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## Introduction

The fast development of information and communication technologies is now promoting economic and social transformation, turning the world into an information, knowledge, globalized and lifelong learning society. In this transforming society, everyday businessmen seek new business opportunities, scientists seek new breakthrough, and educators should seek new approaches to make learning meaningful in this changing world. An open, lifelong, flexible and inclusive learning environment has been created by the integration of education and technology, which has increasingly become a trend of educational reform and innovation in many countries and will surely play an essential role in future education development. In the field of language education, computer assisted language learning (CALL) has been fully explored with the computer as tutor for language drills or skill practice, as a tool for writing, presenting, researching and a medium of global communication. Today the fascinating advancement of wireless technology and smart portable devices lead computer assisted language learning into a new mobile learning era. Mobile learning, assisted with wireless communication, sensing and mobile technologies, has provided unprecedented opportunities to implement new learning strategies by integrating real-world learning environments and the resources of the digital world. With such a learning

mode, students are able to learn in real situations with support or instructions from the computer system by using a mobile device to access the digital content via wireless communications. In such a learning environment, the learning system is able to detect the learning behaviors of the students in the real world with the help of the sensing technology. Such a new technology-enhanced learning model enables learning systems to provide learning suggestions to students when they encounter problems in the real world.

The 10th World Conference on Mobile and Contextual Learning (mLearn) was held in Beijing in 2011, which promotes massive attention from the Chinese academia since it is the first time this conference comes to East Asia. The past mLearn conferences were held in the UK, Italy, Australia, South Africa, Canada, the USA, and Malta. As the first conference on mobile and contextual Learning, mLearn was widely recognized as the premiere international conference on learning with mobile technologies and learning across contexts. Each year, it attracts a great number of participants from more than 60 countries representing all continents, and acts as a forum for knowledge sharing and transfer across cultures. The 10th conference achieved its aims as to stimulate critical debate on and research into theories, approaches, and applications of mobile and contextual learning; to bring together researchers and practitioners from all over the world to share their knowledge, experience and research in

the field of mobile learning; and to create dialogue and networking for knowledge sharing and transfer across the globe. It was in this conference that the concept of “seamless learning” was proposed and regarded as the new trend of mobile learning with its supporting technology, resources and learning innovations fully discussed.

One question often asked by administrators is whether or not technologies truly “work” , that is, if they promote language learning and do so in a cost-effective way. Driven by such questions, massive researches have been conducted comparing the use of computers to non-use of computers in second language classrooms. Mark Warschauer and Carla Meskill discussed in the book *Technology and Second Language Teaching* (2000) the advantages and disadvantages of using new technologies in the language classroom.

This type of research ignored two important factors. First of all, the computer is a machine, not a method. The world of online communication is a vast new medium, comparable in some ways to books, print, or libraries. To our knowledge, no one has ever attempted to conduct research on whether the book or the library is beneficial for language learning. Seeking similar sweeping conclusions on the effects of the computer or the Internet is equally futile. Secondly, and even more importantly, new communication technologies are part of the broader

ecology of life at the turn of the century. Much of our reading, writing, and communicating is migrating from other environments (print, telephone, etc.) to the screen. In such a context, we can no longer think only about how we use technologies to teach language. We also should think about what types of language students need to learn in order to communicate effectively via computer. Whereas a generation ago, we taught foreign language students to write essays and read magazine articles, we now must (also) teach them to write e-mail messages and conduct research on the Web. This realization has sparked an approach which emphasizes the importance of new information technologies as a legitimate medium of communication in their own right rather than simply as teaching tools. (Mark Warschauer and Carla Meskill, 2000)

The above discussion clarifies the key issue in the research of technology enhanced language classrooms. Instead of questioning the existence of technologies and their efficiency in language classrooms, what is the most important is the principal goal of language education: what shall be taught regarding the changing conditions of our society—not only the rules of grammar, but rather to help learners gain “apprenticeship into new discourse communities” (Mark Warschauer and Carla Meskill, 2000), which means that educators should create opportunities for meaningful and real authentic communication inside the classrooms as well as outside

of the classrooms. Meanwhile, learners should be equipped with tools for their further individual social, cultural and linguistic development. In such a scenario, technologies are powerful tools to create authentic learning environment and provide various learning experiences. The roles of technologies in the language classroom can only be justified in light of the changing goals of language education. By using new technologies in the language classroom and outside of classrooms, we can better prepare students for the kinds of international cross-cultural interactions which are increasingly required for success in academic, vocational, or personal life.

In this book, the construction of a “seamless learning” model underpinned by social cognitive theory for EFL learners in China will be discussed. The drive for such a model is the urgent need of EFL learners in this more and more globalized world. We argue that advanced mobile technology and rich online resources should be used to cater for the learners’ needs. Instead of investigating the potential functions of mobile technologies, the discussion should focus on the learners’ needs. We should not ask what technologies can do for the language classrooms but what we can use technology to do to make a difference for each learner’s individual learning experience.

## Chapter 1 Review of EFL Teaching in China

At the beginning of the 21st century, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has seen rapid economic development and an explosion in commercial, technological and cultural exchanges with other parts of the world, and China's growing economic, military and political stability also receive international recognition. This has given rise to a pressing demand for English proficiency (Y. A. Wu, 2001). On the one hand, the Chinese government regards English as necessary to help the nation further open up to the outside world, to realize the modernization program, and to get an edge in the fierce international competition. On the other hand, proficiency in English promises abundant opportunities for job hunters: to graduate from university, to go abroad for further education, to secure desirable jobs in public and private companies, foreign-invested companies or joint ventures, and to be eligible for promotion to higher professional ranks. In fact, employees with proficient English are paid more. A national salary survey in 2002 suggested that employees who could speak English (or another foreign language) fluently had an average



annual income of 53,378 yuan, whereas those with medium or low English proficiency averaged only 31,211 to 38,898 yuan. It follows that English proficiency has secured superior national, social, and economic prestige. As a result, this ever-increasing demand for English calls for impressive commitment to the teaching and learning of it from all possible sides involved.

### 1.1 A Profile of English Learners at Various Levels of Education

Though ELT at the pre-school level is not officially required, kindergartens in large cities do offer English lessons (British Council, 1995). The children who take English in kindergartens generally learn simple English songs, a small number of vocabulary items, brief dialogues, pronunciation, and basic intonation patterns (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b). Their proficiency in English can rightly be described as minimum.

On the level of primary schools, English instruction is not part of the nationally prescribed curriculum. According to the guidelines issued by the MOE (2000b), primary schools run at city and county levels have started to offer English classes since the academic year of 2001/2002, and those in townships since the autumn of 2002. The recommended starting grade is Primary Three. By 2001 there have been eight million primary school pupils studying English as a school subject for two to three hours a

week (ZhongguoJiaoyubao, 2001). The basic requirements for primary English (MOE, 2000e) state that by the end of their primary English course, pupils should be able to understand simple questions and stories with picture cues; conduct brief dialogues with clear pronunciation and intonation; use formulaic expressions to greet, take leave and apologize; read simple directions and illustrated stories; write simple greetings and sentences. Though no data is readily available, judging from the prescribed requirements, it would be quite safe to say that primary school students are supposed to obtain no more than some minimum proficiency in the language.

Junior secondary students are required to study English (or another foreign language) between three and four hours a week for three or four years, which means that by the time they graduate from junior secondary school, they should have more than 400 hours of formal instruction in the foreign language. According to the English syllabus (State Education Commission, 1992) which was followed until 2000, the junior secondary English course should provide the students with a basic knowledge of the target language and a basic ability to use the language for communication through training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As to whether or to what extent the students attain these criteria, no definite conclusion can be possibly drawn as the JSSL(junior secondary school leaving) examinations are set by local educational authorities and naturally

displays considerable diversity in level and scope. But judging from the rates of junior-to-senior-secondary promotion in the recent years, it seems that at least half of the junior secondary graduates have reached the required standards on graduation. The range of proficiency seems to be between basic and lower-intermediate levels in terms of a standardized proficiency scale. But there are significant differences between key schools, especially specialized foreign language schools, and ordinary ones (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a; Ross, 1993). Students from the former are generally more proficient in English than the students from the latter.

All senior secondary school students are required to take English (or another foreign language) as a subject. The 1993 English syllabus for full-time senior secondary schools prescribes 427.5 hours of English instruction. Specialized, vocational, and skilled-workers training schools may offer more hours of English instruction or fewer, depending on the nature and goals of the schools. The major aim of senior secondary English is to consolidate and expand the basic knowledge and language skills acquired in junior secondary school, develop a basic oral and written command of English for communication, and cultivate reading skills and the ability to learn independently so as to lay a good foundation for further study and use of the language (State Education Commission, 1993). Judging by the numerous objectives laid down in the 1993 syllabus, those who successfully meet the requirement should be rather advanced in

English. But there is evidence that considerable disparity exists in the actual levels of proficiency since different schools may vary significantly in the proficiency of teachers, different teaching methodologies, etc.

At the tertiary level, two types of English courses are available to students: General College English, which is essentially an English-for-specific-purpose (ESP) course for non-English majors, and Specialist College English, which is designed for undergraduates who specialize in English. General College English is divided into two stages. The first stage is compulsory for non-English majors in their first two years of university life. It delivers about 300 hours of instruction and aims to build on language knowledge and skills previously acquired at secondary school. Students are required to pass the two College English Test, Band Four and Band Six (which are tested on a nationwide basis) and those who fail to pass College English Test Band Four or Six are not eligible for a bachelor's or postgraduate degree. The second stage takes the form of various specialized elective courses that lasts for another one or two years.

Although it is reasonable to conclude, on the basis of the requirements of the two bands, that university graduates should be at an advanced level of proficiency, it is not rare to hear complaints both from universities and from the companies hiring the university students that in practice the university students' language skills are far from being satisfactory (especially listening and speaking) to engage in effective communication.

That is why a top-down movement of educational reform concerning curriculums, textbooks, and examinations has been initiated.

## 1.2 Influential Teaching Methodologies

Since English was first taught in China, various approaches and methods have been adopted, modified or nativized. Among these various approaches, three have had a far-reaching effect. They are the Grammar-Translation Method, ALM, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

The earliest and most widely adopted methodology was the Grammar-Translation Method. The ability to read in the target language was viewed as the most important quality in English language learning. The belief behind the method is that a foreign language can be most effectively learned by first mastering a full set of grammar rules and then applying this knowledge of grammar in exercises—very frequently translation exercises—that require the manipulation of the morphology and syntax of the target language. Thus lessons are organized around language points which cover both grammar and vocabulary items. Grammar rules are taught deductively, usually in the students' native language, and language is studied at the sentence level. The focus of study is on reading and writing. Successful learning is considered a matter of memorization.

The major drawbacks of this method from the perspective of modern educators and linguists such as Rivers (1968) and Richards and Rodgers (1986; 2001) are its meager attention to speaking practice, as a result of which communication skills are heavily neglected. Too much emphasis is laid on learning rules, some of which may be rare, old fashioned. Students are passively involved in class with overloaded written exercises, which most students consider tedious and laborious. However, despite its obvious indifference towards communicative competence, grammar-translation is still widely adopted.

ALM (Audio-Lingual Method) was a completely foreign approach to language teaching. In class, the instructor would present the correct model of a sentence and the students would have to repeat it. The teacher would then continue by presenting new words for the students to sample in the same structure. There is no explicit grammar instruction—everything is simply memorized in form. The idea is for the students to practice the particular construct until they can use it spontaneously. In this manner, the lessons are built on static drills in which the students have little or no control on their own output.

This teaching methodology took root in Chinese classrooms because some of its features were highly compatible with the Chinese tradition of ELT (e.g., its emphasis on accuracy as a desired outcome, on drilling and memorization as learning strategies, on strict control by the teacher over

the learning process, and on the adoption of a structure-based syllabus).

Two striking problems with ALM, however, are that students often fail to transfer skills acquired through pattern drilling to real communication and that practice activities tend to involve meaningless learning and language use. Moreover, it was very demanding for teachers.

CLT(Communicative Language Teaching) is the latest innovation in foreign language teaching introduced into China's classrooms. CLT started in the 1970s in Europe and drew on developments in sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, discourse theory, applied linguistics, and second language acquisition research. What distinguishes it from the more traditional approaches is its conception of communicative competence as the primary goal of language teaching and learning. It emphasizes the interdependence between form and meaning, between language and communication, and tries to attend to both functional and structural aspects of language.

CLT was introduced to the PRC in the late 1970s but failed to receive widespread support or attention initially. To be more precise, there was strong resistance to it. Ever since its introduction, there has been a heated and continued debate among both Chinese and Western ELT specialists on the necessity, appropriateness and effectiveness of adopting CLT in the PRC. As a result, many proposals have been made that attempt to combine different elements of the traditional practices with CLT in various ways.

Gradually CLT gained acceptance by some teachers at the tertiary level, and tertiary-level textbooks that adopted a communicative approach were published. CLT began to influence ELT at the secondary level when the first communicatively oriented syllabus for secondary schools was issued by the State Education Commission in 1992. There is a growing awareness that ELT does not only involve the provision of linguistic knowledge but should also aim at the development of communicative competence.

TBL(Task based learning) is a student centred method in ELT popularized by N. Prabhu who maintained that students could learn language just as easily with a non-linguistic problem as when focusing on linguistic questions. It refers to “an approach to the design of language courses in which the point of departure is not an ordered list of linguistic items, but a collection of tasks”(Nunan, 1999:24). The tasks involved are varied and practical such as visiting the dentist, attending an interview or making travel arrangements. Task completion, fluency and the development of student confidence are prioritized rather than accuracy of language forms. The task in task based learning, is an activity in which students use language freely to achieve a specific goal that reflects real life situations. Since 2001, a revised National English Curriculum Standard (NECS) has been developed by the Ministry of Education in China (MOE) and implemented in public schools in China. In this curriculum, one of most



important changes is the implementation of student-centered, task-based language teaching (TBLT). In the TBLT method, learners assume the roles of participants, monitors, risk-takers, and innovators. They are required to actively participate in pair-work and group work, facilitate learning and reflection, and create and interpret messages for which they lack full linguistic resources and prior experiences (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Teachers become facilitators, participant analysts, advisers, and process managers. Teachers are also responsible for selecting, modifying and creating tasks to meet students' learning needs and providing demonstrations of how to complete the task successfully.

Currently the methodological picture of ELT in the PRC is a rather complex one. A sizable proportion of teachers still use the Grammar-Translation Method in their classrooms either because of their skepticism about the superiority of CLT over the traditional approaches or because of a range of cultural, educational, social and economic constraints. A growing group of teachers, however, are taking an eclectic approach, drawing on different methods and trying to reconcile traditional practices with more recent innovations to meet the demand of their particular (often diverse) teaching situations.

### 1.3 China's Educational Problems

Despite the appeal for change in teaching, learning methods, and philosophy by many experts, educators, and top officials in the educational sections of different levels, generally speaking, “spoon-feeding” method still dominates the classrooms in institutions of higher learning in this nation. Changes do happen but they are slow to address this issue. Regardless of the fact that educational reforms of different kinds are carried out at all levels across the country, the traditional thought is still considered reasonable that students are passive recipients of knowledge and their teachers transmitters of information. Learning by rote or learning mechanically as the main instructional method is still very popular among university students in China (Gan, 2006, P26).

As a natural result of such pedagogy, university students are particularly skillful in taking tasks but poor in actual communication. That is why complaints are frequently heard as to how many university students fail to live up to expectation in their English proficiency and the effectiveness of the present educational system is thus doubted.

Some of the reasons for the prevalence of the “cramming” method are summarized by Gan Min (2006) as a lack of heuristic methods. Meanwhile the traditional educational systems puts stress on how teachers can best transmit knowledge instead of how students can best acquire knowledge. Other factors include the influence of Confucianism, which to some extent affirms a deep-rooted traditional teaching method of learning by rote. In

addition, the rapid expansion of enrollment also contribute to the present situation. These factors have created a situation in which college teachers have a heavy workload and therefore cannot take good care of each student simultaneously and manage each course equally well (Xu&Xu, 2004; Xu& Li, 2007).

While the academic content keeps increasing, the credit hours for each course stays the same, as a result the teachers are actually left with no other choice but to resort to the traditional “spoon-feeding” method. More than that modern technology is now gradually adopted as a supposedly more efficient way to transmit knowledge. With so much content to cover within so short a time in dazzling prolific methods, the students are naturally found to be tired and bored at the end of class hour. Zhou Yuanqing, former vice Minister of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China and Chair of China’s Higher Education Association, emphasizes that what troubles the present instructional processes or classroom lecture modes is still how to strike a balance between coverage and mastery of what is supposed to be achieved both inside and outside class. In order to promote efficiency in China’s EFL education, the new syllabus for University English Majors was issued in the year 2000, approved by the Ministry of Education as the guideline for all the institutions of higher learning in China.

The goal set by the National Syllabus for University English Majors in China

is to cultivate talents with various abilities. The educational objectives are to raise students' cultural awareness, help them lay a solid foundation of English, and have a wide range of knowledge and broad horizons. Accordingly, the instructional work should focus on raising students' cultural awareness, promoting their ability to analyze and solve concrete problems independently, helping to develop their ability to think critically, and enhancing their ability to take different perspectives.

English learning in China in the new century has been marked by a transition from liberation to globalization (Bolton, 2002). The Chinese government and the Ministry of Education (MOE) have been promoting reform at various levels, from primary school to tertiary school, regarding curricula, teaching methods, assessment system, teachers' professional development. The major aim is to consolidate students' language skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, so that they can meet the challenges in the era of economic globalization (Shu, 2004). In 2001, a news article from Shanghai reported on a sustained campaign to promote English throughout the city involving English days' for schools and self-study courses for police, restaurants and taxi-drivers:

At many Shanghai schools, Wednesday is English day. Dormitories wake up to broadcasts of recorded English news and stories. All day, students make their own radio shows, study math, search the Internet, and watch movies — in English. They sing the Backstreet Boys and Jennifer Lopez

songs in class, and view “Sesame Street” after school on Shanghai TV ... In addition to English day in schools, they’ve passed out English tapes and books to other sectors of society likely to encounter English-speaking visitors, such as taxi-drivers. (Johnson, 2001: 7)

Moreover, various English tuition centers, distance learning, radio/television English courses, on-line English programs, course books for private study, English newspapers/magazines, and English Corners (places, usually in parks or public squares, where people meet to practice English informally) have sprung up across the country to meet the needs of those outside the formal education system to acquire English proficiency. ELT in China is faced with challenges of unprecedented strenuousness and opportunities for further development.