

**Designing and Evaluating a Virtual English
Enrichment Course for Improving Chinese Learners'
Communicative Competence in English**

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Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

Min Du

Designing and Evaluating a Virtual English Enrichment Course for Improving Chinese Learners' Communicative Competence in English

Abstract

Min Du

The aims of this study were to design and develop an online virtual English Enrichment Course (EEC) to develop Chinese English learners' communicative competence. This study addressed two research questions. First, it considered whether learners progressed in communicative competence after studying the EEC course, and if so, in which elements. Second, it explored learners' perceptions of the course features that contributed to developing their communicative competence. The development of the course was supported by a complex educational design model, which integrated communicative language teaching theory, learning theories (complex dynamic systems theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory) and conversation-based communicative computer-assisted language learning.

The design-based research study comprised four cycles of development, implementation, analysis and refinement of the course. Approximately eight students from China were invited to attend the EEC course in each research cycle; Research Cycles 3 and 4 additionally involved comparison groups. The effectiveness of the course was examined through comparing students' progress on pre-tests and post-tests. Students' perceptions of the EEC course were examined through questionnaires and interviews.

The findings showed that the EEC course significantly helped students to improve the sociocultural and interactional elements of communicative competence. Key features identified by the students as helping them to improve their communicative competence included the interactive nature of the course, the specialist knowledge of the invited English speakers concerning the topics and the aim of the course to develop communicative competence.

This study contributed to these main areas: development of the concept of communicative competence and of new assessment tools for it, including presentation with a focus on question and answer; development of assessment criteria for sociocultural competence; and pioneering and developing complex educational design theory. The lessons learned about the development of core concepts, theories and practice from extensive iteration in design-based research are shared and the future development of the EEC course is proposed.

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List of Key Abbreviations

CALL	Computer-assisted language learning
CDST	Complex dynamic systems theory
CED	Complex educational design
CT	Chinese tutor
CG	Comparison group
CGAC	Communication goal achievement assessment criteria
CLT	Communicative language teaching
EEC	English Enrichment Communication (course)
EFL	English as a foreign language
ICAPS	Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IES	Invited English speaker(s)
IG	Intervention group
PQAC	Personal quality assessment criteria
PQA	Presentation with a focus on question and answer (test)
Q&A	Question and answer (time)
RC1	Research Cycle 1
RC2	Research Cycle 2
RC3	Research Cycle 3
RC4	Research Cycle 4
RQ1	Research Question 1
RQ2	Research Question 2
S.D.	Standard deviation
VST	Vygotsky's sociocultural theory

Part I

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale behind the study

English is regarded as the most important foreign language in China (Bolton, 2013). The majority of Chinese English learners regard English as a way to connect with the world and a ladder to better careers (Pan & Block, 2011). However, only a minority of learners feel that the English education they have received meets their needs, and the majority of teachers and students perceive that the current English education in China is exam-oriented, with excessive emphasis on grammar and vocabulary (ibid.).

Given the fact that learners do not have a choice to opt out of English courses (ibid.), the motivations of Chinese students who are learning English are not just to pass exams and find a better job (McPherron, 2016), but also to study overseas and communicate with foreign English speakers both fluently and efficiently (Bolton & Botha, 2015). Chinese employers regard employees' ability to communicate effectively in spoken and written English as important or extremely important in their recruitment of graduates (Velde, 2009). However, despite the expectations of employers, the majority consider English communicative competence to be the weakest ability of employees (Zhou, 2008). On the other hand, many Chinese overseas students also have "difficulty in communicating with students from other cultures" even after one year's study abroad (Liu, 2007: V). There is no doubt that overseas university students in the UK should have sufficient English linguistic proficiency in order to be admitted to a university course. Yet, have they been well prepared for their awareness and ability to communicate in an English-centric world? There is a clear need for improvement and broadening of English education in China.

Communicative competence is widely acknowledged as a vital ability in learning a foreign language (Harris & Hua, 2015). Traditional language teaching as a teacher-centred approach has a long way to go to support the development of communicative competence (ibid.). Although the Chinese government started to promote communicative competence in English education in the late 1970s, the practice of CLT (communicative language teaching) in China has not achieved the expected results (Wei, 2010).

The obstacles are found in four main areas. The first is that the main national English exams, such as the National Matriculation English Test (NMET) and the College English Test (CET), do not really assess communication ability, and examination scores still determine students'

future life (Li & Baldauf, 2011). Even though learners understand that the purpose of learning English and its culture is to use it to communicate with the world, few can ignore the authority of examinations (Cai, 2010). Wang (2010) identified that examination is supposed to serve teaching, and teaching should serve learning. However, the reality is that CET4 and CET6 dictate teaching, and teaching controls learning (ibid.). Over the past couple of years, CET4 and CET6 have failed to prove their aims of improving university students' ability to apply English (ibid.). There is an urgent call to reform them (ibid.). The design of examinations should consider how to serve learning and teaching (ibid.). Unless the government reforms the aforementioned national examinations, traditional methods of focusing on the learning of grammar rules and vocabulary will remain the dominant teaching approach (Li & Baldauf, 2011).

The second obstacle is the lack of ability and training of teachers in applying the CLT (communicative language teaching) approach (Wang, Xu, & Zhou, 2016). Many Chinese teachers of English do not have sufficient language proficiency to deliver English teaching in a truly communicative approach (Wei, 2010; Li & Baldauf, 2011), as they have not been to English-speaking countries, and some have not even talked to native English speakers (Zhang, 2012). Thus, it is hard for them to convey authentic native English culture to their students despite their fluency or good English pronunciation (Liu & Li, 2011). Although some schools and universities employ native English teachers to compensate for the above shortage, the number of native English teachers is insufficient (Lu, Goodale, & Guo, 2013), partly because of the cost and partly because of political restrictions. Therefore, foreign English teachers are not a commonly accessible resource to many Chinese English learners, especially those living in rural or developing areas (Lu et al., 2013).

The third issue is the teacher-centred learning culture in which students have been trained to be obedient and passive learners from kindergarten onwards (Wei, 2010; Wang et al., 2016); and the fourth is the large class size, which restricts the possibility for teachers to support each learner individually (Wei, 2010; Li & Baldauf, 2011). Sixty to eighty students sitting in a class is a normal class size in many universities (Rao, 2013). It is therefore not difficult to understand why students get limited opportunities to practise their spoken English.

The above obstacles hinder the execution of CLT. There is increasing evidence to show the progress of Chinese English teaching employing CLT approach through "computer-assisted language learning" (Liu, 2015). Technology offers new ways to teach and learn a language

(ibid.). In the digital world, Chinese students are connecting to the English world through computer games, western movies and TV series, social media, online books, and so on (Bolton & Botha, 2015). Online learning is gaining increasing popularity because of its convenience (Brown, 2012). Video-conferencing provides a platform with which to bridge the physical distance between participants (Hampel & Stickler, 2012). However, educators should make a meaningful and purposeful choice regarding technology (Chun, Smith, & Kern, 2016).

The report of the Association of Government Boards for Universities and Colleges (2013) indicates that 71 per cent of its members agreed that online education will be primary to the future of their education; yet only 19 per cent of members stated that they were prepared to integrate new educational technologies in their education. Although there have been increasing numbers of online language-learning courses in China in recent years, especially for adult learners, and many traditional language schools have also developed online courses to provide learners with more convenient ways to learn English and survive school themselves (IDKW, 2015), many retain the familiar style of traditional English teaching and its focus on exams.

Although several studies have addressed the use of video-conferencing to help learners improve language learning, especially in western countries, fewer studies have looked at helping learners to improve communicative competence in practice through CALL (computer-assisted language learning) in China. Among the few studies on the use of video-conferencing to connect to native English speakers overseas, Lu et al. (2013) conducted research into the impact of video-conferencing with native speakers on the oral competence and self-confidence of Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. This quasi-experimental study was designed for initial teacher trainers and the course was simply a transformation of their regular teacher training curriculum to an online environment, with the interlocutors as their peer native English teacher trainers. Some studies used Skype for role-play activity with the students in the same school. For example, Yen, Hou and Chang (2015) studied the effectiveness of using Skype and Facebook to help a group of Taiwanese students prepare for the IELTS exam (the International English Language Testing System).

Despite the rapid development in the use of technologies to teach English (Hubbard & Levy, 2006), and the fact that it has been acknowledged as an imperative future way for CALL (Wang & Wásquez, 2012), acceptance of such an approach by English teachers remains low in China. The finding that students still prefer face-to-face learning than e-learning for its immediate interaction with teachers and peers (Quintas, Silva, & Teixeira, 2017) also suggests that the

current online learning approaches have not adequately demonstrated their advantages in comparison to the traditional teaching and learning platform. There is a call for studies that not only discuss theories but also explore practices to shorten this gap (Kozar, 2015).

1.2 Research questions

The EEC (English Enrichment Communication) course documented in this study has been designed to help Chinese English learners learn and appreciate different cultures of the world and to improve their communicative competence in English. It sets out to overcome the shortcomings of mainstream traditional English courses for intermediate and advanced English learners in China. The design of the course reflects theories drawn from the literature review and from my personal experience as an ESL (English as a Second Language) and then EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learner. The process of designing and improving the EEC course has also given me insights into how these theories could be further developed or refined.

The aim of this study is to explore innovative ways to integrate CLT (communicative language teaching) with contemporary technology to develop learners' communicative competence in English. This is done by designing the EEC course via a real-time virtual classroom, evaluating its influence on the progress of Chinese learners' communicative competence and discovering features that are effective in developing it. The research questions have been developed over four research cycles. The research questions for RC3 and RC4 are as follows:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *Does the EEC course improve learners' linguistic, interactional and sociocultural communicative competence in English, in comparison with learners undertaking the usual university course in English? If so, in what ways?*

Research Question 2 (RQ2): *How do learners perceive the course features of the EEC course, which influence their progress in linguistic, intercultural and sociocultural communicative competence in English?*

In order to assess whether the EEC course is effective to help learners improve their communicative competence, it is essential to define what communicative competence is before deciding how to assess learners' progress of communicative competence (Deardorff, 2016). As communicative competence could be divided into several sub-competencies, such as linguistic competence, strategic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence (Bagarić & Djigunović, 2007), it is important to identify which sub-competencies the EEC

course is helping learners to develop. The answer to this question was not clear at the beginning of the research. Through the iteration process of the design-based research, it became clearer after RC1 (Research Cycle 1) and Research Cycle 2 (RC2) that the EEC course had more impact on learners' interactional and sociocultural competence.

Therefore, intercultural competence and sociocultural competence, together with linguistic competence, have been identified as the three sub-competencies of communicative competence to be measured in RC3 (Research Cycle 3) and RC4 (Research Cycle 4) of this study. While there are well-developed assessment criteria for linguistic and interactional competence, there is a significant gap in assessing sociocultural competence. Although the researcher has identified that sociocultural competence can be assessed, and there are over a hundred existing assessment tools claiming that they can assess sociocultural competence, they are largely self-reporting instruments (Deardorff, 2016), survey-based or cognitive-based instruments (Griffith et al., 2016). What is often absent in the existing assessment of sociocultural competence is “the appropriateness of communication”, which can only be measured through others' perspectives (Deardorff, 2016: 122), rather through “indirect evidence”, such as questionnaires, self-reflection, interviews, critical incident analysis or observations. Though Cambridge English, one of the leading English assessment organisations worldwide, has used “communicative achievement” to assess some aspects of communicative competence, such as holding “the target reader's attention” and communicating ideas appropriately, there is no clear indication about the nature of their appropriateness. Overall, there is little “excellent” practice of assessment to measure whether an individual can think and act socioculturally (Deardorff, 2016:122). This study explores and develops assessment tools and assessment criteria to address the above issues and to shorten the literature and practice gaps in this area.

Although RQ2 has been designed to explore learners' perceptions of the course features, this question is based on the design and delivery of the EEC course. Therefore, it is necessary to review the course design theory and its underpinning theories in order to explore the key course features, which are helping learners to improve their communicative competence (Figure 1.1).

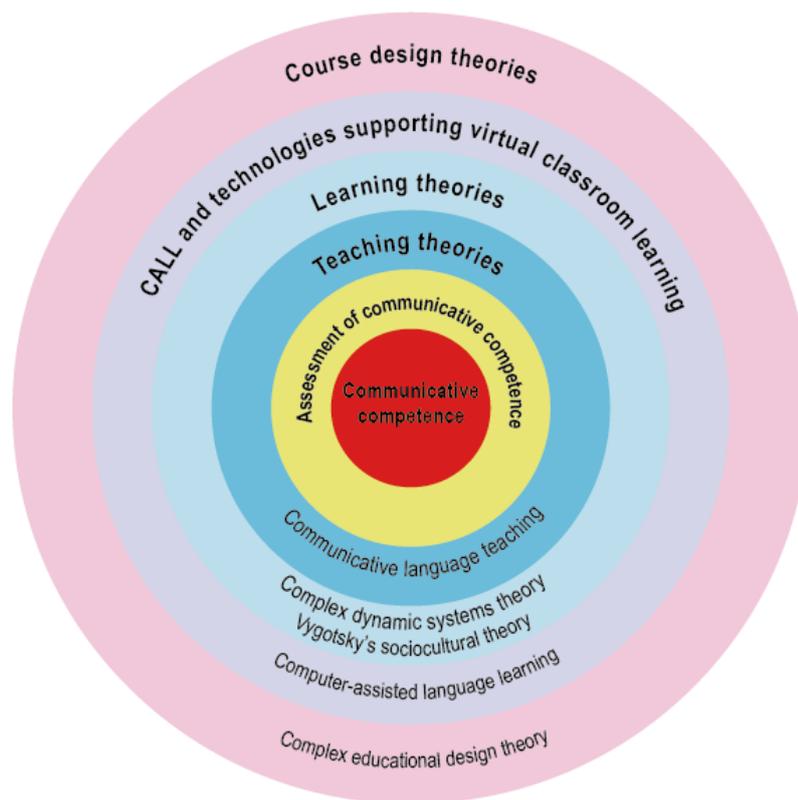


Figure 1.1: Concepts and theories underpinning the EEC course design

As communicative competence is a complex and dynamic concept, rather than being static, (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), learning communicative competence through language is also complex and dynamic (Larsen-Freeman, 2017). Therefore, to help learners develop communicative competence, it is helpful to employ a dynamic course design system. For this reason, CED (complex educational design) (Freire, 2013) has been chosen as the course design theory for this study. However, CED theory is a relatively new course design theory, and Freire (2013) called for empirical studies to support the theoretical CED model. This study is a response to this call.

The course design theory is supported by teaching theories, learning theories and the use of technologies. As the purpose of this study is to develop learners' communicative competence, this study employs CLT (communicative language teaching) as the teaching theory, CDST (complex dynamic systems theory) and VST (Vygotsky's sociocultural theory) as the learning theories. As the EEC course is delivered online, this study also employs CALL (computer-assisted language learning) to support the choice of technologies and the online teaching pedagogies.

This study uses design-based research, which collects both qualitative and quantitative data to analyse the findings. Approximately ten high-school students and thirty non-English-major Year 2 or 3 university students in China attended the EEC course in four research cycles of the study. In the meantime, an approximately equal number of students who did not attend the EEC course, but from the same university English classes, constituted the comparison groups in RC3 and RC4.

Although the aim of the EEC course is to improve learners' English communicative competence, the evaluation of the learning outcome of the EEC course welcomes both positive and negative progress of the participants. Irrespective of learning outcomes, this study has been designed to provide insights into the features of the EEC course that are effective or not effective in developing learners' communicative competence. This study provides a basis for further study to explore this approach to English teaching in more depth.

To help the reader understand the key concepts and theories, and the related literature of this thesis, Table 1.1 summarises the literature and its related research questions.

Table 1.1: Summary of the key concepts and literature related to research questions and methodology

Research question	Key concepts or theories		Researchers	
RQ1	Communicative competence		Hymes (1972); Canale & Swain (1980); Lightbown & Spada (1999); Power (2003)	
		Sociocultural competence (also named “intercultural competence”)	Hymes (1967, 1972); Canale (1983); Bachman (1990); Celce-Murcia et al. (1995); Chen & Starosta (1996); Fantini & Tirmizi (2006); Celce-Murcia (2007); Chen (2014); Zhang & Zhang (2015)	
		Interactional competence		Celce-Murcia (2007)
			Strategic competence	Canale & Swain (1980); Fulcher & Davidson (2007); Nguyen & Le (2013)
			Interactional competence	Celce-Murcia et al. (1995); Celce-Murcia (2007)
	Linguistic competence		Chomsky (1957, 1965); Hymes (1972); Canale & Swain (1980); Canale (1983); Celce-Murcia (2007)	
	Assessment of communicative competence		The test design cycle	Fulcher (2010)
		Assessment of sociocultural competence (“intercultural competence”)		Matsumoto et al. (2001, 2007); Matsumoto & Hwang (2013); Gu (2015)
		Assessment of interactional competence		Skehan (2010); May (2011); Walsh (2012); East et al. (2016)
		Assessment of linguistic competence		IELTS Handbook (2007)
RQ2	Teaching theory	EFL and ESL teaching and learning approaches review	Celce-Murcia (1991)	

		CLT (communicative language teaching)		Li (1984); Hu (2002); Nunan (1991); Cook (2003); Sreehari (2012); Richards & Schmidt (2014); Arnold, Dörnyei & Pugliese (2015); Alamri (2018)
Learning theory	VST (Vygotsky's sociocultural theory)	Zone of proximal development (ZPD)		Vygotsky (1978)
		More knowledgeable others (MKO)		Vygotsky (1978); Veer & Valsiner (1991)
	CDST (complex dynamics systems theory)		Larsen-Freeman (1997; 2006; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2015; 2017); De Bot (2007); Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor (2007); Bertin & Narcy-Combes, 2012); Cui (2016)	
CALL and technologies supporting language learning	CALL (computer-assisted language learning)			Levy (1997); Warschauer & Healey (1998); Lee (2000); Lee (2018); Carr (2016)
		Other types of CALL		Behaviourist CALL (Warschauer, 1996; Ahmad et al., 1985; Lee, 2000); Integrative CALL (Warschauer & Healey, 1998); Atomised CALL (Gimeno-Sanz, 2016)
		Communicative CALL		Lee (2000); Telecollaboration (Belz, 2001); NBLT (network-based language teaching) (Kern & Warschauer, 2000, 2008; Chapelle, 2000); CMC (computer-mediated communication) (Lee, 2018); CMIC (computer-mediated intercultural communication) (Lee, 2018)
		CEM (CALL ecology model)		Marek & Wu (2014)
Course design theory		Traditional course development model		Graves (2000, 2003)
	CED (complex educational design) theory			Freire (2013)

Research methodology	Pragmatism			Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2005); Dewey (2008); Biesta (2010); Morgan (2013)
		Design-based research		Cobb et al. (2003); The Design-Based Research Collective (2003); Tabak (2004); Cole, Puraio, Rossi, & Sein (2005); Akker, Gravemeijer, McKenney, & Nieveen (2006); McKenney, Reeves & Oliver (2007); Anderson & Shattuck (2012); McKenney & Reeves (2013); Ruthven & Hofmann (2013); Ruthven (2013); Taber (2014)

1.3 Significance of the study

It is expected that this study will contribute to the study of CLT (communicative language teaching) through CALL (computer-assisted language learning). Specifically, the aim is to design and develop an online virtual English course to help Chinese English learners improve communicative competence and contribute to both the theory and practice in CLT and CALL.

It may be argued that the study is based on the current situation of China, in which Chinese people have restricted access to the external world via the Internet. Once China opens its doors democratically, Chinese English learners may not need training courses such as the EEC course to help them improve their communicative competence, based on the assumption that, at that time, Chinese English learners will automatically become open and good communicators.

However, the study of Hsu (2007: 370) shows that the Taiwanese, who live in a more open and democratic society, are also “less willing to communicate”, “less self-perceived as competent in communication” and “less argumentative” in comparison to Americans. Interestingly, this phenomenon applies not just to strangers but also to friends (*ibid.*). In Hong Kong the motivation of students to learn English after Hong Kong returned to China in 1997 has also shown shifts from real-life use of English to a much stronger instrumental drive towards exams and careers (Lai, 1999). Similar problems encountered by Taiwanese, Hong Kong and mainland Chinese students suggest that there might be a strong cultural force hindering Chinese students from becoming open communicators. It is believed that it is the eastern value of collective cultural values, such as interdependence, group harmony, duties and obedience, that ensures the development of sensitivity towards others’ values (Kim, 2004).

Rezaee and Farahian (2015) identified that CLT is not widely practised as expected, and this is a problem that is not unique to China but common to other Asian countries. In fact, the problems are also evident in Malaysia, where the lack of English communicative competence of the younger generation affects their employability, especially in international companies (Juhary, 2014). Bartlett (2016) discovered that CLT is not implemented efficiently in Japan as a result of not only examination pressure but also barriers resulting from the inflexibility of experienced English teachers. India recognises English as a global language and an essential path to success (Kumar, Philip, & Kalaiselvi, 2013). However, the different expectations of learners, a shortage of English teachers (*ibid.*), “time constraints”, the “selection of suitable activities”, the “cost factor”, the “size of the classroom”, students’ shyness and the challenge of self-learning have all affected the effective implementation of CLT in India (Walia, 2012: 128–9).

Therefore, this study of the EEC course not only has short-term value in terms of developing the communicative competence of mainland Chinese students, but it may also contribute to the research and practice of CLT in other countries of the eastern world.

1.4 Overview of the study

This study took place over five years and employed a design-based research approach. This entailed iterative development and trialling of the course through four research cycles. The cycles were timetabled as follows:

Research cycles	Year of study
Research Cycle 1 (RC1)	September 2012 to March 2013
Research Cycle 2 (RC2)	September 2013 to March 2014
Research Cycle 3 (RC3)	November 2014 to April 2015
Research Cycle 4 (RC4)	September 2015 to February 2016

This thesis is composed of five parts (Table 1.2). In Part I, Chapter 1 highlights the rationale and significance of the study and introduces the research questions and structure of the thesis.

Part II comprises the literature review of the key concepts and theories, which aim to support the development of communicative competence. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the development of the concept and the assessment of communicative competence. The concept of communicative competence (Chapter 2) is also a thread that brings all the other chapters together because this study aims to develop this competence. Chapters 4 and 5 explore literature on teaching theory (CLT) and learning theories (CDST and VST). The learning theory CDST also plays an important role in supporting the course design theory of this study. Chapter 6 further analyses different types of CALL and their contributions to the EEC course. It also explores the technologies that support the synchronous and asynchronous learning for the EEC course. Chapters 2 to 6 together prepare for Chapter 7, which discusses the choice of the CED (complex educational design) model. In other words, Chapter 7 brings together Chapters 2 to 6 to present a complex and dynamic EEC course.

Table 1.2: Structure of the chapters of the thesis

	Chapter	Focus
Part I	1	Introduction
Part II	2	Communicative competence
	3	Assessment of communicative competence
	4	Teaching theory: CLT (communicative language teaching)
	5	Learning theories: CDST (complex dynamic systems theory) and VST (Vygotsky's sociocultural theory)
	6	CALL (computer-assisted language learning) and technologies supporting virtual classroom learning
	7	Course design theory: CED (complex educational design)
Part III	8	Research methodology
Part IV	9–12	RC1, RC2, RC3, RC4
Part V	13	Discussion of findings
	14	Conclusion

In Part III, Chapter 8 discusses the research methodology and research tools and methods developed to collect and analyse the data. It also clarifies the reasons for the employed data collection methods – mainly related to practicalities as well as to the researcher's full time job. The chapter argues for data sources being pre-test and post-test in the forms of writing and speaking, collected at the beginning and end of the EEC course; and questionnaires and interview data collected at the end of the EEC course.

In Part IV, Chapters 9 to 12 present the findings of RC1 to RC4 respectively. At the end of each chapter, the implications of each research cycle are discussed and an intervention plan is scheduled to inform the development of the next research cycle.

In the last part, Part V, Chapter 13 provides a detailed discussion of the findings of RC1 to RC4 and a reflection on the literature. Through the discussion, the contribution of this study is generated in Chapter 13 and summarised in Chapter 14, which also identifies the limitations and disseminations of the study.

Having introduced the rationale, two main research questions of the study and a graphic overview of the key theoretic and conceptual frameworks as well as the overall structure of the thesis, next chapter is to unwrap the key concept of the study - communicative competence.

Part II

2. Defining the key concept: communicative competence

Communicative competence is a central concept in this study. It is important to review this concept and its sub-competencies in order to determine the assessment of communicative competence, which informs the effectiveness of the EEC course. Section 2.1 reviews the origins and development of the concept of communicative competence. Section 2.2 and Section 2.3 review the two main sub-competencies of communicative competence, sociocultural competence and interactional competence, respectively. Section 2.4 justifies the reasons for focusing on sociocultural competence and interactional competence.

2.1 The origins and development of the concept of communicative competence

Language is one of the most fundamental communication tools in social interaction (Halliday, 1975). However, over the past century, EFL courses have placed a disproportionate emphasis on “grammatical accuracy” (Graham, 1997). One of the reasons for this might be that there was little international economic or social pressure for students to acquire communicative competence as a foreign language; the demand for spoken language skills arose during and after the Second World War (ibid.). Chomsky (1965) first challenged this approach and drew boundaries between the “abstract knowledge of a language and the ability to *use* that language in [a] *real* situation” (cited in Graham, 1997: 12). Hymes (1972: 53) further developed Chomsky’s concept of “linguistic competence” and ignited the concept of communicative competence.

Hymes (1972) identified that, in order to communicate effectively, apart from linguistic rules, one should also know or learn how to communicate appropriately in a given context. Hymes’ communicative competence concept inspired many other researchers to further develop the concept and theory of communicative competence. Campbell and Wales (1970) supported Hymes’ concept of the sociocultural element of language and emphasised that the appropriateness of using the language is more important than grammatical correctness.

Based on Hymes’ notion, Canale and Swain (1980) developed the first “comprehensive model of communicative competence” (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995: 7). They placed greater emphasis on the social feature of communicative competence and proposed a notation of sociolinguistic competence. Canale and Swain (1983) supported Savignon’s views that it is only in a true communication context that an individual can demonstrate his/her communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1983) divided communicative competence into four

components:

- Grammatical concept: words and rules
- Sociolinguistic competence: appropriateness
- Discourse competence: cohesion and coherence
- Strategic competence: appropriate use of communication strategies

(Cited in Sreehari, 2012: 88)

Bachman and Palmer (1996) pointed out that the nature of communicative competence is dynamic rather than static, and more interpersonal than absolute. Therefore, they further developed the above model and changed sociolinguistic competence to pragmatic knowledge (ibid., Figure 2.1). Okvir (2005) combined textual knowledge and functional knowledge to form pragmatic competence and separated sociolinguistic competence. In other words, for Bachman and Palmer (1996), pragmatic competence is another term to represent sociocultural competence, but for Okvir (2005) sociocultural competence is different to pragmatic competence.

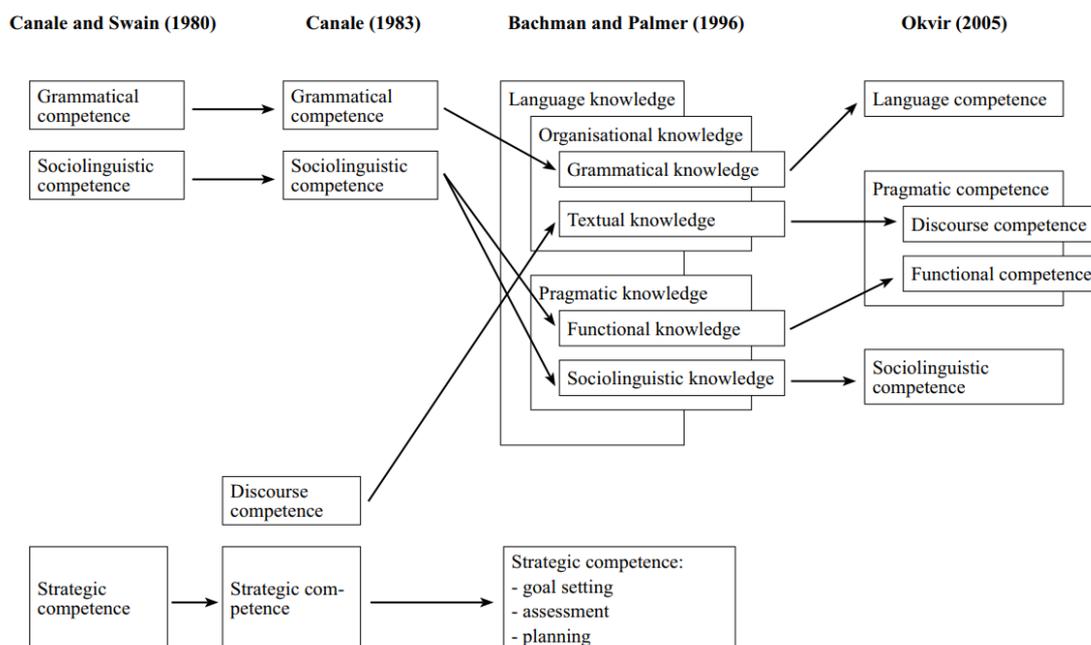


Figure 2.1: Similarities and differences between several models of communicative competence (Bagarić and Djigunović, 2007: 102)

One of the critiques of the model of Bachman and Palmer (1996) is that it was too complicated to follow, which was why most of the researchers were still following Canale and Swain's (1980) model (Bagarić and Djigunović, 2007). Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) and Celce-Murcia (2007) further developed Canale and Swain's model into their own model, with first five and

then six sub-competencies (Figure 2.2).

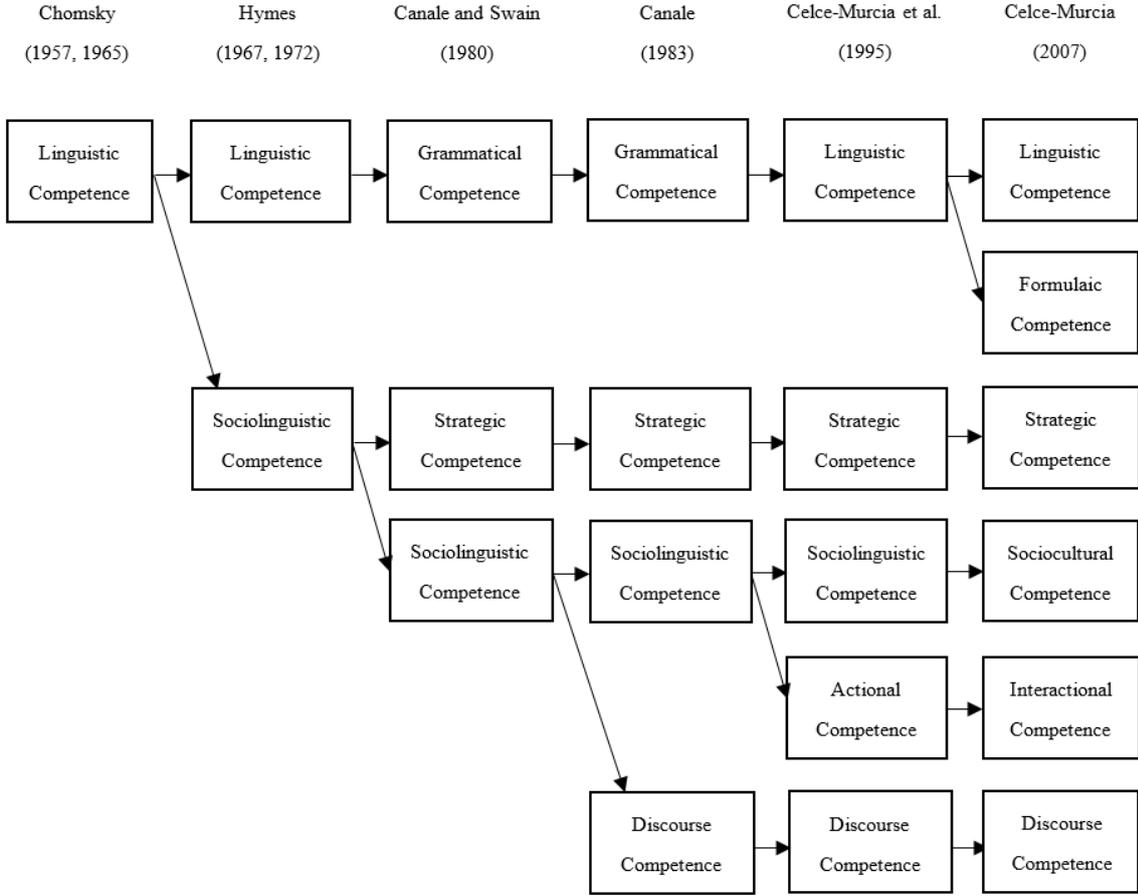


Figure 2.2: Chronological evolution of Celce-Murcia et al.’s communicative competence model (Celce-Murcia, 2007)

Figure 2.2 clearly shows how linguistic competence has evolved to include the additional element of sociolinguistic competence, and how the latter has been divided into actional competence and discourse competence. It also shows that Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) changed the term grammatical competence employed by Canale and Swain (1980, 1983) back into the term linguistic competence used by Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1972) to “include the sound system and the lexicon” (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) further divided sociolinguistic competence into actional competence, in addition to sociolinguistic competence, which is further modified to sociocultural competence.

Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) also compared their model with that of Bachman and Palmer (Figure 2.3).

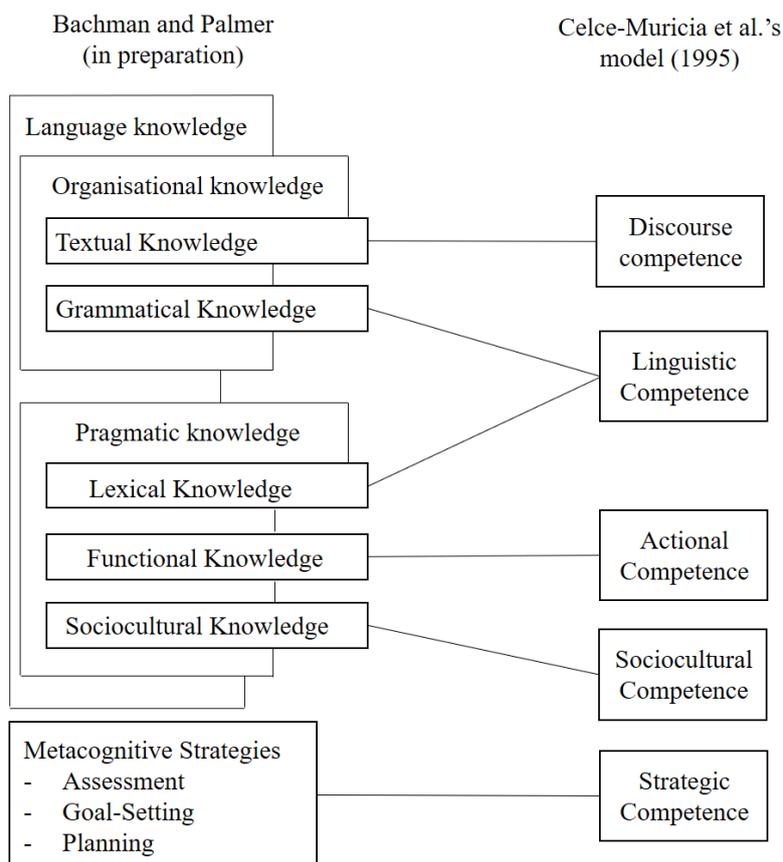


Figure 2.3: Comparison of Celce-Murcia et al.'s model with Bachman and Palmer's model of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995: 12)

Figure 2.3 reveals that Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) further divided pragmatic competence into actional competence and sociocultural competence. However, with the further evolution of the concepts of communicative competence, the terms intercultural competence, cross-cultural competence and global communication competence are widely used instead of sociocultural competence. How are these new terms related to sociocultural competence? To answer this, it might be useful to look at the meaning of sociocultural competence. To clarify the meaning and components of each sub-competence, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) provided detailed specifications for each communicative competence (Appendix XIV). In their specification, sociocultural competence comprises the following aspects and elements:

- Social contextual factors: formed by “participant variables” (“age, gender”, profession, “relations”) and “situational variables” (“time, place” and “social situation”);
- Stylistic appropriate tenses factors: formed by “politeness conventions and strategies” and “stylistic variation” (“degrees of formality” and “field-specific registers”);
- Cultural factors: formed by “sociocultural background knowledge of the target language

community”, “awareness of major dialect or regional differences” and “cross-cultural awareness”;

- Non-verbal communicative factors: include “kinesic factors”, “proxemics factors”, “haptic factors”, “paralinguistic factors” and “silence”.

(Celce-Murica et al., 1995: 24)

The above specification of sociocultural communicative competence might indicate that intercultural competence, cross-cultural competence and global communicative competence can be perceived as part of sociocultural competence, albeit with its emphasis on certain communication contexts. This is because sociocultural competence may be used for communication between people from the same cultural background, but intercultural competence, cross-cultural competence and global communicative competence normally refer to people from different cultural backgrounds, especially from different countries or different ethnic or religious backgrounds (Fantini, 2006).

2.2 The sub-competencies of communicative competence

Overall communicative competence is defined as the ability to efficiently express what one intends to express in the target language and to successfully achieve communication goals appropriately (Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Power, 2003). As discussed above, communicative competence can be divided into several sub-competencies. Below is an overview of the definitions of six commonly used sub-communicative competencies (Celce-Murcia et al., 2007; Canale & Swain, 1980).

a. Sociocultural competence

Sociocultural competence highlights the importance of social and cultural awareness of communicators (Bachman, 1990). It is the ability to control the appropriateness of conversations, speeches or writing in different social contexts (Hymes, 1972; Alptekin, 2002). The detail of this sub-competence is reviewed in Section 2.3. In this thesis, in order to respect the original use of words of different researchers, intercultural competence or cross-cultural competence may be used from time to time. However, they are alternative terms to sociocultural competence in this study.

b. Interactional competence

Interactional competence, which was evolved from actional competence (Celce-Murica, 2007), is regarded as an important sub-competence of communicative competence. It is composed of

a few elements such as the ability to express oneself, understanding interlocutors, managing conversations and using alternative strategies to keep conversations going. This concept is discussed in more detail in Section 2.4.

c. Strategic competence

Strategic competence is the competence that the speaker has to continue communication when other competencies “fail to cope with the situations” (Nguyen & Le, 2013: 857; Canale & Swain, 1980). The individual will be able to use verbal or non-verbal approaches to keep the communication going (Bachman, 1990; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). Canale (1983) extends the meaning to include strategies to improve the effectiveness of communication, such as changing the speed, pitch, and so on.

Strategic competence is regarded as part of interactional competence in this study, as it keeps the interactions going and aims to improve the quality of interactions through a variety of verbal and non-verbal means.

d. Linguistic competence

This is also sometimes known as grammatical competence, which refers to an individual’s knowledge of morphology, lexicon, syntax, phonology, spelling, and so on (Chomsky, 1965). In other words, it is the ability to use a bank of words and clauses in the correct form to construct sentences (Canale & Swain, 1980). Linguistic competence is the knowledge “that is commonly not conscious or available for spontaneous report, but necessarily implicit in what the (ideal) speaker-listener can say” (Hymes, 1972:54).

As the participants in the EEC course are intermediate or higher-level English learners, it is assumed that they have already grasped linguistic knowledge. As discussed in the previous section, traditional English language courses have particular strength in developing learners’ linguistic competence. Therefore, the EEC course in this study shifts the focus onto the other elements of communicative competence, especially interactional and sociocultural competence. Linguistic competence is taught mostly in a more implicit way, such as through reading and listening to authentic English resources. In RC2 (research cycle), linguistic competence is taught more explicitly through commenting on students’ writing task. However, as this demands a significant amount of input from students outside the lessons, to reduce the workload the last two research cycles adopt an implicit teaching method.

e. Discourse competence

Discourse competence reflects the ability to express an individual's views with long texts in writing or with long conversations or speeches in speaking (Canale, 1983). This competence also reveals the ability to "make inferences which cover the underlying meaning of what has been said and the connection between utterances" (Skehan, 1998: 158). The ability to write or speak in different genres and in different contexts is also included (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995).

From the above definition, discourse competence may be considered part of interactional competence and sociocultural competence. This is because the ultimate aim of discourse competence is to express oneself logically to interlocutors and to understand them, which is in line with the components of interactional competence. The challenge is that what is logical to one interlocutor may not be the same to another. There is a need to understand who is the audience. Therefore, discourse competence is also dependent on the understanding of sociocultural appropriateness, which is the key element of sociocultural competence. Therefore, this study combines some of the elements of discourse competence with interactional competence and combines the other elements of discourse competence with sociocultural competence.

f. Formulaic competence

Formulaic competence is separated from linguistic competence to address the competence to use "fixed and prefabricated chunks of language that speakers use heavily in everyday interactions" (Celce-Murcia, 2007: 47). The separation of this competence is an observation of the performance of fluent language users.

Formulaic competence can be also regarded as part of interactional or sociocultural competence. This is because, even for native English speakers, there are different ways to formulate daily conversations, depending on where they live geographically. Native English speakers tend to be tolerant with international English speakers about their different expressions, even if they do not use the formulaic expressions as native English speakers do in daily life. This competence can be gained through addressing learners' interactional and sociocultural competence.

Overall, at the beginning of the EEC course, it is not clear which sub-competences of the communicative competence the EEC course could help learners develop. Therefore, initially there is no specific choice about which sub-competencies of communicative competence to focus on. However, after each research cycle, it becomes increasingly clear that the EEC course

is helping learners to develop sociocultural and interactional competence. Hence the next two sections review more research on the concepts of sociocultural communicative competence and interactional communicative competence.

2.3 Sociocultural communicative competence

Sociocultural competence is regarded as one of the most complex sub-competencies of the six identified by Celce-Murcia (2007). As discussed above, this study categorises intercultural competence, cross-cultural competence and pragmatic competence as sociocultural communicative competence. This section uses terms such as “intercultural competence” to reflect the original words used in the literature, while referring to the notion of sociocultural competence.

Zhang and Zhang (2015: 56) defined intercultural communicative competence as the “ability to engage in productive intercultural dialogues of meanings and relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds”. They further asserted that intercultural communicative competence is constructed by the “ability to communicate interpersonally”, the “ability to deal with different societal systems”, the “ability to establish interpersonal relationships” and the “ability to understand others” (Zhang & Zhang, 2015: 57). Fantini and Tirmizi (2006: 13) defined intercultural communicative competence as “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself”. Although there is an argument about whether both communicators from different cultures should generate a third space in their communication, Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) tended to believe that intercultural competence is more of a competence describing how one adapts oneself to make the communication effective and appropriate to suit the interlocutor’s culture. They further divided intercultural competence into four components: “knowledge”, “attitude”, “skills” and “awareness” (ibid., 29). Through exploring and assessing intercultural competence, Fantini and Tirmizi (2006: 44) produced a list of attributes within intercultural competence, among which “open-mindedness”, “positive attitude”, “tolerance”, “motivation”, “self-development”, “independence”, “adaptability”, “language skills”, “non-judgemental”, “patience”, “sense of humor”, “appreciation”, “self-awareness” and “empathy” were commonly mentioned by respondents.

This is similar to the findings of Matsumoto et al. (2007), who developed an assessment tool named ICAPS (Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale) for this competence. ICAPS aims to assess intercultural competence through four categories: emotional regulation, openness,

flexibility and critical thinking. It is believed that emotional regulation is “the gatekeeper skill for intercultural adjustment”, as it “allows individuals to engage in clear thinking about intercultural incidents without retreating into psychological defenses” (Matsumoto et al., 2001: 485). However, Matsumoto et al. (2001: 485–6) acknowledged that having the ability to control negative emotions is not sufficient; the acquisition of knowledge of a new culture is essential to enable people to “analyse the culture underpinnings of the context, and understand the intentions and behaviours that produced conflict in the first place from a different cultural perspective”. In the meantime, openness and flexibility support individuals to find alternative approaches when the previous social experience proved to be unsuccessful (Matsumoto et al., 2001). Critical thinking supports reflection on the intercultural experience and generates “rival hypotheses that explain conflict other than those from their own cultural framework and the creation of a new set of ideas about social interaction” (ibid., 486). It is noticeable that Matsumoto et al. (2001) regarded these four abilities – emotional regulation, openness, flexibility and critical thinking – as psychological skills. Chen (2014) agreed, but also argued that psychological adaptation is part of intercultural communicative competence.

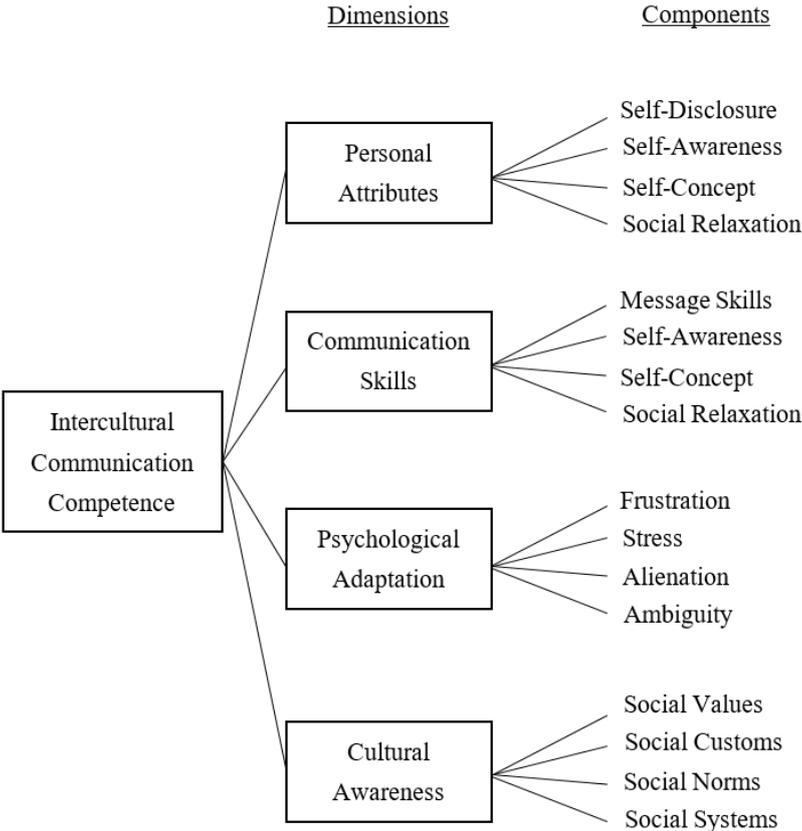


Figure 2.4: The dimensions and components of intercultural communication competence (Chen & Starosta, 1996: 362)

From Chen and Starosta’s (1996) intercultural communication competence model (Figure 2.4),

it can be seen that developing this competence to its full dimensions goes far beyond the scope and capability of traditional language courses. Can a language course ever support students to develop their intercultural communicative competence? If so, how can we cultivate students' potential to develop this competence? This question is further addressed in Chapter 4.

2.4 Interactional competence

In the original model of communicative competence, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) did not mention interactional competence, only actional competence. Actional competence is the ability to “perform common speech acts and speech act sets in the target language involving interactions such as information exchanges, expression of opinions and feelings, problems (complaining, blaming, regretting, apologizing, etc.), future scenarios (hopes, goals, promises, predictions, etc.)” (Celce-Murcia, 2007). However, it addresses more the performance of expressing oneself, for instance, through self-introduction, complaint and apology (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). Actional competence needs to be supported by conversational competence and non-verbal/paralinguistic competence in order to be effective (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

Conversational competence refers to the turn-taking system in conversation (Sachs et al., 1974), which may also include different genres of dialogue. For instance, conversational competence could be about “how to open and close conversations”, “how to establish and change topics”, “how to get, hold, and relinquish the floor”, “how to interrupt” and “how to collaborate and backchannel” (Celce-Murcia, 2007: 48). Conversational competence seems fairly straightforward, but it is very challenging for many Chinese learners, particularly in the context of a group discussion. Lessons at both school and university in China are largely teacher-led for a variety of reasons, including class size and culture. There is little opportunity for Chinese learners to learn to participate in such group conversations or discussions. This problem becomes more significant when they come to study in western-style universities, such as UK universities. Helping Chinese students to overcome this weakness is a valuable issue to explore, and one that underpins my study.

In face-to-face and virtual communication, non-verbal/paralinguistic competence is also critical for interaction. Celce-Murcia (2007: 49) argued that body language, “non-verbal turn-taking signals”, “backchannel behaviours”, “gestures”, “affect markers”, the “use of space by interlocutors”, “silence”, “pauses”, “non-linguistic utterance”, “touching” and “eye contact”, among others, are also important in interaction. Non-verbal/paralinguistic competence is infrequently studied. Nevertheless, it is important to know these subtle tactics in

communication, such as: What is the normal physical space between speakers? Can interlocutors touch each other? If so, in what ways? What is the way to greet each other? What is an appropriate way to make eye contact? It is acknowledged that, depending on who the interlocutors are, this competence may also be categorised as intercultural competence if the interlocutors are from different cultures or countries.

2.5 A summary of the aspects of communicative competence in this research

The above sections have reviewed the evolution of communicative competence and the details of some of its sub-competencies. Many different concepts and sub-competencies have been developed since those of Hymes (1972) and Canales and Swain (1980). However, there is no universally agreed model for communicative competence. Maybe this is partly because it is a complex concept (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), which has different forms in different contexts. Celce-Murcia et al. (cited in McGroarty, 1995: 30) pointed out that the understanding of this concept depends on the learning objectives inherent in a given context. Berns (1990) supported the idea that the understanding of communicative competence should consider the understanding of the sociocultural contexts of language use.

The ultimate aim of developing communicative competence is to help an individual enjoy being a member of a family, community or society. The EEC course is designed to help Chinese English learners improve their communicative competence in English when they communicate with English speakers from other cultures or countries. The EEC course seeks to strengthen the weaker areas of communicative competence from which Chinese learners suffer, so that they can become more open, positive, sociable and effective communicators in English. The understanding of the concept of communicative competence was developed throughout the research cycles, which are discussed in Sections 9.4.2, 10.5.2 and 11.6.2. The concept of communicative competence developed through RC4 is presented in Section 13.1.

Of the six sub-communicative competencies, there are several reasons why I have focused on sociocultural competence and interactional competence. The first is that linguistic competence is widely addressed in many traditional English language courses. The second is that many aspects of strategic competence in the old model of Celce Murcia et al. (1995) can be merged into interactional competence. Similarly, as discussed in the previous sections, discourse competence can be classified into sociocultural competence and formulaic competence, and strategic competence can be grouped into interactional competence. The third reason is that few existing English courses in China are able to truly help Chinese learners improve their

sociocultural competence, and only a few can develop their interactional competence. Therefore, it was considered very valuable to attempt to shorten this gap through this study. However, linguistic competence is still assessed alongside sociocultural competence and interactional competence in this study in order to compare the progress with the comparison group taught in traditional courses, which focus mainly on developing learners' linguistic competence.

The chapter 2 explored the concept of communicative competence and clarified the study's focus on its two sub-competences i.e. sociocultural and interactional competence. Chapter 3 provides further discussion on how to evaluate learners' progress in communicative competence in English.

3. Evaluating learners' progress in communicative competence in English

This chapter reviews the literature on the test design and assessment of learners' progress in three sub-competencies of communicative competence: linguistic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence. It also discusses the consideration of the EEC course on the choice of assessment in this study.

3.1 Assessment design cycle

The principle of educational assessment is to conduct the measurement of learners' progress in a fair and systematic way (Canale, 1988). Scores or ranking individuals are not the primary purposes of assessment but rather a way to represent "certain aspects of understanding" (ibid., 67). Test designers should consider "what to test, how to test, and why to test" and this naturalistic–ethical approach of language testing is in fact "an art, a science, and very much an ethical issue" (ibid., 67). Figure 3.1 illustrates the process of the test design produced by Fulcher (2010).

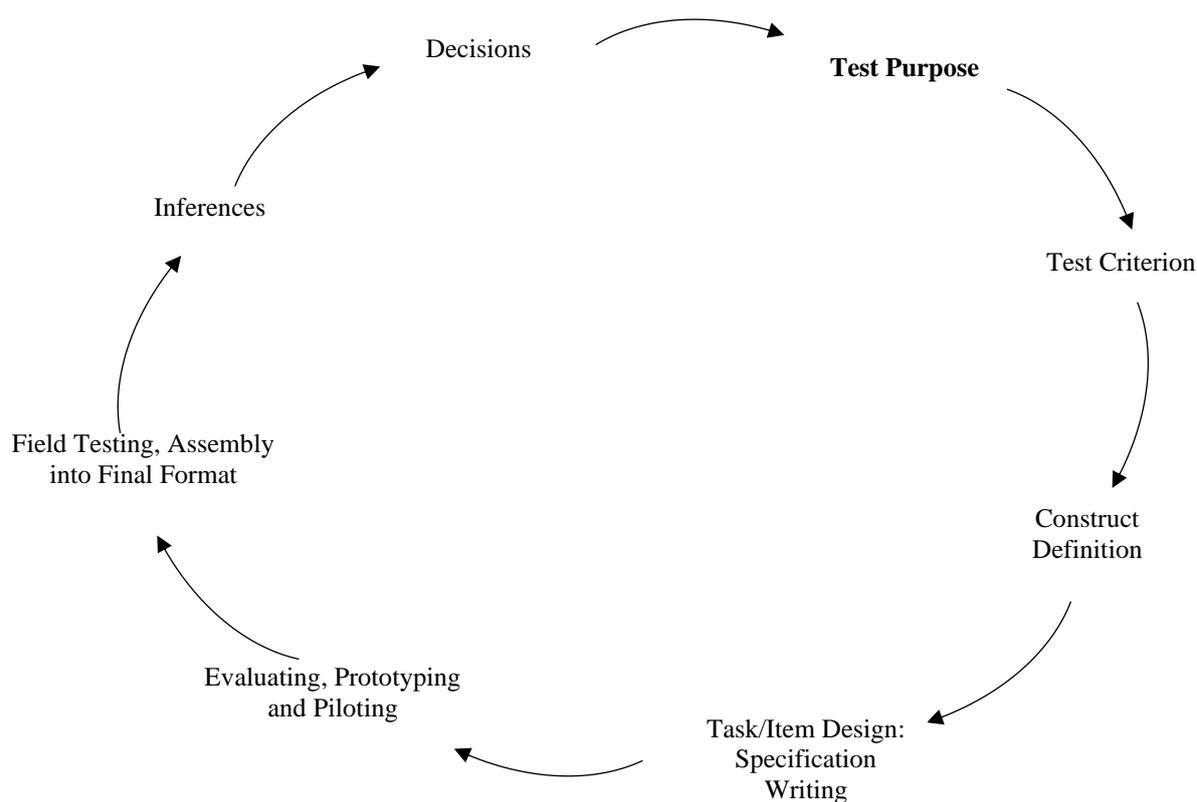


Figure 3.1: The test design cycle (Fulcher, 2010: 94)

Developing a standardised test is a time-consuming and expensive process, which involves an enormous amount of time and effort to ensure that the test is reliable, valid and has positive

washback impact (ibid., 93). This might be the reason why many teachers design a test starting from writing test items (ibid.). However, Fulcher (2010: 93) strongly believed a test design should start from identifying the testing purpose to build a clear rationale “for selecting test contents and format”. Canale (1988: 67) supported this idea, claiming that understanding which assessment tools and techniques should be used requires more understanding of “what should be measured in the first place” (ibid., 67).

Although identifying the test purpose is regarded as an essential step, the purpose cannot be identified without considering how practically to deliver the test, collect the test responses and analyse the test responses, and so on. Answering the following questions might help to identify the direction for the rest of the steps in the test design cycle:

- *What do we hope to achieve?*
- *How can the important issues be identified?*
- *Who should be involved?*
- *What may be the effects of evaluating?*
- *How can information be collected and analysed?*
- *Who can best collect and analyse the information?*
- *What are the most applicable sources of information?*
- *What are the constraints (e.g. time, manpower, political)?*

(Fulcher, 2010: 94)

Apart from considering the above questions, in order to identify the test purpose it might also be useful to “look at the learning objectives or outcomes” (ibid., 95). The test purpose needs to be described very specifically, and a test purpose should normally include the description of target test-takers, the ability range, “the domains of language use”, “the range of language use” and “the range of knowledge, skills or abilities” (Fulcher & Davidson, 2009: 123–4). Without clarification of a clear and practical test purpose, there is a high chance of design chaos and “validity chaos at the end” (Fulcher, 2010: 96). The test purpose of this study is discussed in Section 7.5.

The impetus of designing tests to assess communicative competence arose from language teaching during the 1980s (Bachman, 1991). There are two key features to differentiate communicative tests from other linguistic language tests (ibid.). The first is that communicative tests require test-takers to complete one task in order to do another (ibid.). For instance, a test-

taker might be asked to listen to a recorded lecture and then write a paragraph accordingly. The other feature is that communicative tests are designed to measure a much broader range of language abilities than the others (ibid., 678). They measure not only linguistic knowledge but also other communicative abilities and skills, such as “sociolinguistic appropriateness” (ibid., 678).

However, Nguyen and Le (2013: 862) argued that the concepts and theories of communicative competence have been available for more than three decades, but the current language assessment system does not demand that learners show their real communicative competence. There has been a call for language-exam organisations and teachers to develop tests to improve assessment (Nguyen & Le, 2013).

3.2 Measuring linguistic competence

Of all the sub-communicative competencies, linguistic competence has the most developed assessment structures. There has been a long history of large-scale testing to measure learners’ linguistic competence in English, such as TOEFL (a Test of English as a Foreign Language) in the USA and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) in the UK. TOEFL was established in 1962 and is one of the most popular English tests for entry to overseas studies, particularly to American countries. IELTS, set up in 1989 in the UK, has gained increasing popularity around the world and has been used to assess learners’ ability to use English in academic study or work (ielts.org). This study employed IELTS to measure learners’ linguistic competence since the researcher and the majority of teachers on the EEC course were based in the UK.

IELTS is composed of four sub-tests: listening, reading, writing and speaking, with a score band from 0 to 9 (Appendix XIII). The overall band score is the average of four sub-tests. For international candidates to access higher education or employment (ielts.org, 2012), scores of 6.5–7.5 are generally required. There are two types of IELTS: academic and general. Academic IELTS is designed for test-takers intending to apply for university courses. General IELTS, on the other hand, is targeted at those who are planning on immigration. Both IELTS exams share the same speaking and listening questions but have different questions in reading and writing tests.

Although ideally the participants of this study would have been asked to take all four sub-tests of the IELTS test, it would have been time-consuming and practically difficult to conduct all of

them. Since this research focuses on communicative competence in conversation, which is based on mutual interaction, it was deemed more useful to adopt only the IELTS writing and speaking tests, because the reading and listening tests usually do not require test-takers to express themselves. The next two sub-sections review more details of the IELTS writing and speaking tests.

3.2.1 IELTS writing test

There are two tasks in the IELTS writing test. Test-takers are expected to spend 20 minutes on Task I, with at least 150 words; and 40 minutes on Task II, with at least 250 words. Task II in both the IELTS general writing test and the IELTS academic writing test are the same. Task I in the general IELTS test normally asks that test-takers write a letter to “respond to a given problem” (IELTS Handbook, 2007: 9), while Task I in the academic IELTS test normally asks that candidates interpret a graph or chart using a description, comparison or explanation. Although the academic and general writing tests have different questions, they share three assessment criteria: “coherence and cohesion”, “lexical resource” and “grammatical range and accuracy”. The only different criterion is that Task I requires test-takers to complete the task and then assesses them according to task achievement. Task II requires test-takers to state, argue and support their ideas with examples, which means that it is assessed based on “task response” (ibid., 10).

The writing task (Task I) in the IELTS general test and Task II in the academic test can assess some aspects of sociocultural competence. Task I reveals more about test-takers’ emotional control and openness. Task II shows more critical thinking, as well as openness. The EEC course considers both Task I (general test) and Task II (academic test). The findings are discussed in Chapters 9 to 12.

3.2.2 IELTS speaking test

The IELTS speaking test is divided into three parts: the test attempts to evaluate the extent to which a candidate has the ability to talk about daily topics (Part 1); to give a short speech about a given topic (Part 2); and to communicate opinions logically, analytically and justifiably (Part 3) (ielts.org). Its assessment criteria are composed of four features: fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation (IELTS Handbook, 2007: 12). Fluency and coherence are revealed by “repetition and self-correction”, “hesitation” or “speech rate”, “the use of discourse markers”, “connectives and cohesive features”, “the coherence of topic development” and “response length” (Brown, 2002: 6). On the other hand,

lexical resources are attributed by “breadth of vocabulary”, “accuracy/precision/appropriateness”, “idiomatic usage” and “effectiveness and amount of paraphrase or circumlocution” (ibid., 7). Grammatical range and accuracy are highlighted by “range/variety of structures”, “error type and density”, “error-free sentences”, “impact of errors”, “sentence complexity”, “length of utterances” and “complexity of structures” (ibid., 8). Regarding pronunciation, “intelligibility” and “listener effort” are ranked as the two most important criteria (Yates, 2011).

The IELTS speaking test is regarded as the least fair test by candidates in comparison with the other three tests (Kerstjens & Nery, 2000). In order to provide a more equitable speaking test, examiners are trained and expected to follow the speaking test criteria strictly (Seedhouse, 2006). Examiners also take into account candidates’ cultural background and avoid asking them about certain topics (Khan, 2006). For instance, they are advised that it is inappropriate to ask a candidate from a rural area in Bangladesh about “keep-fit activities”, “holiday” or “urban noise”, as he/she probably has no knowledge or experience of these topics. There is also a strong correlation between listening scores and speaking scores, particularly in Part 3 (Nakatsuhara, 2012). If a candidate finds it difficult to understand the question, then it is unlikely that he or she will be able to answer the questions correspondingly. This is in line with O’Sullivan and Lu’s (2006: 22) findings that the Interlocutor Frame should allow examiners a certain degree of flexibility to create questions to make the interview “natural” and “free-flowing”. Seedhouse and Harris (2011) further proposed an additional Part 4 to allow candidates to lead and develop topics with the examiners; this addition would help to create a speaking test that is truly interactive and which assesses candidates’ ability to ask questions and develop topics. This is indeed a challenging potential addition, as it is subjective and uncontrollable, which makes it impractical for exams such as the IELTS.

Despite the above proposition, Part 4 has not yet been introduced to the IELTS, and there is a lack of criteria to assess test-takers’ interactional and sociocultural competence. The EEC course employed the IELTS speaking test in RC1 but had to drop it for reasons that are discussed in Chapter 7. However, the IELTS speaking test assessment criteria have proved to be valuable in forming the framework for the self-designed speaking test for this study. More criteria were added in order to assess interactional and sociocultural competence.

3.3 Measuring interactional communicative competence

As discussed in the previous sections, researchers have overwhelmingly focused on measuring

a test-taker's linguistic performance as a non-communicative individual rather than an interactive individual in a social context (Walsh, 2012). To assess interactional communicative competence, Walsh (2012: 2) pointed out that it should assess the joint competence of all interlocutors, as interactional competence is performed jointly by interlocutors. East et al. (2016) reinforced that the current teacher-led interview test model should be replaced by a peer interactional assessment, as it is expected that such peer interactional assessment is more authentic and spontaneous (*ibid.*). Skehan (2010: 169) agreed that peer-group interaction shows more authentic interactional competence of an individual than teacher–student interaction.

However, East et al. (2016) argued that such ways of assessment may not necessarily generate genuine spontaneous interactions in practice, as some test-takers may tend to write down the scripts or prepare in other ways in order to achieve better test results. On the other hand, in the real world, learners have to show their competence in situations in which they do not feel comfortable. Students indicated that they were less comfortable talking to certain people such as “teachers”, “important people”, “business people”, “bosses” and “authorities” (Oliver et al., 2008: 217). Although the students were native English speakers in Australia, many were reluctant to speak in front of a large audience and were afraid of making mistakes and being judged. Only a select group of students, who were extremely competent, were able to speak confidently in the speaking tasks (Oliver et al., 2008). They were also not skilled at telling someone to stop doing something that concerned them, at talking to someone they did not like or expressing their opinions on certain topics (*ibid.*). This shows that a peer-paired test or group test may not reflect test-takers' interactional competence in those challenging contexts.

Therefore, the criteria for selecting a test should consider not only whether students feel comfortable with it, but also the aims of the course and the communicational needs of the students in real life. Furthermore, in practice, peer assessment may not be practical, as the time it requires is likely to overstretch the workload of classroom teachers (East et al., 2016). In addition, the introduction of social factors in the speaking test has its own challenges, not just for test-takers but also for assessors (Chalhoub-Deville, 2003).

May (2011) conducted a study to explore assessors' perceptions of the key features of an individual's interactional competence. Three aspects were examined: the extent to which a test-taker is able to “understand the interlocutor's message, respond to the interlocutor appropriately, and use communicative strategies appropriately” (*ibid.*, 133). The study discovered that assessors tend to use the following criteria to score the interaction performance of test-takers:

- **Understanding the interlocutor's message**

- Understand interlocutor's message
- Produce speech that is intelligible to the assessor
- Listen to interlocutor

- **Ability to respond appropriately to interlocutor**

- Respond to interlocutor
- Express ideas and opinions
- Use body language
- Contribute to the quality of the interaction
- Work cooperatively with partner
- Demonstrate assertiveness through communication
- Manage interaction
- Contribute to the authenticity of the interaction
- Not dominate interaction
- Demonstrate persuasiveness
- Help partner out

- **Using appropriate communicative strategies**

- Use communicative strategies
- Ask for partner's opinion
- Clarify/ask for clarification
- Use functional language

(May, 2011: 134–8)

Considering the above, the assessment of interactional communicative competence should produce a context in which test-takers can interact authentically and spontaneously, but it should also not add a significant workload to teachers and students. Ideally, this assessment should reflect the scenario that the test-takers regularly encounter in real life and which is also easily modified in a classroom context. For university students, one of the most relevant scenarios is presenting their study and answering questions from an audience. Q&A time is one of the most challenging aspects for many Chinese students, as it involves much interaction. Presentation communication competence could also be extended to apply in students' future workplaces.

3.4 Measuring sociocultural communicative competence

As clarified in the previous chapter, this study classifies intercultural communicative competence and cross-cultural communicative competence as sociocultural communicative competence. This section, and this thesis, may use intercultural communicative competence or cross-cultural communicative competence, but both refer to sociocultural communicative competence in this study.

3.4.1 Measuring intercultural communicative competence in China

Following efforts to change the curriculum and improve Chinese learners' intercultural communicative competence in English, the development of an assessment of this competence is also urgently called for in China. In a study of how Chinese university English teachers perceive what should be assessed to evaluate students' intercultural communicative competence, and what they have actually assessed in practice, cultural knowledge in the target language was regarded as one of the most critical elements (Gu, 2015). This was followed by "value" and "language cultural connotation of English-speaking countries" (ibid., 262). Only a small proportion of teachers mentioned the culture of non-English-speaking countries. Nonetheless, out of approximately 800 responses, only 2 respondents mentioned the "ability to deal with problems occurring in intercultural communication", and "knowledge and understanding of their own culture, including thinking patterns, values, and beliefs" (ibid., 262). Apart from knowledge, although many English teachers recognised skill as being just as important as knowledge, little priority was given to assessing ability in practice (ibid., 262). Attitude and awareness were ranked even lower in teachers' perceptions (Gu, 2015).

In terms of what assessment tools teachers would like to use to assess learners' intercultural communicative competence, oral presentation, role play and paper test were the top three choices (ibid.). Other methods, such as problem-solving tasks, interviews and portfolios were rarely applied (ibid.). Furthermore, none of the respondents used learners' self-evaluation and self-monitoring as assessment tools, such as "self-reports", "self-reflection diaries", "evaluation forms" and "surveys" (ibid., 263). One of the reasons for the limited choices is the lack of administrative support to reduce the workload of EFL teachers and to encourage them to innovate traditional ways of assessment (Gu, 2015). However, overall, the current assessment of sociocultural competence in China is still at an early stage. It is valuable to review what international researchers have studied in terms of assessing sociocultural competence, and how.

3.4.2 Finding measurable elements of intercultural competence

There are several tests aimed at measuring intercultural communicative competence, such as the CCAI, CQ, IBA/BASIC, ICC, ICSI, MPQ, IDI, ISS and ICAPS. To find out what elements contribute to intercultural competence, an initial item pool needs to be created through specifying “desirable outcomes” and then identifying the knowledge, skills, abilities and other factors that are necessary to demonstrate competence in “the target cultures” (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013: 2). The next step is to identify what knowledge, skills, abilities and other factors are fundamental to “produce the desired outcome in those cultures” and to use these items to design questionnaires (ibid., 2). Through a validation process, which includes content validity, construct validity and ecological validity, the researcher reduces the items down to the minimum and optimum for higher reliability and practicality (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). Through the above process, a variety of psychological factors “for intercultural adaptation and adjustment” are identified in order to give practitioners guidance on designing training programmes accordingly (ibid., 1). On the whole, adaptation and adjustment are defined as two measurable elements of intercultural competence (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013).

Adaptation is changing behaviour to fit the target culture, and adjustment is the subjective feeling about such conduct (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). Successful intercultural adaptation and adjustment should change the behaviour to achieve the goals and, in the meantime, embrace the positive feeling about such behaviour (ibid.). In other words, it means having a “successful relationship with people from other cultures; feelings at interactions are warm, cordial, respectful, and cooperative; accomplishing tasks in an effective and efficient manner; and managing psychological stress effectively in one’s daily activities, interpersonal relations, and work environment” (ibid., 2).

This description, in fact, is a description of a very high, optimal level of intercultural competence. Although it may be achievable within the context of a short tourist-based visit to a foreign country, it may be very challenging to achieve for a more extended period of overseas residential experience. This is because, for a short stay, there may be fewer opportunities for a visitor to encounter conflicts with local people in the target country or culture; yet there is a much higher chance of producing clashes over a more extended period of time.

In theory, it is ideal to have such harmony when an individual interacts with other people from different cultures. In reality, it is almost impossible not to have any conflicts between any two individuals, even from the same cultural background. Therefore, it is not practical to assess

learners' adaptation and adjustment through the tests after a short period of time. There should be a balance to measure how well an individual integrates into the target culture, but also how an individual reacts to conflicts in behaviour and subjective feelings.

3.4.3 Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS)

ICAPS is one of the most popular assessment tools for intercultural communicative competence (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). It initially identifies 8 psychological constructs – emotional regulation, critical thinking, openness, flexibility, interpersonal security, emotional commitment to traditional ways of thinking, tolerance of ambiguity, and empathy – about which 193 items were created in the item pool. Through ecological validity tests with Japanese sojourners and immigrants to the United States, and with immigrants and sojourners from other countries, such as India, Sweden, Central and South America, and Spanish-speaking sojourners to the United States, the initial 8 constructs were reduced to 4 – emotional regulation, openness, flexibility and critical thinking – through the 55-item ICAPS test (ibid.).

Emotional regulation refers to how individuals continue to think clearly in sociocultural incidents “without retreating into psychological defenses”, which is regarded as a “gatekeeper skill” for sociocultural adjustment (Matsumoto et al., 2001: 485). To learn a new culture, an individual needs openness and flexibility. Openness indicates how an individual is able to free the mind from “previous ways of thinking that have worked in the past” and to tolerate the ambiguity of not knowing or being able to predict the likely outcomes of one’s actions (ibid., 486). Flexibility demonstrates one’s ability to take alternative approaches if the previous approach is not working (Matsumoto et al., 2001). Critical thinking is not only comparing the original culture with the target culture in an analytical way but also monitoring one’s own behaviour and reflecting upon oneself and others around oneself (ibid.) These four factors are all psychological skills that affect the sociocultural competence of an individual.

Although ICAPS can be used to assess any individual’s intercultural adjustment ability, it might be more reliable if it were used to assess communicative competence once an individual has had intercultural experience for a specified period of time. This length of experience may not necessarily mean that the individual has physically lived abroad for a long time, as the individual has been in contact with target language speakers physically (face-to-face) or virtually (online) on a regular basis. As a result of the high cost of taking ICAPS tests for this small-scale study, this study employed the concepts and transferred to assessment criteria to assess learners’ competence regarding four elements: emotional regulation, openness,

flexibility and critical thinking. The four elements were also evaluated through questionnaires and interviews to supplement the findings of the tests.

3.5 Validity and reliability of a test

When designing a test, validity and reliability are the two key elements to consider (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). Lado (1961: 321) defined validity as follows: “Does a test measure what it is supposed to measure? If it does, it is valid.” Reliability is “the consistency of test scores across facets of the test” (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). Reliability is distinct from validity. However, many researchers have regarded it as “a prerequisite for validity” (Chapelle, 1999: 255). Watts (2013) summarised four aspects of validity: content, criteria, construct and consequences. Content validity reflects whether the test covers the content of the specification, syllabus or curriculum (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). Construct validity refers to whether the test can reveal the relevant attribute, underlying skills or ability of the test-taker (ibid.). Criteria validity is whether a series of descriptions of assessment objectives measures what the test aims to evaluate (ibid.). Finally, consequential validity is stated as being fundamental to validity (Shaw, 2013). On the one hand, it discloses whether a test measures what it sets out to measure; on the other hand, both its intended (or claimed) outcome and unintended (or negative) outcome suggest the degree of validity of the test (ibid.).

As the EEC course was designed to assess not students’ knowledge but their competence, content validity did not play an important role in the assessment of this study. However, the tests in this study emphasised the other three validities: criteria, construct and consequence. Regarding criteria validity, the assessment criteria for linguistic competence employed the IELTS writing test and speaking test. On top of this framework, the assessment criteria for interactional competence were added based on the studies of Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) and May (2011). On the other hand, the assessment criteria for sociocultural competence were developed from the theory of Matsumoto and Hwang (2013) but still supported by the study of Celce-Murcia et al. (1995).

It is debatable whether the added criteria for international competence and sociocultural competence were valid, as they have not been proven by a large number of tests such as IELTS exams. As Nguyen and Le (2013) identified, the current assessment of communicative competence is far behind the understanding of its concept, and therefore a variety of tests should be trialled to pioneer the way for the development of assessment of communicative competence. Although there were certainly limitations to the tests in this study, it is expected that the

assessment process and findings in relation to interactional competence and sociocultural competence could contribute to the study of assessment of communicative competence to provide a foundation for further development.

Regarding consequential validity, one of the most common scenarios in which university students can show their interactional and sociocultural competence is when they present their academic study and answer audience questions. Addressing the presentation with a focus on Q&A would not distract students' learning but reinforce their ability to deliver their academic presentations and answer the audience's questions. Therefore, presentation with a focus on Q&A has consequential validity. On the other hand, the context of the IELTS writing test reflected a common scenario regarding conflicts in university accommodation. The strategies that the test-takers revealed to solve these conflicts could also reflect the sociocultural competence that they might employ to solve other conflicts. In addition, it was common to write a complaint letter in real life. Thus, the IELTS general writing test also showed the consequential validity to assess communicative competence.

Regarding construct validity, the Q&A was specifically designed to assess learners' interactional competence and the IELTS general writing test was designed to enlarge test-takers' sociocultural competence in particular.

Therefore, it was expected that these two tests could assess test-takers' communicative competence in the contexts of academic communication with the audience and dealing with conflicts in daily life. In other words, both tests have application in students' real life, which reflected construct validity and consequential validity (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007).

3.6 Summary of assessment tools used by this study

The aim of the EEC course was to develop Chinese university students' communicative competence in English, especially interactional competence and sociocultural competence. However, in order to make a comparison with a group whose main aim was to develop learners' linguistic competence, the assessment also had to include linguistic competence. The purpose of the assessment was to measure the extent to which learners improved in linguistic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence after a period of time. This period of time was determined by the length of the EEC course. The intervention group and the comparison group of Chinese university students both took pre-tests and post-tests to measure the progress they had made during the EEC course. The EEC course tried the following tests in

each research cycle.

RC1: IELTS speaking test

IELTS academic writing test (Tasks I and II)

School test

RC2: IELTS speaking test

IELTS academic writing test (Task II only)

RC3: IELTS general writing test (Task I only)

Presentation with a focus on Q&A (individual presenter with audience)

RC4: IELTS general writing test (Task I only)

Presentation with a focus on Q&A (group presenters)

In RC1 and RC2 my understanding of the assessment theory did not develop into interactional competence and sociocultural competence. Therefore, the tests chosen in RC1 and RC2 were based more on the tests to assess linguistic competence. In RC3 and RC4 more attention was paid to tests that could potentially assess interactional competence and sociocultural competence.

As outlined in Section 3.3, the common approach to assessing interactional competence is through a paired or group speaking test. The paired test was considered too time-consuming for this study, especially for the comparison group. The group test was an option. However, it was felt that presentation with Q&A might be a more useful practice for most Chinese university students, as many are required to present their academic study at international conferences and to answer questions from an audience. This might also bring more direct and positive washback, as the test itself is what students are experiencing in their real academic life. I considered the idea of a small group test. In fact, it was felt that this would be another scenario that many Chinese university students might find challenging but useful, particularly when they study overseas. Nonetheless, if a choice had to be made between the two, presentation with Q&A was a more popular format and was expected to produce less work for the teacher and the students. After talking to the teachers in China, it was agreed to use only presentation with Q&A in this study in order to reduce the workload of both the teachers and students of the comparison group. Figure 3.2 summarises the main categories of assessment criteria.

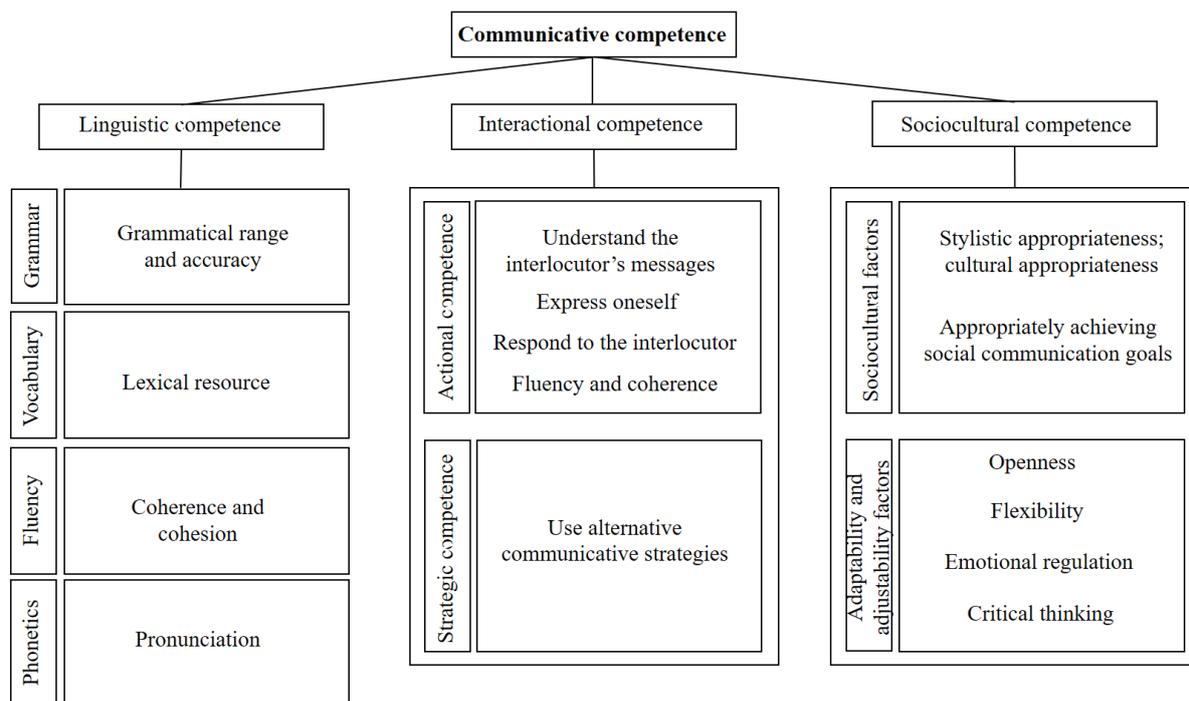


Figure 3.2: Summary of assessment criteria of linguistic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence

The findings and reasons for changing the tests in each research cycle, and the consideration of the assessment criteria, are discussed in Chapters 9 to 12. The test results for linguistic, interactional and sociocultural competencies were triangulated with students' perceptions of the elements of these three competencies through questionnaires and interviews.

Chapter 3 explored ways of evaluating learners' progress in communicative competence in English and presented a range of assessment tools to be used in the study. In order to evaluate learner's progress in communicative competence, it might be worth considering which teaching theories may prove most adequate for its development. Chapter 4 sheds light on the issue.

4. Teaching theories to support the development of communicative competence

This chapter reviews the teaching theories supporting the development of communicative competence. Section 4.1 looks at the overall picture of the concepts and teaching theories of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL). Section 4.2 takes a detailed look at CLT (communicative language teaching) and links the theory with its application in the EEC course.

4.1 Overview of the EFL or ESL concepts and teaching theories

4.1.1 EFL versus ESL

The EEC course is located in the field of teaching English to non-native speakers. However, is it a course of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL)? The reason for clarifying this is because there might be different teaching methods or strategies for each. The main difference between these two notations is based on *where* learners are located. EFL is used when a learner is learning English in a non-English speaking country and the teacher speaks the same native language as the learners; ESL is used when a learner is learning English in an English-speaking country and the teacher is a native (Peterson, 2014). From the above definitions, the EEC course is typical of neither EFL nor ESL and thus not straightforward to define. The online EEC course has removed the restrictions of physical locations to teach or learn English. In this study, the EEC course has two kinds of English teacher, one from the same culture as the learners and the other from the target language culture. The latter teacher speaks the learners' native language (Chinese) and may or may not live in the same country as the learners. The teacher from the target language culture or elsewhere speaks native English or English as an International Language (EIL), and also may or may not live in an English-speaking country. Although the EEC course has features of both kinds of language teaching, it is closer to an EFL course, as learners were based in their home country and one of the English teachers was also from the same home country. Therefore, this study considers the EEC course as a combination of EFL and ESL teaching but regards EEC learners as EFL learners. Section 4.1.2 reviews the teaching and learning theories of EFL and ESL to give a brief overall background context of the EEC course.

4.1.2 EFL and ESL teaching and learning approaches

Second-language teaching and learning theories have a long history. Celce-Murcia (1991: 3) listed nine language-teaching approaches, of which the most important are:

1. Grammar-translation approach
2. Direct approach
3. Audiolingualism (US)
4. Cognitive approach
5. Communicative approach

- **Grammar-translation approach (GTA)**

The grammar-translation method is one of the most traditional language-teaching methods, derived from classical methods in teaching Greek and Latin (Wang, 2009). It requires students to translate the texts from the target language into learners' native language, through which students learn grammatical rules and vocabularies. Students are sometimes also requested to replicate texts in the target language. This method often ignores pronunciation or any communicative aspects of language learning (Wang, 2009). The result of this approach is that students often find it difficult to use the target language for communication (Celce-Murcia, 1991). However, as the teacher does not have to be able to speak the target language (Celce-Murcia, 1991), the grammar-translation approach is often used in EFL teaching.

- **Direct approach (DA)**

The direct approach emerged to answer criticisms of the grammar-translation method in Germany and France around 1900. In contrast to the grammar-translation method, the direct approach teaches learners only in the target language. It attempts to imitate how learners acquire their native language (Wang, 2009). Grammar and the target culture are taught inductively. As teachers are not required to know the students' native language (Celce-Murcia, 1991), this approach is often applied in ESL teaching.

- **Audiolingualism (ALA)**

As a reaction to the impracticality of GTA and DA, audiolingualism teaches learners a language directly in the target language. However, this approach focuses more on drilling students in the use of grammar instead of vocabulary. The aim is to train learners to practise particular constructs until they can use them spontaneously. Pronunciation is highlighted from the beginning. With this method, teachers present correct models of sentences for students to repeat and replace certain words. There is no explicit grammar learning but great effort is made to prevent learners making errors (Celce-Murcia, 1991). As teaching activities and materials are manipulated and controlled, teachers may only be proficient in the structures and vocabularies

(Celce-Murcia, 1991). Being criticised for a lack of interaction, this approach is directly opposite to the communicative language-teaching approach (Wang, 2009). The reasons why ALA was not chosen for the EEC course are also discussed in Section 4.1.4.

- **Cognitive approach (CA)**

Instead of drilling, the cognitive approach advocates that learners can only use a language after they have understood the rules of the language system. In other words, the cognitive approach believes that imitation can only happen when a cognitive process is activated. The cognitive approach splits language learning into four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing from the beginning of the language course (Wang, 2009). Reading and writing regained their importance as equal to listening and speaking. The division of language learning into four skills helps learners to focus on not only learning grammatical rules and vocabulary but also the application of language rules to understand the application of input languages, such as listening and reading, as well as the application of output languages, such as writing and speaking.

However, none of the above teaching approaches have responded to the needs of learners to use the language to communicate in real life. As a result, communicative language teaching (CLT) is introduced to react to the above needs.

- **Communicative language teaching (CLT)**

The aim of communicative language teaching (CLT) is to develop learners' ability to use language in real-life communication. Its principal focus is to support learners to generate appropriate and effective meanings to serve authentic interaction with others, rather than developing perfectly grammatical structures or acquiring native-like pronunciation (Wang, 2009). Teachers are required to use the target language more fluently and appropriately than in GTA and ALA (Celce-Murcia, 1991). The development of communicative competence promotes the development of communicative language teaching (CLT). Out of a wide range of approaches and methods developed for language teaching over the years, CLT has become the dominant approach worldwide (Alamri, 2018). As the aim of the EEC course was to develop learners' communicative competence, CLT was chosen as the main teaching approach. The next section reviews and discusses the detailed features of CLT and its limitations, and justifies the reasons behind this choice. Section 4.2 further discusses the details of CLT theory.

4.1.3 Rationale behind the choice of models for the EEC course

The traditional approach to EFL and ESL, which is a combination of the GTA, ALA and CA, has dominated English-language teaching in China (Hu, 2012). In other words, the Chinese English-teaching method is a combination of translation of texts, drills of sentences, teaching of grammar rules and vocabularies, and addressing reading, writing, listening and writing as separate language skills. The strengths of such methods are that they equip learners with fairly solid systematic grammar knowledge and build some solid forms of use of vocabularies. However, they all focus on linguistic competence rather than the sociocultural aspect of communicative competence.

I was taught English in GTA, ALA and CA in China. My own experience as a language learner was a key motivation for wanting to design the EEC. The advantages of this teaching approach were that it was efficient in the initial stage of my English learning. When I first started learning English at the age of 12 in a junior secondary school, my first teacher, a newly qualified teacher, emphasised reading aloud and memorising paragraphs of textbooks. I was often called on by my teacher to recite paragraphs from the textbooks by memory. The teacher corrected my pronunciation or errors but also gave me a lot of encouragement. This was a time when I really enjoyed learning English.

GTA, ALA and CA approaches also worked fine when I entered senior high school. However, I had fewer chances to speak English as the class size grew bigger and the teaching focus was more on learning and memorising the rules of grammar and vocabulary to pass the exams. This teaching approach helped me to learn systematic grammatical knowledge to cope with English exams.

While I entered the university to study biology and chemistry, the university English teacher continued applying the GTA and ALA approach. I was very bored by such teaching approaches, as what we did was translating textbooks, underlining new vocabularies or phrases from an English textbook, attempting to memorise as much vocabulary as possible, and doing practice questions to prepare for CET exams. In the lesson, we were mostly listening to the teacher's monologic lecturing, reading English texts or taking notes. Although I was very interested in learning English, on several occasions I struggled to stay awake in the lessons. The vocabularies that I had tried hard to memorise also slipped from my memory rapidly, as I did not have a chance to see them or use them elsewhere. I was very frustrated, as I did not feel I was making any progress, and any progress was negative in comparison to my secondary English learning.

My personal experience convinced me that GTA, ALA and CA approaches are effective for language learning but maybe only for beginner learners. However, once learners have grasped grammar rules and accumulated a certain amount of vocabulary, GTA, ALA and CA lack the force to drive learners to further develop the ability to apply the language in real communication. Wang (2009: 151) criticised the traditional Chinese English-teaching approaches, arguing they have “produced too many dumb and fluency idiots”, which hurt “native speakers’ feelings”, and as a result, they do not satisfy the modern demand for foreign-language specialists. I would say that ignorance of the importance of communicative rules hurts not only native speakers’ feelings but also those of any interlocutors. As a result, being able to speak English does not mean that learners can reach a positive communication outcome and/or build up pleasant and sustainable relationships with others. This is a serious problem in Chinese English education, which must be solved. It is one of the main reasons why the aim of the EEC course is to develop English learners’ communicative competence.

Arguably, there are some similarities between direct approach (DA) and communicative language teaching (CLT) as they both teach English in the target language. Unsurprisingly, DA (direct approach) is a teaching approach that is frequently used by foreign English teachers in China. However, DA could still focus on developing learners’ linguistic competence and/or speaking skills, which is not equivalent to communicative competence. It is this misalignment with the main aim of the EEC course i.e. to develop learners’ communicative rather than linguistic competence that led to DA not being the chosen teaching approach for the EEC course.

Different from traditional language teaching, which normally focuses on form, CLT shifts the focus towards more meaningful and authentic communication (Cook, 2003: 36; Alamri, 2018). What distinguishes CLT from traditional teaching approaches is its conception of communicative competence, rather than linguistic competence alone (Brown, 2001). In other words, CLT plays a vital role in raising learners’ awareness of social and cultural considerations (Berns, 2013), which has a significant impact on learners when participating in the real world in an effective way (Richards & Schmidt, 2014). The next section reviews the CLT teaching approach and discusses why the EEC course has adopted it.

4.2 Communicative language teaching (CLT)

4.2.1 Aims and key features of CLT

The aim of communicative language teaching (CLT) is to improve learners’ communicative competence (Sreehari, 2012), which is nourished by a theory of language use; the belief is that

language can be learnt through the experience of using language for communication (Arnold, Dörnyei & Pugliese, 2015). The rationale behind the CLT approach is that it is learner-centred and interactive, which allows freedom, unpredictability, spontaneity and student initiatives (Li, 1984). CLT encourages language learners to communicate in the target language through the process of struggling to communicate (Finocchiaro & Brumfitqtd, in Brown, 2007: 49).

The teacher plays the role of facilitating, advising and guiding learners in the classroom to create a student-centred classroom and engaging learners in authentic and meaningful communications that require meaningful negotiations, with the goal of increasing comprehensible language input for learners and expecting them to generate more output (Alamri, 2018; Huang & Liu, 2000). However, Harmer (1982) argued that the intention with CLT is not simply to throw learners into a pool of communication and to let them sink or swim. Teachers should not only play the role of a facilitator or adviser, but also provide learners with feedback, correct their mistakes or inappropriateness, and interact effectively with learners, both inside and outside lessons (Alamri, 2018). The EEC course invited foreign English speakers to interact with learners. This is different from most of the CLT courses, which are dominated by peer interactions. The EEC course has a balance of peer interaction and teacher–learner interactions.

Nunan (1991) identified five features of CLT:

- An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation. Authentic materials refer to any form of resources that are not especially prepared for pedagogical purposes (Richards, 2001).
- An enhancement of the learner’s own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

(Cited in Sreehari, 2012: 88)

Other researchers added more features of CLT:

- Teaching language skills in integration so that learners can learn the language holistically (Sreehari, 2012: 91).

- A focus on the social nature of learning rather than on students as separate.
- A view of learning as a lifelong process rather than something that is done to prepare for an exam (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003: 3).

The last feature indicates an important long-term direction of the EEC course. In summary, the theory of CLT takes a holistic and interactional approach to help learners improve communicative competence in a variety of contexts through authentic and meaningful communication, inside and outside lessons. The EEC course, which shares the aim and features of CLT, is a practical course to test the theory of CLT. However, despite worldwide recognition of its importance, there are criticisms of the theory and practice of CLT.

4.2.2 Critical review of CLT

There are two main areas of critique of CLT. The first is that it is not felt to be as efficient in real practice as it aims to be (Lindsay & Knight, 2006). Some researchers have even called for a paradigm shift away from this approach (Alamri, 2018). For instance, textbooks are not valuable in CLT, as bespoke teaching and learning materials are chosen, which are mostly authentic from real life (Tomlinson, 2001). While textbooks provide systematic and collaborative activities, not using textbooks means that CLT teachers have to deal with heavy lesson preparation, which is overburdening and underpaid (Ozsevik, 2010). Moreover, the limited capability of the local English teachers and the costs to implement CLT are further key factors hindering its impact in practice (Lindsay & Knight, 2006; Alamri, 2018; Walia, 2012). As a result, teachers tend to avoid implementing and adapting the CLT approach in teaching (Ozsevik, 2010). Hence, students struggle to feel the benefit and hesitate to participate in CLT activities (Walia, 2012).

The second criticism is that the emphasis of CLT on communication risks neglecting the importance of linguistic competence (Alamri, 2018). The principle of CLT is to develop learners' communicative competence to accomplish language learning (Alamri, 2018). Under this principle, CLT emphasises communication but pays less attention to linguistic structure (Nunan, 1989: 10). This leads to the criticism that it might neglect the importance of the language form, which results in the misexpression of one's meaning, which is ultimately serving the purpose of communication (Littlewood, 1985; Widdowson, 1978). It is harmful to assume that as long as learners are communicating, they are learning (Alamri, 2018). Such criticism is supported by the observation of some advanced-level English learners who can speak fluent English and have the ability to communicate with people, yet they make critical

errors in the language form (Chang, 2011). This is conceived as a result of the tolerance of form errors in the CLT approach. This phenomenon suggests that focusing on communication itself is not sufficient for language learning (Alamri, 2018). CLT requires teachers also to correct learners' form errors, especially critical ones related to "interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning" (Alamri, 2018: 134). Lightbown (1998) argued that drawing learners' attention to linguistic form when they are engaging in meaningful communication may have a harmful psychological impact on learners, as they would constantly be worrying about linguistic form instead of focusing on the meaning. My own experience corroborated the above concern.

As an EFL learner, I can speak fluent English and communicate with English speakers effectively in most cases. However, from time to time I make linguistic mistakes. My grammar mistakes in writing are more noticeable, as perhaps it is easier to identify grammar mistakes in texts than in speech. Through my own experience, I perceive that I would benefit from improving my linguistic competence to a higher level if an English teacher could identify my mistakes and demonstrate better ways to express them. Of course, ultimately, I have to learn from my mistakes by possibly classifying them into different categories and making sure that I am making fewer similar mistakes.

Although there are conflicts between teaching linguistic competence and sociocultural and interactional competencies, such conflicts are not insoluble. The EEC course addresses this conflict in a few ways. First, the writing task is designed so that learners can get feedback from professional native English teachers to identify and correct their linguistic mistakes. Second, the individual feedback to learners' presentation in and after the lesson from teachers also attempts to pick up some linguistic points to help learners improve. The chat box is also used to type in key words or sentences for learners to pick up vocabulary and correct the form of expressions linguistically. There are more strategies that the EEC course could develop to address linguistic competence. Of course, the learning materials sent to the learners to study before or after lessons are also designed to increase learners' vocabulary and improve language use. Although there are many more strategies that the EEC course could take, as a result of limitations of time and finance, some strategies are left for future studies and proposed in the Conclusions chapter.

4.2.3 Issues of applying CLT in China

Apart from the above criticality concerning CLT in general, there are other factors hindering

its practice in China. CLT has been introduced to, and promoted in, China since the late 1980s. Despite this, traditional approaches to English-language teaching have dominated (Hu, 2012). As mentioned before, at that time I was a secondary-school student who started to learn English at the age of 12. My experience of learning English in China supports the findings that English-language teaching in China still involved the “systematic and detailed study of grammar”, “extensive use of cross-linguistic comparison and translation”, “memorisation of structural patterns and vocabulary” and “an emphasis on written language” (Hu, 2002: 93).

The underlying obstacles were identified as “cultural factors”, “teachers’ lack of language proficiency and sociolinguistic competence”, “lack of necessary resources”, “big class size”, “limited teaching time” and “examination pressure” (Hu, 2002: 93). Among these, Hu (2002) identified the most important constraint as being the Chinese culture of learning, which is in conflict with CLT in several important respects. For instance, Chinese culture equates learning with reading books. However, CLT encourages learning from authentic resources and constructing knowledge through communication (Hu, 2002).

The second conflict is that the Chinese learning culture preserves a hierarchical relation between teacher and student. Chinese education tends to avoid putting teachers at risk of losing face (Hu, 2002). This is in contrast to CLT, which promotes a more equal relation between teachers and students. Unlike the traditional Chinese learning culture, where students are not expected to challenge the teacher, CLT encourages students to develop critical thinking skills, and it is not regarded as being disrespectful to challenge the teacher (Hu, 2002). The traditional hierarchical relation also brings into question peer evaluation, as peers are regarded by Chinese students as not qualified to correct others’ work; only teachers have such knowledge and authority (Jones, 1995).

Many Chinese English teachers are also resistant to adopting CLT, as “it requires a high level of proficiency in the target language and strong sociolinguistic competence in the target language culture which they lack” (Hu, 2002: 99). The EEC course invited English speakers (IES) with specialist areas to teach Chinese students through virtual online lessons, which overcomes the known weakness of many Chinese English teachers. The invited English speaker (IES) did not need to travel to China, and his/her specialist knowledge and first-hand experience of the topics meant that the students had the opportunity to become more open-minded and critical about what they knew.

Another significant impact of Chinese educational culture on learning is that learners should have positive attitudes towards learning (Salili, 1996): they should be keen on acquiring more knowledge (Paine, 1990), cooperate with teachers, be diligent, perseverant, aspire to high academic achievement so as to be useful to society and glorify the ancestry and family (Lee, 1996; Salili, 1996). To achieve the above, students must put all their effort into learning and sacrifice other pursuits, especially social life (Hu, 2002). As a student brought up in such a situation, I really understand the strengths and weaknesses of Chinese education. Although I am achieving relatively well in academic study, I was reluctant to attend unnecessary social events for fun unless it served a purpose for study or work. This, in fact, severely weakened my social awareness and ability to build close relationships with others, as there was almost no “meaningless” social life for me. When I started to work in the UK, despite my colleagues regarding me as a friendly colleague, they also described me as a highly intelligent person but lacking a sense of sociability. I struggled to join in with their social life, as I conceived that socialising was a waste of time. I realised after many years of living overseas that a social life is important to build up relationships with others and to share values, support and love. Although work is important, relationships are more influential in terms of our happiness and health. The western culture of respecting individuals’ happiness and encouraging people to speak their mind is in contrast with what I was taught in China, which was to work harder and speak less.

Despite the incompatibility of Chinese educational culture and CLT, Hu (2002: 102–3) also identified some features of CLT that may fit into Chinese educational culture. For instance, “collaborative learning”, “cultivation of sociolinguistic competence”, and “use of authentic teaching materials” are in agreement with the Chinese culture of “collective orientations”, “socially appropriate behaviours” and “concerns for the right way of doing things”. Hu (2002) called upon the government to consider the reality of the current Chinese educational culture, and not to impose CLT on Chinese EFL education as a top-down policy.

I agree with Hu (2002) that communicative language teaching (CLT) should not be imposed on teachers until they are ready to implement this language-teaching methodology. However, this does not mean that CLT can only be applied to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in China in the above limited areas. This study explores new ways of delivering CLT with the support of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) to overcome the obstacles of applying CLT in EFL education. Although the EEC course was delivered online in this study, the model could be modified to integrate it into classroom teaching. For instance, it could be used to train

Chinese English teachers to become more familiar with the CLT teaching approach and then integrate the online EEC course with physical classroom lessons. In other words, the local Chinese English teachers could play the role of the Chinese tutor in the EEC course and organise students to talk to the invited specialist foreign English speakers. In this way, local Chinese EFL teachers could play a facilitator role, which does not require a Chinese teacher to be a specialist in the topics. The conversations between the invited foreign English speaker and the students could also help Chinese EFL teachers to build up their confidence in the topics and the language itself over the time. Gradually, both Chinese EFL teachers and learners' English communicative competence could be improved.

4.3 Developing linguistic competence

The EEC course did not focus on improving learners' linguistic competence. However, there were elements to help learners improve their competence, either implicitly or explicitly, especially in writing and oral linguistic competence. In the study of Al-Hroub, Shami and Evans (2016), a group of upper-primary students in Lebanon participated in a writers' workshop model intervention. The students went through the process of being a writer by working for 30–40 minutes on generating ideas, drafting, revising and editing their writing in small groups, getting support from the teachers during their independent work, and then sharing their writing with the whole class by adopting the activity of the “author's chair”. It was found that all students improved in fluency after the writer's workshop intervention, with above-average students benefiting more than the other levels of students from this pedagogy, especially in terms of content (ibid., 11).

Through the EEC course it was also possible to develop certain writing tasks to help students improve their linguistic competence through their own mistakes. The most common mistakes for Chinese English learners in linguistic competence are using the correct articles and singulars or plurals, as these two concepts are absent from Chinese grammar. As a Chinese English learner, I often make these mistakes myself, and I have to pay careful attention in order to make sure that I am using the correct grammar. Training students to be equipped with the correct grammar requires a full study – something that this study could not address but which will be developed in future.

4.4 Developing interactional communicative competence

Walsh (2012: 2) pointed out that there is a tendency for language teachers to focus more on training learners to become native-like fluent and accurate solo speakers rather than speakers

who can interact with interlocutors meaningfully. One of the reasons for this is that it is easier to teach and test students as solo speakers than to teach and assess using a collective approach (Walsh, 2012).

It is believed that interactional competence may only truly be grasped through real-life experience (Sun, 2014). Traditional grammar drills have proven to be “incompatible” with developing interactional competence (ibid., 1067). A few pedagogies supporting the development of interactional competence are discussed below.

To enhance interaction in the classroom, it is important to “acknowledge the centrality of interaction to teaching and learning” (Walsh, 2012: 5). Pachler et al. (2014: 200) suggested three types of interactional relationship in a language classroom: teacher–pupil, pupil–teacher and pupil–pupil, identified by The National Curriculum Council as non-statutory guidance. In a traditional language lesson, the most common form of interaction is teacher–pupil interaction. It would be more difficult to organise pupil–teacher interactions and pupil–pupil interactions as a result of there being more factors that could affect the outcome of these two types of interaction (Pachler et al., 2014).

A learner-centred interactional environment needs to be supported by the ability and confidence of English teachers to employ an interactive approach in teaching. O’keeffe and Walsh (2012) discovered that students may not necessarily engage in the conversation actively as a result of the weak pedagogy skills involved in managing the classroom interaction of the teachers (O’keeffe & Walsh, 2012). In other words, there is a need for teachers to develop such pedagogical skills to enable students to develop classroom interactional competence, helping them to “express new ideas”, “discuss key concepts”, “question accepted knowledge” and “articulate emerging understandings” (ibid., 178).

Walsh (2012) suggested a few pedagogies to help teachers become more confident in taking an interactional approach, the first addressing the need for interaction to be meaningful. To achieve this, the interaction should be context-based, which means that there is actually a context provoking students’ real intentions to express themselves and interact with others (ibid., 12).

The second is to create space for interaction, which means producing sufficient opportunities for learners to talk to others. One of the pedagogies is to reduce “teacher talking time” (ibid., 3). However, the quality, rather than quantity, of teachers’ talk, is actually most important

(Walsh, 2002). Strategies to improve quality include keeping “error correction” and teacher echoes to a minimum to reduce interruption time and maintain the verbal flow. They also include responding to learners with genuine personal reactions, extending “wait time” by using pauses to give learners time to think (ibid.).

The third pedagogy is to create understanding jointly by organising students to debate or discuss a topic from a variety of views. The fourth is to shape learner contribution, which means seeking clarification, scaffolding, modelling or repairing learner input, and so on. However, Sun (2014: 1064) addressed the idea that teachers should not overemphasise grammar corrections and “hasten to point out speech errors of learners”.

The fifth is to encourage and engage learners in the conversation when there is silence or shyness in the discussion (Walsh, 2012). Although teachers have the primary responsibility for building and maintaining classroom communication, this should be shared by the students (Walsh, 2003; Walsh & Li, 2012) to help them grow into better “interactants” (Walsh & Li, 2010: 156). This is particularly important when learning is perceived as part of a social process (ibid., 262). EFL teachers should be made aware of the above pedagogical strategies and improve their teaching skills by listening to audio or video recordings, or analysing transcripts of their lessons (Walsh, 2002).

As discussed in Chapter 2, strategic competence is regarded as part of interactional competence in this study. It is “activated” when learners run out of “linguistic resources” when they want to express a certain message (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991: 18). Two strategies may be used in such a situation: “message adjustment strategies” and “resource expansion strategies” (ibid., 18). The first are also called “avoidance strategies” or “reduction strategies”, which means alternating one’s meaning or avoiding expressing it if an individual does not have the linguistic competence (ibid., 18). However, this strategy may be too passive when an individual really wants to express his or her views. “Resource expansion” plays a positive role in that one may ask for help from interlocutors, either directly or indirectly (ibid., 18). The second type of resource expansion is trying to use one’s own resources in alternative ways, such as describing a word using a sentence or paragraph, an approximate word, non-verbal behaviour or invented words (ibid., 18). Gol and Aminzadeh (2015: 132) regarded non-verbal behaviour, which includes facial expressions, head or eye movements, and gestures, as “extremely significant among foreign language learners”. The study of Gol and Aminzadeh (2015) proved the assumption of Hyde (1982) that learners at a lower level tend to make more frequent use of

non-verbal behaviour than higher-level learners. Nonetheless, teachers should encourage learners to seek all approaches and strategies to communicate (Gol & Aminzadeh, 2015).

To equip learners with such strategic competence, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) suggested a few activities, the first being to train learners to become familiar with fillers such as “well; I mean; actually; you know”. The second is to let them practise how to avoid a question or to steer a conversation to a known topic. The third is to paraphrase what the interlocutor says when he/she is not sure about his/her understanding; and the fourth is to appeal for help directly. These strategies have been practised and proved to be useful.

Developing students’ interactional communicative competence played a big role in the EEC course and the above strategies were drawn upon where possible. The aim of the EEC course was to choose topics that were meaningful to the students, as they were partly suggested by the students and partly recommended by the course designer, who had many years of overseas study and working experience. Therefore, it was expected that the students would have a real intention to interact. The EEC teachers were also encouraged to give every student the chance to interact in the lesson, which meant that there would be waiting time for shy or slow learners. Corrections to students’ linguistic errors were kept to a minimum to reduce the number of breaks to the flow of the conversation. The teachers were able to demonstrate the correct way to express an opinion but not to spend too much time explaining linguistic mistakes. The students were encouraged, and made comfortable, to speak and give different views, as there was no criticism of different or even “crazy” opinions in the EEC lessons. On the whole, the EEC course adopted a variety of strategies to help students improve their interactional competence.

4.5 Developing sociocultural competence

The teaching of sociocultural competence was introduced to China in the past decade (Zhang, 2007). There has been a call for a change in the teaching paradigm to improve Chinese English learners’ sociocultural competence (Gu, 2015). However, this is largely restricted by the competencies of language teachers themselves (Gu, 2015; Witte & Harden, 2015). Another concern is that Chinese students have limited opportunities to communicate with others in English, because English is not an official language in China and many parts of China do not have many foreigners for Chinese English learners to communicate with. Therefore, it is more difficult for Chinese English learners to develop intercultural communicative competence with peers in a “homogeneous culture” (Sun, 2014: 1066). More researchers have focused on interactional competence. This section reviews the studies on how to help learners improve

their sociocultural competence. Again, to avoid any confusion to readers, this section uses sociocultural competence to replace similar terminologies, which include intercultural competence or multicultural competence.

4.5.1 Misconceptions of teaching sociocultural competence

English has evolved to become a leading world language through the promotion of British cultural and economic imperialism (Gundara, 1999: 77). However, there are three main misconceptions in developing learners' sociocultural competence.

The first is Anglocentrism, which asserts that, in order to teach learners English, teachers only need to teach them the target culture, placing little importance on learners' own cultures (Pennycook, 1994: 158–9). Scarino (2010) argued that a language educator cannot be an expert in language education without a good understanding of the culture and languages that learners bring to the classroom. The idea that simply knowing the British culture is sufficient has been portrayed by the political culture of the British mass media, which used to regard using standardised English as a weapon to rule the world (Hooks, 1994: 172). However, the reality is that the English no longer have sole ownership of the English language, as it has spread around the world (Rushdie, 1991: 70). In fact, English has developed, with an increasingly significant contribution by its learners from different cultural backgrounds (Crystal, 1997: 61). Scarino (2010: 324) pointed out that teaching the culture of a foreign language should not be separated from students' mother culture and their own identities and values. Lenchuk and Ahmed (2013) further identified that teachers should also avoid focusing on teaching learners cultural facts rather than awareness; otherwise, it is similar to teaching linguistic rules or formulae. One of the examples they gave was about teaching learners how to offer compliments. Instead of giving learners a list of standard ways to compliment other people, teachers helped learners to develop an understanding of the appropriate use of compliments through warming up with a speaking activity, reading, practising, listening, speaking practice, a discourse-completion task, watching a video and completing homework (*ibid.*). They recognised that this point is acknowledged by many teachers, and yet little has been put into practice.

The lesson plans of the EEC course prepared questions for the native English teachers to use to engage students in classroom discussion, including questions asking learners about their culture. The native English teachers were also encouraged to ask students their own questions. It was through raising teachers' awareness of showing a real interest in learners' culture or perspective that the course aimed to build a more interactive and equal communication environment.

The second misconception is that language teaching should train learners to be flawless native-like speakers or conflict-free communicators who speak in a way that avoids disagreement and who get along with everyone (Carr, 1999). This might be one of the reasons why traditional English teaching and learning in China place greater emphasis on linguistic competence. An ideal communicator not only communicates accurately and effectively but also feels happy and positive about communication. However, in reality, it is hard to communicate with others without any breakdowns because of the different needs of each individual. Therefore, learners should learn not only strategies to produce positive communication but also how to deal with conflicts, clashes or even a mess (*ibid.*). This hybridity of sociocultural competence calls for language teaching to offer a less secure pedagogy to “engage explicitly with the ‘messy and contradictory realities of the sociolinguistic order’” (Fairclough, 1992: 51; Carr, 1999: 107).

Corbett (2010) suggested a variety of activities to help learners deal with conflicts in sociocultural communication. Most activities were designed to take place in 40-minute lessons and for intermediate and above-average language learners (*ibid.*). The activities included “requesting and complaining”, “answering job interview questions”, “resolving personal incidents”, the “language of conflicts”, “listening to complaints”, “understanding and resolving differences”, “making suggestions and seeking consensus” and “stating opinions” and “defending positions” (*ibid.*, 32–51).

The EEC course welcomed problems such as clashes and conflicts. Even if no issues were encountered in the lesson, students were encouraged to talk about the conflicts or clashes they had experienced in their real lives. This was discussed either in the whole class, if the learners felt comfortable, or in the context of one-to-one support.

The third misconception is to regard communication simply as an “exchange of information” (Byram, 2014: 190). A developed way to understand this concept is “communication as dialogue” and “dialogue should lead to action in the world” (Council of Europe, 2008). In other words, “language teaching should be language education”, which means that its aim is not only to teach students language but also to develop their personal qualities as individuals and individuals in society (Byram, 2014: 191). In fact, this should be an axiom of not only language teaching but also all other subject teaching. Byram (2014) suggested that this could be improved by combining two subjects, language and citizenship, with a particular emphasis on developing a sense of criticality. Although Byram (2014) acknowledged that it might not be best to combine

“citizenship education” with language teaching, this is done, as it is easy to understand and accessible for most teachers to link the two. Attention should be drawn to expanding citizenship to an international level, as traditional citizenship education mainly focuses on the local, regional and national level (ibid.).

According to Barnett (1997, Table 4.1), four levels of criticality need to be developed, and each has three domains. The domain of “knowledge” represents “critical reason”, the “self” domain represents “critical self-reflection” and “world” represents “critical action”. From the first basic-level critical skills to reflexivity, the refashioning of traditions and the top-level transformatory critique, it shows one of the ways to develop an individual’s ability in terms of adaptation and adjustment (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013).

Although Barnett (1997) named his theory as levels of criticality, it actually covers the four factors indicating an individual’s intercultural adaptability: emotional control, openness, flexibility and critical thinking (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). Openness is reflected in how an individual uses the knowledge to reflect and reconstruct him/herself and eventually cooperate with others to reconstruct the external world. Flexibility and critical thinking are needed to support the above process. However, I would argue that facilitating learners through the above four levels requires more authentic practice in real life. Therefore, it was expected that the EEC course might not be able to help learners in some aspects.

Although it is very difficult to reach the top level to reconstruct knowledge, as an individual needs to interact with the world to reconstruct it, Byram (2014) provided a few examples to show that it is still possible to develop learners’ communicative competence to the third and (top) fourth level. One of the cases was a project between Argentinean university students and British university students, who were at the advanced level in English and Spanish respectively. In a discussion about the Malvinas/Falklands War, the students reached a natural point of conflict. They talked to one another online “synchronously” and “diachronically”, interviewed both Argentinean and British war veterans, and created a PowerPoint and an advertisement, which called for reconciliation. They distributed the advertisement in their city, and Argentinean students also taught this topic in a local English language school. Byram (2014) believed that the actions taken in the language classroom at least brought students to the third level.

Table 4.1: Domains of education and levels of criticality, based on Barnett (1997: 103)

	Domains		
Levels of criticality	Knowledge	Self	World
4. Transformatory critique	Knowledge critique	Reconstruction of self	Critique-in-action (collective reconstruction of world)
3. Refashioning of traditions	Critical thought (malleable traditions of thought)	Development of self within traditions	Mutual understanding and development of traditions
2. Reflexivity	Critical thinking (reflection on one's understanding)	Self-reflection (reflection on one's own projects)	Reflective practice ("metacompetence", "adaptability", "flexibility")
1. Critical skills	Discipline-specific critical thinking skills	Self-monitoring to given standards and norms	Problem-solving (means-end instrumentalism)
Forms of criticality	Critical reason	Critical self-reflection	Critical action

Another example of developing students' sociocultural competence was given by Halualani (2011), who transformed students from non-critical knowledge learners of culture to critical intercultural communicators. The course started by helping students to understand and apply "the building blocks of culture (world views, cultural patterns, beliefs, values, and attitudes)", to employing a series of simulations to enable students to tackle the problems of different cultures in a simulation situation, such as "Powerwalk" (ibid., 49). There were different stages of simulation, from dealing with a simple cultural pattern to a complex array (ibid., 2011). At each stage, students were encouraged to break the boundaries of cultures by asking questions such as "Why?", "How does this come to be?" (ibid., 50). The above questions formed a vibrant discussion, which led students to re-think their prior knowledge of cultures (ibid.). The course was conducted through "intense simulations, journaling, performative case scenarios, and case studies and guided discussions around contexts of power" (ibid., 50).

One of the useful implications of the above studies for the EEC course was to not regard the EEC course as a pure language course but to integrate it with other essential elements required to develop sociocultural competence (Corbett, 2010). The EEC course introduced cultural knowledge to the students through discussion of the topics. Regardless of which topics were discussed, the idea of the EEC course was to train students to be able to embrace critical thinking skills by provoking them to think from different perspectives (Halualani, 2011). It was also necessary to design the course in such a way that the students could apply what they had learnt in the course to their real life to reconstruct themselves (Barnett, 1997). The presentation

time gave students the opportunity to talk about what interested them in real life; and the Q&A time could be used to help the audience of students to become critical thinkers and to assist the presenter–student to be more flexible. Although it is arguable that there was little chance to develop learners’ emotional control in a language course, it was possible that students experienced losing emotional control when the discussion did not go their way. The Chinese teacher could talk to the students afterwards about what they had done well and less well in terms of improving openness, flexibility, critical thinking and emotional control. The one-to-one support after the EEC lesson further helped the students to talk about how to improve their emotional control if they preferred not to talk about it in a group.

4.5.2 How to help learners overcome shyness

Shyness is “a unique cultural and social phenomenon in China” (Dong, Liu, Zhao & Dong, 2014: 270), which might hinder a learner from becoming a confident communicator when needed. Shyness is defined as “a mental attitude that predisposes people to be extremely concerned about the social evaluation of them by others” (Zimbardo & Radl, 1981: 9). However, it is challenged that shyness in China may be a regulated social action to avoid “appearing bold and overly assertive or standing out in the group”, which is regarded as positive and encouraged by Chinese culture (Dong et al., 2014) and politics.

Therefore, to help Chinese learners overcome shyness in interactional communication, strategies should not only have the aim of overcoming shyness in front of people but also make it clear to students about different cultural expectations so that they can make a judgement about when to speak out and when to be more conservative. The aim of the EEC course was to provide students with a free-speaking environment to help them build the confidence to speak out when they wanted to. It was felt that students should also be trained to encourage turn-taking in a group discussion to avoid a few students dominating the discussion and to look after others’ opportunities to take part in the discussion.

Further to the cultural factor discovered by Dong et al. (2014) regarding shyness, Valerie (2005) pointed out that socio-environmental cues and learner-internal cues may strongly influence foreign-language learners’ performance or progress in social and interactive communicative competencies. In what can appear to be shyness, foreign-language learners are inclined to isolate or disadvantage themselves in a new social network as the result of a failure to communicate with others, even in a single case (ibid.). They tend to experience self-doubt about their proficiency to communicate in a foreign language and therefore stop altogether, or reduce,

their communication with others in a foreign language (ibid.). Therefore, apart from helping learners to improve their linguistic competence and teaching them communication techniques, it is vital to help learners construct a self, which equips them with strong learner-internal cues to become positive and confident communicators in the target language. One of the pedagogies to help learners build up a strong internal cue is to expose them to an uncomfortable situation in communication but to validate every little effort or improvement they make by listening to learners with patience and responding to their speaking with “praise” or “constructive criticism” (ibid., 55). However, Valerie (2005) argued that the social environment in real life is likely to be more spontaneous and less validating. Interlocutors in real life might be unpleasant, impatient and sometimes even threatening to the learners’ comfort zone of communication. Language learners found that gender, age, appearance, behaviour, hierarchical rank in the relationship and the attitudes of interlocutors affect their spontaneous performance in terms of communicating in a foreign language (ibid., 86). Yet, it is difficult, or almost impossible, to ask the interlocutor to change his or her communication attitude towards others.

Normal lesson drills and role-play practice are not sufficient to help learners cope with real-life communication problems. It is vital for foreign-language learners to develop strong internal cues to overcome their perceived communication hurdles and to adapt themselves to cope with these problems. Common hurdles are a lack of self-esteem and unnecessary or inappropriate self-comparison with others (Valerie, 2005). It is evident that “familiarity” and “commonality” are two important factors to help learners generate learner-internal cues (ibid., 98). In other words, when learners are familiar with interlocutors or a particular environment, they will feel more open and confident to speak out and communicate, and vice versa (ibid.). On the other hand, when commonality is found between learners and interlocutors, it is much easier for them to develop conversations and thereafter familiarity (ibid.). The two factors generate positive cycles. Commonality helps to develop familiarity, and vice versa – through learning from others’ different interests. The more successful a communication experience a learner has had, the more confident he or she will become (ibid.). Yet, it is inevitable for learners to experience “failure” in communication (ibid.). Valerie (2005: 126) suggested that learners could build up internal security by improving linguistic competence, “devaluing negative consequences”, preparing for interaction, reducing self-expectations when speaking a foreign language and practising a foreign language in a comfortable environment.

Valerie’s (2005) theory provided an important understanding of how to help language learners open themselves up to others. To help learners build up commonality, the aim of the EEC course

was to engage students in discussions about common topics, which they might apply and talk about with foreign English speakers in real life. To help students establish familiarity in intercultural conversations, the EEC course gave students opportunities to do presentations, to answer audience questions, and to join a discussion with invited English speakers (IES) in a small group.

4.5.3 A summary of the pedagogies to develop sociocultural competence

On the whole, in order to help students become more open-minded, the EEC course enabled students to compare both the target culture and students' mother culture (Singh & Singh, 1999). It also integrated elements such as personal values, social values, personal qualities and the construction of oneself to help students build up a foundation of sociocultural competence (Byram, 2014). To help students improve emotional regulation, the EEC course encouraged students to talk about their life stories and inspired them to face and deal with conflicts and clashes with a positive attitude (Carr, 1999). This could also be achieved through asking students challenging questions and training them to regulate their emotions, which could be observed in the EEC lessons. To help students improve critical thinking skills, the EEC course exposed students to different views and challenged their perceptions (Halualani, 2011). In addition, the EEC course encouraged students to ask challenging questions of others to become proactive critical thinkers. Flexibility could be achieved through developing interactional communicative competence, which is discussed in the next section.

Overall, the EEC course adopted a number of strategies to develop learners' sociocultural communicative competence. The first was the selection of topics, which covered a variety of cultural and social-life contexts. However, as there were only 10 to 13 weeks of lessons, the topics were selected according to students' needs, the course designer's perceptions and the convenience of finding specialist native English teachers to teach such topics. The second component of the pedagogy was to challenge and deepen students' thoughts about the topics (Barnett, 1997). Although some questions were prepared to guide the discussion, the EEC course had to be flexible and spontaneous enough to adapt the lessons to unexpected situations (Freire, 2012). When native English teachers were not able to manage such unplanned situations, the role of the Chinese teacher was to steer the direction of the conversation when necessary and to provide a supportive atmosphere. The third type of pedagogy was the use of a "plenary" session, as discussed before, whereby students reviewed their performance with the support of the Chinese English teacher. Furthermore, preparation of the lesson and further exploration of the topics after the lessons were also designed to help learners understand sociocultural

knowledge and skills.

Chapter 4 presented different teaching approaches and argued for the most appropriate ones for the study. As learning theories usually complement teaching approaches, Chapter 5 focuses on the two of them that successfully support the design of the EEC course.

5. Learning theories supporting the EEC course

This chapter reviews two learning theories supporting the design of the EEC course: complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) (Sections 5.1 and 5.2) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (VST) (Sections 5.3 and 5.4). Section 5.3 justifies the rationales behind the choice of these two learning theories.

5.1 Complex dynamic systems theory

Although linguistics, cognitive language-learning theory and functional linguistics have all acknowledged that the interaction of variables is a critical facet to language learning, Bot, Lowie and Verspoor (2007: 7) argued that these theories stand apart based on the lack of one overarching theory. This draws the attention of language researchers to complex dynamic systems theory (CDST).

There are a few different labels to describe CDST: complexity theory (CT), dynamic systems theory (DST) and chaos theory (Larsen-Freeman, 2017). Chaos theory was regarded as part of CT and DST (Bot, 2017). Through comparing CT and DST, despite the fact that they were using a different ontology, Bot (2017) argued that there is no reason to choose one or the other to refer to the same phenomenon. Therefore, complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) was proposed as the general label to refer to CT and/or DST. In order not to confuse the reader of this thesis, CDST is used hereafter to replace the original CD or DST.

CDST is based on complex constructivism, according to which knowledge is constructed by learners from “interpreting their experiences” (Doolittle, 2014: 485). Doolittle (2014) introduced complexity to constructivism to form the theory of complex constructivism, which regards learning as an “active construction and adaptation of one’s internal models of reality based on the interaction between oneself and one’s environment (including other persons)” (2014:485). This process is not simply building new knowledge; often one has to deal with the conflicts between the existing internal model of the world and the new insights, through self-regulation, to construct new internal models of reality, and then further negotiate the comprehension through social activities (Fonsnot, 1996).

CDST further explains how learning develops in such a complex system. According to CDST, a system does not stand alone but is composed of sub-systems; each system interacts with the others, either directly or indirectly, and therefore should not be treated as separate (Bot et al.,

2007: 8). Second, CDST does not follow a linear rule in change (Bot et al., 2007). A learning outcome is a combined force by the learning variables, such as the external environment or individual change (Bertin & Narcy-Combes, 2012). The cause and outcome may not be proportional (Cui, 2016). A small alternation, such as genuine praise from a teacher, may result in a significant change in student learning. However, a big alternation, such as the long-term effort in learning, may not result in any change in learning outcome, because the big alternation is absorbed by its internal systems, such as ineffective learning strategies (Cui, 2016). A famous story could be used to explain this feature:

*For the want of a nail the shoe was lost,
For the want of a shoe the horse was lost,
For the want of a horse the rider was lost,
For the want of a rider the battle was lost,
For the want of a battle the kingdom was lost,
And all for the want of a horseshoe-nail.*

(Quoted by Benjamin Franklin, 1758)

The variable that causes the change in the system is unpredictable, regardless of whether or not it is a small variable (Bertin & Narcy-Combes, 2012: 112). However, it does not mean that learners do not need to put more effort into learning and only wait for the small variable to change the system. The non-linear feature reminds us that we should not simply change a variable without considering how such a change would interact with the other sub-systems or factors. A new system emerges in a much shorter time when there are simpler sub-systems in a complex system than when new things generate from a complex system without any sub-systems (Fan & Zhang, 2005). This is a particularly useful guide for the EEC course design when considering development of the sub-competencies of communicative competence instead of developing communicative competence as a whole.

Third, in CDST, all components or (sub)systems are constantly changing, even though some might be more stable than others (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). Cui (2016) discovered that some elements or sub-systems are more stable than others. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5.2. However, De Bot (2007) argued that certain sub-systems might remain in a restricted state, which appears unchanged, known as an attractor state (De Bot, 2007). In contrast, sub-systems that change dramatically are called repeller states (De Bot, 2007). In second-language acquisition, grammar mistakes are comparatively stable and may last for a longer period.

Although learners may identify their own mistakes and correct them accordingly, they may return to their original status and continue making the same mistakes. This drawing-back phenomenon is affected by attractor states (De Bot, 2007). A typical example of the effect of attractor states is fossilisation, which means an incorrect language feature may stay with a second-language learner for a very long period, even becoming a characteristic of the learner in speaking or writing (Cui, 2016). However, Larsen-Freeman (2005) argued that such fossilisation is also only a temporary phenomenon, which can be changed when the system continues to develop.

My own experience of learning English supports the above theories. I observed that even though I made progress in sociocultural competence, I continued making grammar mistakes such as misusing definite articles and indefinite articles, singulars and plural forms. However, I also noticed that I could make progress if I paid extra attention to remembering my mistakes and correct forms.

The fourth feature of CDST is the self-reorganisation of the system, which means that a system can adjust or reorganise itself according to the interactions with other internal or external systems (Kelso, 1995). Through the interactions to reorganise the learning system, learners can improve their abilities to adapt to the environment.

5.2 Implications of CDST for language learning

The above-mentioned features of complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) suggest a few of its implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning. First, the success of a student's study is a combined effect of a variety of factors, and the teacher is only a component in the second-language-learning system (Cui, 2016). Language educators (including course designers, teachers, tutors, etc.) should draw attention not only to the functions of each factor but more importantly to embracing a holistic view of language learning (Cui, 2016) and adjusting teaching and learning components to boost and harmonise the interaction of each component. More attention should be drawn to the interaction between the variables to increase the opportunity to trigger the "butterfly effect" or to support the effect.

Second, the constantly changing feature represents a limitation of assessment of communicative competence. What we can assess may only reflect the ability of the test-taker at the time rather than a fixed and non-changeable ability. We should not be restricted by the test performance of a student. Therefore, the comparison between pre-tests and post-tests may only illuminate the

difference between the intervention group and the comparison group on the particular assessed areas over the assessment period. The analysis of the results must consider this and identify its limitations.

Third, as some variables are more active than others, it might be more efficient to identify and emphasise the change of the key variables to the language-learning problems. Cui (2016) explored some variables that affect the language-learning outcome of Chinese English learners and discovered that the direct variables that affect learning outcomes are learning strategies and learning effort (Figure 2.4.1). However, these two variables are influenced by four mediating variables: learning styles, learning beliefs, learning motivations and foreign-language-learning anxiety. The most active mediating variables are learning beliefs, followed by learning motivation and then foreign-language-learning anxiety. The most stable mediating variable is learning styles.

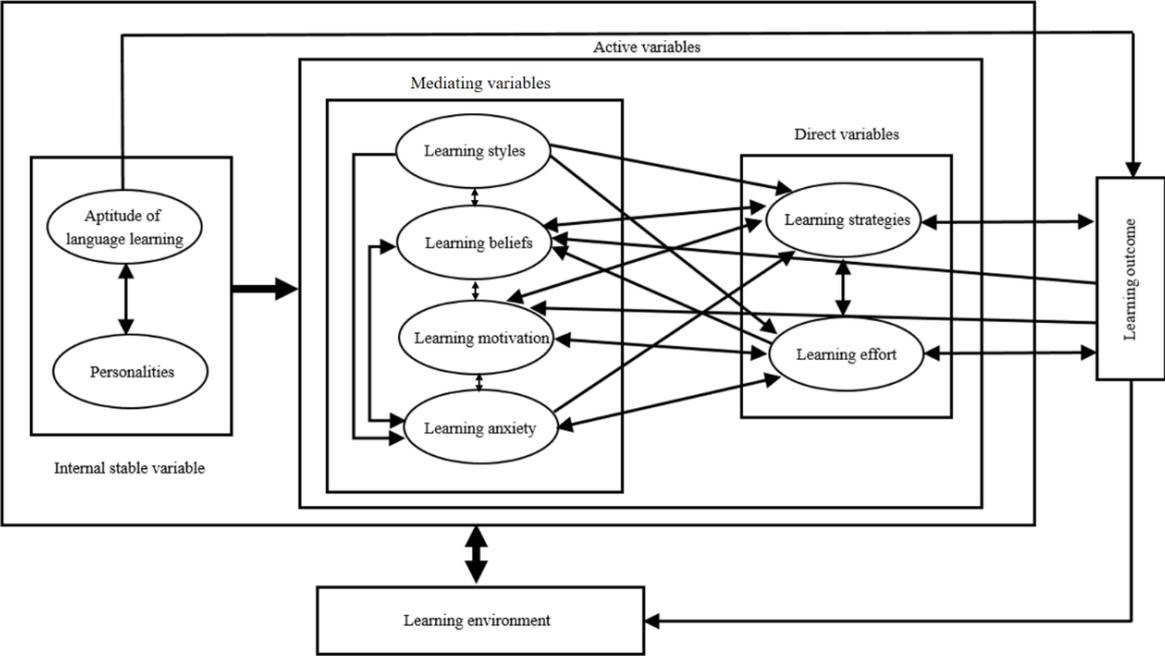


Figure 5.1: The difference between individual factors of the dynamic system of Chinese English learners (Cui, 2016: 239)

In contrast, language aptitude and personalities are the most stable of all the variables. The aptitude of language learning is composed of phonetic coding ability, grammar coding ability and mechanics memory ability (Carroll, 1981; Skehan, 1986). The aptitude of language learning has a direct effect on people’s learning outcome in foreign-language learning (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995), which suggests that not everyone can learn a foreign language well (Cui, 2016).

On the other hand, personality is also relatively stable, as it does not change easily (Eysenck, 2013). Therefore, it will be more efficient to put more effort into active learning variables than endeavouring to change a learner's personality or the aptitude of language learning (Cui, 2016).

On the other hand, there is one factor that can change the stable variables, which is the environment. The environment can be categorised as a teaching and learning environment, which includes teachers, teaching pedagogy, teaching materials, curriculum and social environment; the social environment includes learners' social status, culture, tradition, customs and social needs. These environmental factors may affect learners and cause a change in individuals. Such a change could also affect change in the external environment. Such mutual impact could carry on in cycles (Cui, 2016).

Figure 5.1 indicates that the learning environment has a mutual impact on all factors in the language-learning dynamic system, including a direct impact on stable variables: language-learning aptitude and personality. This can be understood as how the practice of foreign languages may enhance learners' grammar sensation; and enriched in-class social activities may change learners' personality to become more exotic. On the other hand, experienced teachers may adjust teaching styles according to learners' foreign-language-learning aptitude and personalities. Therefore, the top priority factors that educators should focus on and promote to increase the opportunity of learning outcome are: learning environment, learning strategies, learners' effort, learning beliefs, learning motivation and anxiety about learning a foreign language. Although the above factors mostly rely on learners' own determination and actions, teachers can promote positive effects of the above factors to become a positive learning habit of learners. The EEC course prioritises some of the above factors. The details of this are discussed in the next few paragraphs.

Learning strategies

Learning strategies refer to what actions or thoughts learners embrace to help them learn more easily, quickly, enjoyably and independently while being adaptable in the new environment (Oxford, 1990). Learning strategies can be classified into cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, social strategy and emotional control strategy (Dörnyei, 2009). The EEC course prioritises social strategy and emotional control strategy before cognitive strategy and metacognitive strategy. This is because it aims to develop students' communicative competence, which takes place in the social environment, requiring the support of emotional control strategy. The EEC course encourages learners to embrace a positive attitude when going through a series

of difficulties in communication in the synchronous lessons, as well as in their real life. Some learners might be struggling to understand others; some may be stressed about speaking in the group; and some may be frustrated by the critical and challenging questions of others to their presentations. The EEC course recognises these frustrations but encourages learners to embrace a positive attitude towards these challenges, to take control of their emotions, and it acknowledges every little improvement that learners make. The EEC course acknowledges the importance of cognitive learning strategy and metacognitive strategy. However, these two strategies are mainly employed through asynchronous learning via learning tasks before and after the lessons. A metacognitive strategy is also employed through the plenary led by the Chinese tutor (CT) and the small catch-up talks between the CT and the individual learner after the lesson.

Effort

Effort (Gardner, 1985) is another direct active factor affecting the learning outcome. The effort may be measured by the length of concentrated time that the learners spent on the learning and their perseverance in learning (Cui, 2016). Although the effort that the EEC course learners put into attending the weekly synchronous lessons can be easily monitored by teachers, it is less controllable when it comes to the effort that learners put on home learning before and after the synchronous lessons. This problem can be solved through a few strategies.

The first is to check learners' preparation effort through classroom discussion. Every learner is asked to interact in the synchronous lesson. Learners who have not done well in pre-lesson preparation are more likely to feel embarrassed when they are struggling to understand what others are talking about or not offering a good-quality contribution. As a result, they naturally know the importance of pre-lesson preparation.

Second, personalising teaching is another way to make learners feel unique enough to attend each lesson (Richards & Bohlke, 2011). Lesson planning should consider encouraging learners to link the contents to their lives and personal stories. Littlejohn (1983: 605) advocated that teachers should not dominate lesson time but rather help students to conduct student-directed lessons. In this way, it is more valuable for learners to attend the lesson. Otherwise, learners could choose to watch lesson videos to learn.

A third strategy is to monitor home-learning effort through designing asynchronous learning platforms, which require learners to respond to the tasks, such as multiple choice, voice-

recording or writing. The asynchronous learning platforms automatically mark learners' answers, give feedback accordingly, award merits or chase up automatically. For some writing or speaking tasks, which have to be checked by human teachers, designated staff will be assigned to monitor the completion and quality of the homework. This uses behaviour computer-assisted language learning (CALL) to reinforce their positive learning efforts, which are discussed in Section 2.5. The fourth is to celebrate their home-learning work through a variety of ways, such as Friends Zone in WeChat, Learners' achievement on the EEC learning website or even some public media, if permission is given by learners and their parents or guardians.

Learning beliefs

Learning beliefs consist of beliefs in language-learning ability, beliefs of language-learning difficulty, beliefs about the ultimate language-learning approaches, beliefs about communicative strategy in language learning, and learning motivation and expectations (Horwitz, 1999; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006). Each of the above learning beliefs is composed of the beliefs of educators and learners. Although the beliefs have an impact on each other, from my professional teaching experience the beliefs of educators have more impact on those of learners because of the nature of the roles of teachers and learners. Learners' beliefs could also change the dynamics of the learning environment, particularly if the number of learners is significantly larger than that of teachers. However, teachers can nurture positive learning beliefs through their leadership role. Thus, in this study, the beliefs of the course designer play a leading role. As the EEC course designer, with the support of the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978), I believe that although learners may have different learning abilities regarding improving their communicative competence, all learners can improve within their zone of proximal development (ZPD) with the guidance of more knowledgeable teachers. I also believe that no matter how difficult a language is, in a dynamic complex learning environment a language course may always disseminate language learning into sub-systems according to learning goals and promote interactions between sub-systems, especially active factors, to boost the opportunity for learners to reach the next level. This study chooses a CLT approach, as I believe that communicative competence can best be developed through learning in a sociocultural environment. The learning expectation of the EEC course is not on passing examinations but on developing communicative competence, which benefits not only their academic study but also the happiness and quality of learners' whole life.

Learning motivation

Learning motivation is an internal drive, emotion or wish to learn (Brown, 1987: 117). It is believed that creating a positive learning environment is one of the key factors influencing the learning process and outcomes (Richards & Bohlke, 2011). There are two types of motivation in language learning: integrating into the target culture; and using language as an exam tool (Gardner, 1979). Cui (2016) argued that there is no need to under-grade tools motivation, as integration motivation and tools motivation can be mutually beneficial. The EEC course encourages students to be motivated to communicate with English speakers of the target cultures. The EEC course does not emphasise exam motivation. However, according to CDST, promotion of the ability to integrate with the target culture could also influence the language exam results, as sub-systems interact with one another.

Learning anxiety

Horwitz (1986) identified three reasons for learning anxiety: exam anxiety, being afraid of negative comments from others, and social anxiety. Social anxiety means being afraid of socialising with others, which is normally presented as not being willing to participate in others' conversations or social activities (McCroskey, 1977). It was discovered that students may present much higher anxiety in speaking a foreign language than in their mother tongue (McCroskey, 1985). Therefore, teachers should be aware that learners might have a higher level of anxiety even if they do not have any problem speaking their native language. Anxiety may not necessarily generate a negative impact. If it is at a comparatively low level, it could be facilitating anxiety, which promotes learners to take challenging tasks. On the other hand, if it is at a high anxiety level, it may be debilitating anxiety, which may make learners try to escape from the tasks (Alpert & Haber, 1960).

Therefore, teachers should adjust the anxiety level to help learners cultivate their best potential (Cui, 2016). Chinese language learners tend to have high-level language anxiety. The EEC course addresses this issue through producing a natural, authentic and relaxed atmosphere, encouraging learners to talk despite their fluency or accuracy, and ensuring that every learner has as many opportunities as possible to speak out in every lesson. Any effort by learners at speaking in the lesson is also praised by teachers verbally or through texts in and after the lessons. The explicit correction of their language mistakes is also minimised to boost the confidence of students to speak out without too many fears about making grammar or vocabulary mistakes. Of course, this ignorance of linguistic mistakes may also be a weakness of the EEC course, as poor linguistic competence would hinder the quality of communication.

However, the priorities need to be identified and addressed one at a time. Once learners are more comfortable speaking out in the target language, other strategies can be implemented to improve linguistic competence.

On the whole, the EEC course sets up a learning environment that enables learners to have authentic and meaningful communication with invited English speakers (IES) from a wide range of fields in the target culture, which is difficult to achieve with traditional English courses. The EEC course itself formalises learning strategies to a communicative approach, which means learning English through authentic communication with IES, CT (Chinese tutor) and other peers. Learning materials and tasks sent to learners before and after the synchronous lessons are designed to stretch learners' efforts beyond the lessons. The EEC course helps learners embrace positive learning beliefs through one-to-one support and motivates them through recognising every little improvement they make. The EEC course also makes sure that every learner has opportunities to speak in the lessons without negative criticism but positive constructive feedback.

Invited English speakers (IES) in this study include any people who speak English and were brought up in any country other than China. They may or may not be a professional English teacher. However, they should be specialised in the topics required and their English level should be native or advanced. This is because professional English teachers are normally specialised in English teaching. They may not be specialised in the topics such as architecture or natural disasters. The EEC course is open to a wide range of topics and is attempting to provide learners with authentic communication environment. Therefore, being a professional English teacher or not is not a primary requirement of the EEC course. In this study, sometimes IES may also be referred as foreign English teacher in order to match to the term used by the students in the interview.

5.3 Vygotsky's sociocultural theory

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) and Jean Piaget (1896–1980) were regarded as the two main figures contributing to the development of learning theory from the perspectives of modern psychology and education (Lourenço, 2012). Piaget perceived that the construction of knowledge can be attained by the individuals themselves; Vygotsky argued that beyond learners' natural intellectual abilities, learning can be achieved through a social process, especially through social interactions with more knowledgeable others (MKO) (Vygotsky, 1978). Some researchers pointed out that Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories are overlapping and similar in

most (Bidell, 1988; Glassman, 1994). However, Lourenço (2012) argued that the two theories have fundamental differences that should not be ignored. Piaget's theory is rooted in autonomy; in other words, it studies learning through the inside or intrinsic nature of learners. Vygotsky's theory is oriented towards heteronomy, which studies learning from the outside or extrinsic nature of learners. In other words, Piaget was more interested in the genetic influence on learning, while Vygotsky drew more attention to the influence of languages and culture on the development of learners' intellectual ability (Bryant, 1995). Linking to complex constructivism, although Piaget's learning theory is associated with constructivism, complex constructivism extends learning from learners' own experience to the interaction with the external world. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which considers the interactions between human beings, can be considered part of complex constructivism. This is because complex constructivism includes the interaction with a wider environment and is not restricted to human interactions. The presented theories describe learning from different aspects, and the choice of which theory should be employed depends on the nature of a particular study (Lourenço, 2012). The integration of both theories should also be done cautiously and employed in a critical way (Lourenço, 2012).

As the aim of the EEC course is to develop learners' communicative competence in general and its sociocultural and interactional sub-competences in particular, Vygotsky's perspective on learning as being achieved through social interactions fits better with the study than Piaget's theory. One of the main concepts of Vygotsky's theories is the ZPD (zone of proximal development) (Veer & Valsiner, 1991), which identified that between the zones in which learners can achieve by themselves and in which learners cannot achieve even with help, there is a zone of proximal development, where learners can achieve with the assistance of MKO (more knowledgeable others). Mariani (1997) further identified that learners tend to learn more in a high-level challenge with high-level support than in a low-level challenge with high-level support. However, if the challenge is higher than what learners can ever reach, it becomes a demotivator instead. In other words, the right level of high-level challenge is critical to reaching the optimal learning outcome of scaffolding. This is also the reason why the EEC course emphasises the interactions between the course designers and the students to hear the voices of the students so as to continually adjust the level of difficulties to the right level.

The EEC course emphasises learning through interaction among learners, as well as between learners and teachers. In particular, interactions between teachers and learners are aligned with Vygotsky's view that socio-interactions with more knowledgeable people lead to learning and

development. For this reason, the EEC course design emphasises teacher–learner interactions. For instance, there are two teachers for every lesson in the EEC course, an invited English speaker (IES) from educational and other professional backgrounds and a Chinese tutor (CT) of English. The IES is intended to stretch the learners to both a higher level of communicative use of a foreign language and a deeper understanding of the culture of English-speaking environments. The CT supports such interaction by shortening the gap of understanding of the target culture and the learners’ mother culture and also adjusts the level of difficulty to the right level. In other words, MKO will use the ZPD to get learners to achieve what they might not on their own. Thus, during the EEC course learners will experience exposure to MKO’s support in their development of communicative competence in English.

The notion of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) was introduced to explain teachers’ support to help learners reach ZPD (Berk, 2001). Scaffolding is a metaphor to represent the essential but temporary support that teachers give to students to help them develop new understandings or complete a task so that students will later be able to apply the knowledge or complete similar tasks alone (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Although Vygotsky himself has not used the term scaffolding, this notation was widely used, as it was regarded as a perfect fit in Vygotsky’s ZPD framework (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). However, the understanding of scaffolding ranges from the view that scaffolding is an operationalisation of Vygotsky’s concept of teaching in the ZPD (Wells, 1999) to the perspective that scaffolding only reflects part of the richness of Vygotsky’s ZPD (Daniels, 2002).

Instead of simply exposing learners to the conversation with IES, the role of CT and asynchronous learning resources provide scaffolding to support learners’ learning. Such scaffolding will fade gradually by asking learners to be active in developing communicative competence in their real life and bringing their real-life communication stories to the classroom discussion or one-to-one support.

Kozulin (2003) argued that not all interactions produce mediational effects in an instructional situation; effects are influenced by the participants in the interactions and the setting where the interactions happen. In a teacher–learner interaction scenario, it is the role of the teacher to play the critical role of mediator (Kozulin, 2003). In other words, teachers should familiarise themselves with the learners’ native learning culture as much as possible (Kozulin, 2003). The EEC course design took account of these ideas. First, it had two English teachers in every lesson; even though the IES might not necessarily have understood learners’ native learning culture,

the CT had the same native culture as the learners. Moreover, as the course designer, I could contribute to the course design distinctively from the perspective of both a learner and a teacher, as I was not only educated in China like many other Chinese English learners but also studied, worked, lived and taught in the target culture like a native English speaker. I have experienced many conflicts in communication with other English speakers in the target culture and also gained many valuable experiences of overcoming such sociocultural conflicts in communication. Moreover, I have been teaching in local schools of the target culture for over twelve years, and I have a good understanding of the education system, theory and practice. All of the above experiences provided an exclusive view to designing the EEC course, which could less easily be achieved by a Chinese English teacher or a native English teacher. This is because a typical Chinese English teacher has little or no overseas experience, so he or she would only feel comfortable designing English courses from a linguistic view or from that of learners' mother culture, which could cause severe bias, especially at a time when China is not fully open to the world. On the other hand, a native English teacher could also struggle to identify the real needs of Chinese English learners, as what the learners relay may not necessarily reflect the real gaps or problems. The same problem could occur when simply putting a team of native and Chinese English teachers together, who have limited experience of the counterpart cultures. Of course, I had to avoid designing a course purely from my own experience but instead regularly interact with the learners to update the responses to their needs. Nonetheless, I had a solid basis to design a unique English course to help learners improve their communicative competence.

The third strategy is to cultivate a good social learning environment to provide learners with a warm, healthy and fertilising learning soil to let them develop themselves (Vygotsky, 1997). The EEC course cultivated its social learning environment by establishing a real-time synchronous learning platform, led by the IES with the support of the CT, to discuss topics that learners were interested in, which were relevant to their real life. The whole learning environment produced by the EEC course was social, warm, open, relaxed, interactional and inspirational.

Despite the application of Vygotsky's theory, as indicated above, there were also challenges to applying Vygotsky's theory in other parts of the EEC course. One of the challenges was that Vygotsky emphasises interactions between naïve learners and MKO. However, in real life, we communicate with people at a variety of communication levels, and we may learn from anyone we talk to depending on what we want to gain from the communication. Thus, the EEC course also encouraged peer communication, for example, learners' presentations with a peer Q&A

session, and promoted social communication with any level of communicators in the lessons, as well as their real life. The second challenge with the application of Vygotsky's theory in the EEC course was that the socio-interaction between learners and MKO is intended more for knowledge. Little attention was given to other competencies, such as social competence (Mayer & Geher, 1996) and the competence to cultivate personal qualities. Overall, according to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (VST) (1978), knowledge is gained through social interaction, influenced by the history of sociocultural experience, and presented by modified experience.

5.4 Clarifying the difference between sociocultural competence and sociocultural theory

When discussing sociocultural theory, it is necessary to differentiate it from sociocultural competence, as they share the same word, "sociocultural", and it is easy to consider them as being the same concept. This could create confusion, as both concepts are used in this study but have significantly different meanings.

As discussed in Chapter 2, sociocultural competence is a sub-competence or component of communicative competence, which shows learners' ability to use language appropriately with interlocutors to reach the goal or intention of communication. Sociocultural theory is not a sociolinguistic theory but a theory that answers the question of "what is uniquely human about human development" (Eun & Lim, 2009: 15) and emphasises that knowledge is shared and understanding is constructed jointly through interactions among individuals (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). Sociocultural theory supports not only language learning but also a wider area of learning in any subject. It views human "development as proceeding from outside to within" (Eun & Lim, 2007: 24). What learners acquire from interacting with others is later internalised as individual qualities (Eun & Lim, 2007). Language plays a critical role in supporting the interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). This might be one of the reasons why it is more confusing to many people to differentiate the two concepts. Furthermore, sociocultural theory states that humans not only react with the world but also change the world (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Such a change is not an individual act but more of a social act (ibid.). Vygotsky (1994b) believed that the proper environment for human life is the social world rather than the physical world.

In summary, sociocultural theory is a learning theory that asserts that learning happens through social activities; sociocultural competence and linguistic competence are two aspects or components of communicative competence. Developing sociocultural competence is one of the main aims of the EEC course. Sociocultural theory, on the other hand, is employed to support

the learning theory of the EEC course. The next section reviews how VST guides the design of the EEC course from a learning perspective.

5.5 The rationale behind the choice of learning theories

Both CDST and VST are related to constructivism. While according to CDST learning is a non-linear process through interactions among sub-systems, VST focuses on interactions between learners and teachers (MKO). The development of communicative competence depends on the quality of interactions. There are two ways to understand this interaction. From a narrow understanding, it refers to interactions between interlocutors. This is supported by VST. From a wider scope of understanding, it depends on interactions among all factors affecting the quality of communication, which is supported by CDST. Furthermore, CDST is also the main learning theory supporting the complex educational design theory of the EEC course, which is discussed in Chapter 7. Therefore, for this study both CDST and VST were chosen as learning theories to support the EEC course design.

In summary, the concepts of communicative competence and CLT provided the teaching theory for the EEC course. CDST and VST provided the learning theory to support the EEC course design. As an online course, its design also needed to take into consideration supporting teaching and learning in a digital environment. The next chapter reviews how computer-assisted language learning (CALL) supports the EEC course as an online learning environment.

6. CALL and technologies supporting the EEC course

This chapter continues exploring computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and technologies that supported the EEC course design. Section 6.1 reviews the definition of CALL and its development, promotes a new concept of conversation-based CALL, and discusses its limitations. Section 6.2 reviews technology platforms supporting synchronous learning and Section 6.3 reviews asynchronous learning platforms, which are relevant to this study. Section 6.4 discusses pedagogies supporting online language learning to develop communicative competence. Section 6.5 reviews some existing online language-learning programmes and compares them to the EEC. Section 6.6 identifies the challenges of applying CALL. Section 6.7 summarises the application of CALL and technologies supporting the EEC course.

6.1 Computer-assisted language learning (CALL)

The computer has been used for assisting language learning since the invention of personal computers in the 1960s (Lee, 2000). Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is defined as “the research for and study of the application of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Levy, 1997: 1). The principle of CALL is using computing technologies to achieve the aim of language learning. Although with the development of technology, language learning could be assisted by not only computers but also mobile phones, tablets and other platforms, the term “computer” can still be used to represent all types of IT technology rather than a physical computer. Therefore, despite different alternative terms used by different researchers over recent decades, to avoid confusion, this study uses CALL to include all alternative terms such as NBLT (network-based language teaching (Chapelle, 2000), CMC (computer-mediated communication), and CMIC (computer-mediated intercultural communication).

To understand CALL, it is necessary to review its development (Section 6.1.1). As the current development of CALL does not have a perfect model that suits this study, Section 6.1.3 introduces conversation-based communicative CALL, which is specifically defined for this study. Sections 6.1.3 and 6.1.4 further discuss the challenges of communicative CALL and its limitations.

6.1.1 Development of CALL

According to Warschauer and Healey (1998), the development of CALL can be classified into three stages: behaviourist CALL (Warschauer, 1996), communicative CALL and integrative CALL. Gimeno-Sanz (2016) added “atomised CALL” as a post-period of integrative CALL.

Behaviourist CALL

Behaviourist CALL (Warschauer, 1996) is based on the behaviourist theory of learning, focusing on the study of drill practice using stimulus, response and reinforcement of language learning (Ahmad et al., 1985). PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations) was the best-known tutorial system based on behaviourist CALL (Lee, 2000). It emphasises accuracy more than fluency. The EEC course in this study was certainly not a behaviourist form of CALL, as it did not emphasise drills, and the accuracy of using language was placed below the fluency of using language. However, behaviourist CALL may contribute to some features of an asynchronous learning platform for the improvement of linguistic competence in future studies.

Communicative CALL

Communicative CALL emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in response to the development of the concept of communicative competence and CLT (Lee, 2000). From this perspective, communicative CALL is closely related to the technology model of the EEC course and it applies the theory of CLT in CALL. The personal computer allows more personalised work through CALL software, such as text reconstruction programmes and simulations (Lee, 2000).

Kern and Warschauer (2000) introduced network-based language teaching (NBLT), which focuses on applying global or local communication networks within foreign and second-language education. NBLT expands its focus on linguistic competence to the cultural, communicative and social aspects of online teaching and learning, and human-to-human communication is the focus (Kern & Warschauer, 2008). Telecollaboration is one type of NBLT, which organises language learners to communicate or complete a collaborative task through Internet communication tools to improve sociocultural awareness (Belz, 2001). However, Chapelle (2000) argued that NBLT is still CALL, as the latter includes both interactions between humans and computers and communication between humans through computer technologies. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is another popular type of communicative CALL, which promotes communication by employing online forums, blogs, social network sites, instant messenger, web-conferencing tools and emails (Lee, 2018). It adopts the theory of CLT in a computer-mediated teaching and learning environment and encourages learners to produce language in context rather than manipulating the language (Brown, 1994). Similarly, computer-mediated intercultural communication (CMIC, or often “intercultural telecollaboration”) was created to focus specifically on developing learners’ intercultural communication competence through collaborative learning with learners from

other countries. Lee (2018) advocated that CMIC telecollaboration could be an alternative to the traditional English language course. However, the challenges of such an approach are recognised. To reduce the negative impact, CMIC should be implemented in more socially, pedagogically and culturally sensitive ways (Lee, 2018).

The current or traditional studies of communicative CALL often adopt the approaches of collaborative learning of learners from different countries or regions; the EEC course engaged EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners to communicate with IES (invited English speakers), who are specialised in the topics of discussion. Of course, a traditional communicative CALL course would be more cost-effective than the EEC course. However, speaking to specialised IES, the EEC course is more likely to trigger learners' curiosity, engage them in discussion and develop a more enriched and deeper understanding of the culture and topics. Talking to peers who are inexperienced and non-specialised in the topics would be likely to generate basic, shallow or superficial conversations and understanding.

Integrative CALL

Communicative CALL was criticised for its use of the computer as a marginal contribution rather than letting the computer play a central role in language learning as a result of shifting away from cognitive language learning to sociocultural language learning (Kenning, 1990). Integrative CALL makes full use of a computer to assist language learning (listening, speaking, writing and reading) and potentially makes learning resources available to every student (Warschauer & Healey, 1998).

I agree that the synchronous and asynchronous learning platforms should support each other effectively. However, the use of technologies in assisting language learning should be determined by the learning drive rather than for the sake of using technology. If learners could use hard copy learning resources equally effectively, there would be no need for them to use digital learning resources. If learners could practise English with foreigners face-to-face physically, there would be no need for them to use video-conferencing or audio-chat technologies to communicate. The EEC course was led by learning goals but not driven by technologies: added value was always considered. Therefore, the EEC course was not a typical integrative CALL.

Atomised CALL

In "atomised CALL" learning is no longer technology-driven as in integrative CALL but needs-

driven (Gimeno-Sanz, 2016). Reviewing the history of language learning, Gimeno-Sanz (2016: 1110–1111) noted that traditional language learning attempts to combine isolated resources. Integrated CALL attempts to establish “all-in-one” stand-alone, networked or online courseware (Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2); atomised CALL returns to technology-based isolated tools, which require researchers to find the optimal route to integration (Figure 6.3).

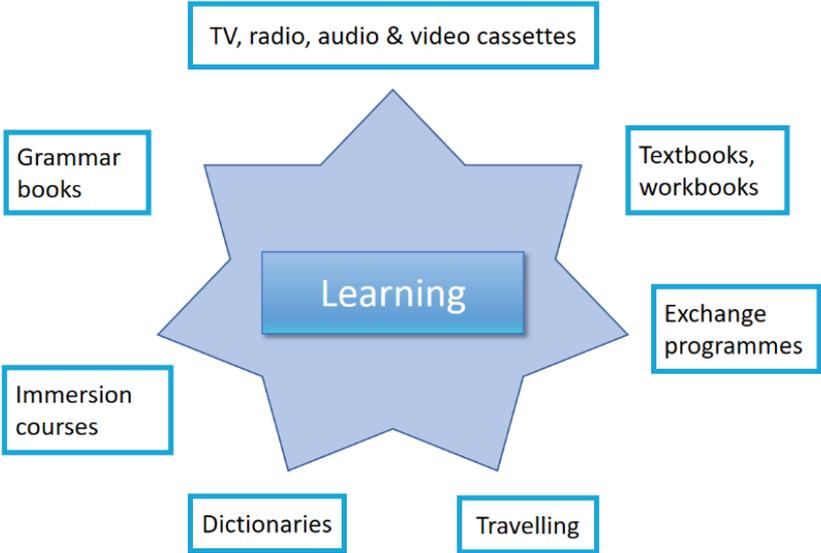


Figure 6.1: Integrating isolated resources (Lee, 2018)

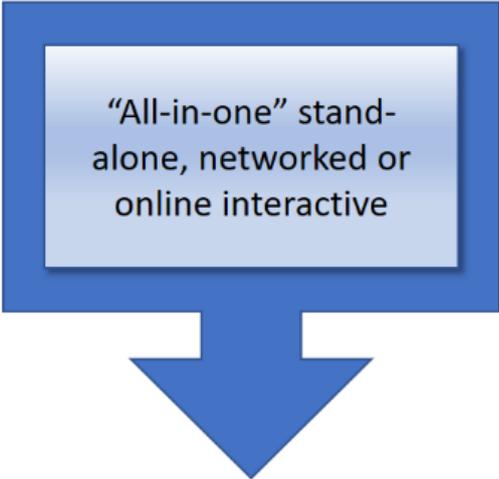


Figure 6.2: Integrating CALL (Warschauer, 1996)

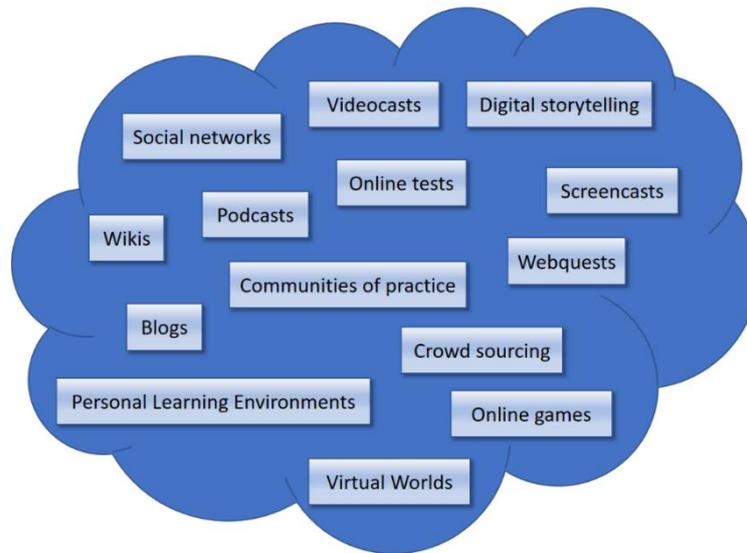


Figure 6.3: Representation of “Atomised CALL” introduced by the author in 2013

The features of each stage of CALL – behaviourist CALL, communicative CALL, integrative CALL and atomised CALL – were able to contribute to different aspects of the EEC course. For instance, behaviourist CALL could be a guide to constructing asynchronous learning apps to develop some aspects of linguistic competence that require drills; integrative CALL and/or atomised CALL could be used to develop asynchronous learning tools, to serve the purpose of language learning. For instance, the EEC course used a self-designed learning website, Edmodo, QQ, QQ group and WeChat to support asynchronous learning. Communicative CALL contributed to the central part of synchronous learning, to develop learners' communicative competence.

6.1.2 Conversation-based communicative CALL

Technology itself does not deliver education but provides the tools and approach. Overall, I agree with Gimeno-Sanz (2016) that a CALL course or programme should not be driven by technology. However, there is also no need to restrict the type or form of CALL by the stage or trend. As discussed above, behaviourist CALL and communicative CALL were defined as the first and second stages of CALL. However, this does not mean they are outdated and cannot be used for CALL currently. What technologies and what type of CALL are to be used should be decided by the needs of learners and the aim of the learning programme. The EEC course in this study focused on developing learners’ sociocultural competence and interactional competence. Linguistic competence was taught implicitly. Therefore, the EEC course in this study had more features of communicative CALL, which, however, were restricted by the current approaches to network-based language teaching (NBLT, Kern & Warschauer, 2000)

(e.g. telecollaboration), computer-mediated communication (CMC, Lee, 2018) or computer-mediated intercultural communication (CMIC, Lee, 2018). The EEC course, in fact, aligned with the principle of communicative CALL, albeit not in the same form as any of the types of communicative CALL mentioned above.

To develop sociocultural and interactional competence, the EEC course facilitated student opportunities to have real-time conversations with worldwide specialist invited English speakers (IES), rather than allocating students to a peer-dominated network, where the quality of interaction varies significantly according to the pairing of peers. The EEC course was also different from a large-scale webinar, which has little verbal interaction between participants and presenters. Therefore, this study promoted a new type of CALL named conversation-based communicative CALL.

The EEC course was primarily based on the learning generated from the communication between the IES and students. The students learnt the topics through having conversations with the IES, who came from around the world and were specialised in specific areas to inspire students to study more of the topics after the real-time lessons. Bringing the world to a virtual classroom and helping students improve their communicative competence was one of the aims of the EEC course.

However, this does not mean that the EEC course could not employ other types of CALL. To develop linguistic competence in future studies, the EEC course could employ behaviourist CALL to drill some basic grammar knowledge, or employ atomised CALL to integrate other technology platforms, such as the MOOC (Margaryan, Bianco, & Littlejohn, 2014), to serve the best of learning needs.

6.1.3 Challenges of communicative CALL

Researchers noticed some difficulties with communicative CALL programmes (Carr, 2016; Lee, 2018). The first is the conflicts of traditional face-to-face learning style and online virtual learning style (Adam, 2016). The main concern is whether online learning produces the same results as a face-to-face course (Driscoll, Jicha, Hunt, Tichavsky, & Thompson, 2012). Quintas et al. (2017) claimed that, despite the convenience of e-learning, students still prefer face-to-face learning to e-learning. The main concerns are that it is less convenient to interact with teachers and peers than in physical face-to-face learning; technical problems often disrupt online communication and interaction; and the information on online learning resources can be

overwhelming (ibid.). In addition, different time zones and school timetables make it more difficult for students from different countries to communicate synchronously online (Evans, 2011). Nonetheless, Driscoll et al.'s study (2012) shows that there is no significant difference between an online course and a face-to-face course in terms of student satisfaction and performance. The test grades of learners in web-based and land-based courses are similar (Brown, 2012). Ni (2013) also supported this finding and identified that students who prefer an online learning environment show more persistence in online classes than in face-to-face classes. There is no evidence to show that physical or online learning environments represent a significant factor affecting learning quality (Driscoll et al., 2012).

Consequently, we should not design or provide online courses just because it is fashionable to use innovative technology, but rather consider whether online courses can improve the learning outcome, which traditional face-to-face courses may not be able to offer. A hybrid course might extend the advantage of face-to-face and online courses beyond their limits if delivered alone (Ni, 2013). However, such a study is still at an early stage. Further studies are needed to provide more evidence to convince face-to-face classroom teachers and educational institutions to accept the idea.

The EEC course was designed to supplement the shortcomings of traditional English courses, which cannot invite specialised foreign English teachers to teach students in China directly in real time. Therefore, the EEC course was designed not for fashion but for purposes that face-to-face learning struggles to achieve.

The second challenge is cultural constraints. There are difficulties in communicating between students from different cultural beliefs and learning approaches (Kayumova & Sadykova, 2016) and therefore it is difficult to develop a friendship with their international partners (Lázár, 2015). For instance, Iranian female school students are not allowed to contact male Korean students directly. The telecollaboration course in Carr's study had to address this issue to pair the same genders, which means extra effort had to be taken to pair male Korean students with students from other schools. Such organisation management is time-consuming. In addition, as a result of religious practice, some Iranian students followed their family for a spiritual trip during Ramadan, which means that a couple of Korean students could not receive responses from their Iranian partners. Again, this challenge was not a significant issue for the EEC course, as the students were talking to the IES in the presence of a Chinese tutor (CT). The learners were not left alone to deal with cultural conflicts without the support of a Chinese English teacher.

According to Vygotsky's ZPD (zone of proximal development) theory, the guidance of the teachers can stretch learners more in learning other cultures. One may question whether such help can defer learners' independence in dealing with cultural conflicts in real life. The answer is no, as EEC learners were encouraged to experience the cultural difference in their daily life and bring their real-life stories back to the EEC lessons. Therefore, there was a balance of supporting and independent exploration of the sociocultural experience.

The third challenge is the peer pressure or anxiety created in CALL communication. The frequent language "mistakes" learners make in communication also discourage interlocutors from continuing their communication (Rudenko & Krylova, 2016). Some students also feel constantly exposed to their deficiency of using the target language and, as a result, they are constantly experiencing high anxiety (Ke, 2016). On the other hand, although students are expected to be active throughout a CALL course, not all students practise and benefit from this collaboration equally. Students who have a higher performance in English tend to communicate more and produce high-quality tasks, and students with lower performance in English tend to struggle to get even basic conversations correct (Lee, 2018). Therefore, carefully planned activities with the ongoing teacher and technical support are essential factors for successful learning outcomes via telecollaboration. The EEC course had to acknowledge such anxiety and potential problems when learners were comparing themselves with other learners. One of the strategies was to raise learners' awareness of this problem and make it clear to higher-performing students that they might engage with other learners in addition to providing their own contributions. The lower-performing or shy students would be picked up to contribute to the discussion but then gradually encouraged to make an effort to speak out themselves. Of course, teachers had to be aware of giving opportunities to all students to speak in the lesson.

Overall, the research of CALL may always be behind the updates of new technologies, as when research generates evidence of the effective use of one particular technology, that technology may already update itself or be overtaken by newer technologies (Gimeno-Sanz, 2016). This study, organised as design-based research, could respond to changes in technology fairly quickly from one research cycle to the next. The EEC course developed learners' communicative competence mainly through face-to-face synchronous learning, led by human teachers. Therefore, the development of technology can only provide better platforms for the EEC course. The asynchronous learning platform can also be updated to match the trend of technology to transfer the contents and facts from one format to another.

6.1.4 Limitations of CALL

Limitations of the computer as a game

The aim of the computer as a game is teaching learners through language games or simulating real-life situations. Although Ma, Oikonomou and Jain (2011) argued that computer games for educational purposes are distinct from ordinary games, which are purely for entertainment, the theory behind language games is still based on the theory of learning through entertainment. The aim of the EEC course was to develop learners' communicative competence in an authentic communication context in real life. Although computer games can help to develop some aspects of communicative competence, such as daily standardised conversations, real-life communication has much more complex and dynamic factors affecting communication situations than a game can present to learners. Moreover, the phenomena of young people being obsessed by computer games (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012) and distancing themselves from face-to-face communication raise deep concerns and were the main reason for deterring the EEC course from adopting the computer gaming approach. Some computer games use the Second Life communication model, which allows learners to communicate through avatars, which may help students, particularly those who are more open to talking with someone via the avatar. However, this does not solve the problem of helping learners to overcome barriers to communicating with others in real life. Therefore, it was considered one of the least favourite models for the EEC course.

The aim of the EEC course was to improve learners' communicative competence, not in a virtual world but in the real world. The difference is that people in virtual life play a role defined in the game that can be changed easily according to the choice of game players; but people in real life play the role in which people have to take responsibility for their actions.

Limitations of the computer as a cognitive tutor

The computer as a cognitive tutor (Aleven & Koedinger, 2002) can be regarded as an application of integrative CALL, as it maximises the use of technologies and minimises the input of human teachers. It has been widely applied in grammar learning (*ibid.*), speaking, pronunciation, listening, reading and even writing. However, language itself is a complex system. People can always produce unique sentences or styles, which are not within the range of the database of a computer tutor. For instance, I have been using Grammarly, one of the most sophisticated examples of online grammar checking software, to help me proofread my writing. However, in comparison to professional proofreaders, Grammarly can only correct certain popular or simple mistakes and sometimes even gives incorrect suggestions. Grammarly

struggles to pick up any unclear or illogical meanings in paragraphs. Even with the latest artificial intelligence technology, which can enable conversations between human beings and computers, what computers can communicate with human beings is very limited and will never be the same as communication between human beings. Despite some researchers predicting that AI will reach a human-like level in the middle of this century (Baum, S.D., Goertzel, B., Goertzel, T.G., 2011), I believe that even though a computer can generate logical and intelligent responses, it will struggle to generate humans' complex emotions, feelings or spiritual thoughts. It is clear that the computer as a tutor can hardly play the full role of a human tutor in understanding and responding to learners' meaning. The EEC course did not adopt this type of CALL, as its aim was to help learners be more confident and efficient in communication with human beings, not with a computer. However, the computer as a tutor could be employed to develop certain aspects of communicative competence when drills or facts learning are required, for instance, linguistic rules or cultural facts.

Technology has already developed sufficiently to enable education to extend far beyond the reach of traditional education (Tseng, Lien, & Chen, 2014). Over the years, a wide range of technologies has been developed to serve education, but the choice of technology should be meaningful to teaching and learning (Pachler et al., 2014). The next four sections focus on synchronous and asynchronous learning technologies and the relevant pedagogies for the EEC course. They also discuss the challenges of applying technology in these learning areas.

6.2 Synchronous learning

Synchronous learning is online learning where learners can see, talk or chat instantly, at the same time, with teachers and other learners who are connected from different geographic locations. It may be supported by a virtual classroom (web/video conferencing), chatting or voice app or virtual worlds. It has the advantage of helping students improve verbal communicative competence (Sotillo, 2000). The EEC course employed two main technologies to deliver synchronous lessons: the virtual classroom and Skype.

6.2.1 Virtual classroom

The virtual classroom is a live online classroom, which offers almost all that a physical classroom can offer learners, except physical contact (Hensman, 2012). There is an increasing number of software-facilitated virtual classrooms, such as WizIQ, WebEx, Adobe Connect, Elluminate Live, Big Blue Button, Saba Centra, Wimba Classroom, AT&T Connect, LearnLinc, Microsoft Live Meeting, iMeeting, Raindance Meeting Edition, Web-4M, OpenMeetings,

GoToMeeting, Livemeeting, Convenos and Gensys. The EEC course used Adobe Connect and WizIQ, based on their popularity at the time.

- **Adobe Connect**

Adobe Connect (www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html) is a leading commercial virtual classroom, graded “B+” for its “flexible management interface and ability to accommodate diverse session content” (Cogburn & Kurup, 2006:7). It gives users the flexibility to change classroom background and layout, use polls and breakout rooms, share microphone audio and web camera video, upload and exchange files, use an interactive whiteboard, and share desktops and record lessons for later reviewing. Significantly, it supports users’ own uploaded video clips and audio files to be played directly in the virtual classroom without users having to download documents (Schullo et al., 2007), or through external platforms such as YouTube. However, because of these luxurious functions, Adobe Connect requires higher bandwidth, which could restrict use by learners from lower bandwidth areas.

The cost of Adobe Connect is also higher than many other virtual classrooms (Mavridis, Tsiatsos, & Tegos, 2011). To compare commercial Adobe Connect with other free open virtual classrooms, Mavridis et al. (2011) conducted a study to test how well Adobe Connect and Big Blue Button (bigbluebutton.org) supported collaborative learning. The results showed that although Adobe Connect had more functions than Big Blue Button, it did not provide better support for collaborative learning (Mavridis et al., 2011).

Another significant weakness of Adobe Connect is that it only offers a synchronous learning platform, not an asynchronous one, which could severely hinder its development for future collaborative learning (Hensman, 2012).

- **WizIQ**

WizIQ (www.wiziq.com), on the other hand, has almost all the functions of Adobe Connect but does not support the direct playing of video and audio clips in the virtual classroom and has less flexibility to change the classroom layout and background. Although WizIQ supports YouTube videos, this function does not work for students based in China, as Youtube is not accessible there. However, in comparison to many other virtual classrooms, WizIQ provides an extensive educational network where students can access a wide choice of courses offered by teachers worldwide. It also supports the functions of tests and assessments and can be integrated with asynchronous learning platforms such as Moodle (Hensman, 2012). It is beneficial for

teachers and students to have both synchronous and asynchronous learning platforms in one place (Mavridis et al., 2011). Many users choose this platform to build their network with teachers or students who have similar interests (ibid.).

6.2.2 Skype

Skype is a peer-to-peer telephone service through VoIP (Voice over IP) developed by KaZaa in 2003; it has become incredibly popular despite the emergence of other voice call software and apps (Hensman, 2012). It facilitates computers or tablets to act like telephones (Godwin-Jones, 2005). Calls from Skype to Skype are free. Calling a landline or mobile incurs a fee. The sound quality through broadband is better than in the Adobe Connect virtual classroom, but it still relies on the network speed. Skype is notorious for its audio quality and reliability problems, such as the sound being distorted or the call ending on occasion. Nonetheless, and despite virtual classrooms being well developed, some language-learning providers are still only using Skype to offer real-time courses. Rayson and Aberdour (2009) categorise Skype as a virtual classroom, as it supports chat and voice/video for participants. The study of Correa (2014) showed that Skype is welcomed by language learners, who conceive that Skype facilitates a better social interaction environment and allows them to interact with others from diverse backgrounds. However, because of the limited functions of Skype for real-time learning, it might be more appropriate to separate it from virtual classrooms. Instead, Skype can be used as a valuable voice/video communication tool supplementing the weakness of the virtual classroom.

In summary, when comparing Adobe Connect, WizIQ and Skype, the strength of Adobe Connect lies in the functions of the virtual classroom, which not only offers all the features of the WizIQ classroom but also allows users to play music and video clips directly in the virtual classroom. However, it does demand a high network speed. WizIQ has less flexibility and fewer functions than Adobe Connect. It requires less network speed and, most importantly, offers a learning network and integrates other asynchronous learning platforms with the virtual classroom. The whole package offers more convenience to teachers and learners. Skype, on the other hand, is not a virtual classroom but an online telephone app. The strength of Skype is that it is one of the least demanding apps, which can even be accessed via mobile devices on the move.

To decide which tools to use for synchronous learning, one should consider not only the features of the tool itself but also the accessibility and technical competence of virtual classroom users

(Hensman, 2012). For the EEC course Adobe Connect, WizIQ and Skype were chosen as its synchronous learning platforms: Adobe Connect was selected for RC1; WizIQ for RC2 and RC3; and Skype was used as a supporting platform in RC1, RC2 and RC3 and as the main platform in RC4. The reasons for the change in choices are discussed in Chapters 7 to 10.

Skype provides simplified WizIQ functions to support language training programmes. Terhune (2016) studied a 12-week face-to-face synchronous Skype-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) programme to help 20 Japanese university students prepare for overseas study. The programme integrated regular university classroom discussion, presentations, quizzes, language-learning projects and participation in the 25-minute Skype-based CMC online conversation. The findings showed that although students enjoyed talking to the foreign English teachers in the Philippines, if not required or reminded to attend, they would not proactively continue with the Skype conversation practice lessons. This suggested that the opportunities for students to speak to native English speakers did not motivate them to attend the training programme. Terhune (2016: 1086) suggested that students need to be clear about what they need to achieve and, more importantly, “the conversations must have a goal-oriented aspect to them”.

6.3 Asynchronous learning

Historically, the majority of online courses have been dominated by asynchronous learning (Waits & Lewis, 2003). This is the approach to learning via virtual libraries, document repositories, audio or video files, email, discussion boards, online social networking, email, e-portfolios, DVD/CD-ROM, Twitter/microblog, blog, tablet apps and interactive computer programmes. It does not restrict learners from being online with other people at a set time. An English learning website can transform learners from passive learners in a traditional learning approach to proactive and discovery-driven learners (Chen, 2014). Many people choose online learning because of its asynchronous nature, which enables them to combine family or work commitments (Hrastinski, 2008: 52).

Despite its convenience in terms of freedom of learning time and interaction asynchronously, the criticism of asynchronous learning regarding its social interaction and communication remains (Järvelä & Häkkinen, 2002). Learning is not only an individual’s psychological process but also a social process that requires interaction with other human beings (Çifçi, 2016). Learners negotiate meanings through interaction with others before the independent learning process begins (Çifçi, 2016). However, Kreijns, Kirschner and Jochems (2003) highlighted that

there is a danger of assuming that social interaction will automatically occur for online learning. Although asynchronous learning does not require teachers to be present at the same time as students, teachers have a role in producing a warm, supportive and enjoyable online web-based learning environment (Chen, 2014: 169). To avoid this pitfall, collaborative learning, online interactivity, the interaction between teachers and/or learners, and enhancement of social presence awareness should be considered when designing asynchronous learning activities (Kreijns et al., 2003; Song, 2007: 56).

Facebook is regarded as an effective social media platform to support learners to interact with peers and teachers in a social context (Wang & Kim, 2014). Research with US teenagers revealed that approximately 75 per cent of young people use online social networks such as Facebook and Myspace (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr 2010). Undergraduate students at the University Sains Malaysia (USM) also consider Facebook a useful tool for learning English (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin 2010). Students who attended both on-campus lessons and asynchronous online learning via Facebook engaged more than those who only attended on-campus lessons (Northey, Bucic, Chylinski, & Govind, 2015). Yet, Facebook is prohibited in China. Nonetheless, there are many alternative asynchronous learning platforms. For the EEC course three asynchronous learning platforms were chosen: Edmodo, a self-designed learning website and QQ. Micro-Blog and WeChat were also considered. However, not all students were using Micro-blog and WeChat at the time. Therefore, this study only focused on the above three platforms.

6.3.1 Edmodo

Edmodo, launched in 2008, is a free learning social network that is regarded as a Facebook for education. It supports teachers to create groups; post assignments, messages and links; upload files; host discussions; create tags and polls; maintain grades; and set alerts (www.edmodo.com). As a social learning network, Edmodo is explicitly designed for educators and learners to reduce the distractions of other social networks, such as Facebook, and introduces more functions for learning (Majid, 2011). Edmodo supports reading, writing, listening and cross-cultural understanding in a language course (ibid.). However, as Edmodo does not facilitate web conferencing, it does not lend itself to the teaching of speaking in real time. Apart from the components supporting language learning, Edmodo enables teachers to create sub-group activity, give badges and involve parents. Edmodo was chosen for the EEC course as one of the asynchronous learning platforms because of its global nature, which could provide students with more possibilities to communicate with learners from other countries and

cultures.

6.3.2 QQ group

QQ is similar to Facebook Messenger and is one of the most popular social network messengers used by the majority of Chinese students (Chen & Tang, 2011). In a study by Liu and Tan (2014), out of 360 university students, 100 per cent had QQ accounts, around 89 per cent used QQ every day, and more than 60 per cent spent more than two hours every day on QQ. In another study by Zhao et al. (2012), some Chinese teachers explored setting up QQ groups to extend learning from the traditional classroom to the outside world. The findings indicated that students showed interest in learning through a QQ group (ibid.) and found it particularly useful to receive their teachers' posts (Liu & Tan, 2014). However, in Zhao et al.'s study (2012), the students only showed more participation in a QQ group in the first week and towards the end of the course. The records of online text chatting revealed that students were in a QQ group mostly for exam information and resources rather than discussion (ibid.). The study of Chen and Tang (2011) also supported this finding. Consequently, it is not surprising to discover that there is no correlation between the frequency of participation in a QQ group and learners' exam results (Zhao et al., 2012).

Some students expressed concerns about learning through a QQ group, as they perceived that they could easily be distracted by chatting with their QQ friends (Liu & Tan, 2014; Zhao et al., 2012). Furthermore, they mentioned that the feedback to their questions in the QQ group was often delayed and they lacked patience when waiting for an answer (Liu & Tan, 2014). They also identified that learning resources were limited in the QQ group (ibid.). The above weaknesses of QQ groups suggest that although QQ has the potential to be a convenient learning platform, it requires more input from teachers, such as time and effort searching and providing learners with updated, meaningful and interesting resources. To reduce teachers' workload and build up an active QQ group, Yu and Mu (2011) suggested that teachers should train a core group of students to play the roles of organiser, guide, learning assistant and coordinator to keep the learning community alive and fluent (ibid.).

6.3.3 Learning website

A learning website offers course designers the flexibility to organise learning resources in its own designed way, and learners can learn in their own time and space (Wu, Wang, & Tsai, 2010). The gratification of learners with web-based learning is influenced mostly by how conveniently they can access the learning materials and how useful the content of the learning

materials is to them (Chen, 2013: 168). A good language-learning website should consider learners' interests and capability and users' interaction with the learning resources to provide better user experiences (Shen, Yuan, & Ewing, 2014).

Chinese English learners prefer authentic learning materials to a digital copy of a textbook, as the latter simply replicates classroom learning (Shen, Yuan, & Ewing, 2014). Furthermore, they also like to contextualise Chinese elements on the website to support their learning (ibid.). The most popular web resources that many Chinese English teachers like to use are from Voice of America (VOA), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and recordings from English songs or films (ibid., 163). However, testing materials are prevalent on Chinese English learning websites, as most users wish to acquire learning outcomes to pass examinations (ibid.).

This does not mean that an English learning website should provide everything that learners want, but it should address the aim of the course. The EEC course employed a web builder in RC1 to create an English learning website according to the design of the course designer. However, it was costly to upgrade, and therefore in RC3 the EEC course used website creator Weebly (www.weebly.com) for its quick design and creation process. Weebly is one of many web-hosting service providers, such as WordPress, Google Sites, Webnode, Jimdo, and so on (Giannopoulos, 2015). Weebly allows educators to simply use “drag and drop” to upload Word, PowerPoint, audio and video resources to create their own learning website (ibid.). This was very convenient for me as a non-web specialist when producing my own website. How this self-designed learning website worked is discussed in the findings and analysis chapters.

6.3.4 Mobile learning

Mobile learning can support both synchronous and asynchronous learning. It is “the use of mobile or wireless devices for the purpose of learning” (Park, 2014). The mobile device is developed to be a mini-computer (Cook, Pachler, & Bachmair, 2011), and learners can enjoy using it even when they are on the move (Looi et al., 2009). The population of Internet users in China reached 591 million by the end of June 2013 and over 75 per cent of them were using mobile devices to access the Internet (CNNIC, 2013).

The Internet is acknowledged as a substantial channel for Chinese English-language learners to support not only linguistic learning but also their understanding of cultures, social rules and psychological reactions (Yang & Chan, 2008; Shen, Yuan, & Ewing, 2014). Mobile devices are designed for social communication, and mobile learning is characterised as culturally

significant (Pachler, 2009: 98). Hart (2012) claimed that, instead of thinking of mobile learning technology as replacing technologies for online training platforms or courses, it should be considered a technology for the social platform.



Figure 6.4: The social workplace learning continuum (Pachler, Seipold, & Bachmair, 2013)

Pachler et al. (2013) stated that if learners establish the habit of using mobile devices to learn, they can connect their informal learning to formal learning and achieve the optimal outcome. In the social workplace learning continuum (Figure 6.4), formal learning boosts face-to-face or online learning events, and informal learning develops independent learning skills (Pachler et al., 2013: 15, cited in Hart, 2012). Hsu, Hwang and Chang (2013) highlighted that students using personalised mobile learning perform better when learning English than those who only have access to general non-personalised mobile learning.

However, Kukulska-Hulme (2007) argued that there are also disadvantages to using mobile learning, such as slow or unreliable networks, excessive screen brightness that can harm the eyes, concerns about the security of personal information and possible radiation exposure from devices. Cyber-bullying and harmful Internet content accessed by students should also be addressed (Cook et al., 2011). Park (2014) asserted that it is important to consider this issue when designing mobile learning.

Developing from e-learning to mobile learning (mLearning) and then ubiquitous learning (uLearning), uLearning is a more all-around online learning approach, including mobile devices, computers and any of the latest technologies that facilitate student learning (Van't Hooft, Swan, Cook, & Lin, 2007: 6; Stead, 2014). ULearning allows teachers to keep their expertise, as well as supporting students' independent learning (Crowe, 2007: 129). In other words, uLearning

enables both formal and informal learning and decreases the reliance on fixed locations (Peters, 2007).

Although mobile learning is an increasingly popular platform for language learning (Ally & Tsinakos, 2014), because of time and financial limitations, I did not manage to design a mobile app for learning in this study. Nonetheless, the students accessed the EEC learning website and QQ from their mobiles. Development of the cellular network speed also enabled some students to access the course through their mobiles during real-time synchronous lessons.

6.4 Pedagogies supporting online language learning to develop communicative competence

Although digital technologies support face-to-face teaching and enable teachers to provide space for learners to learn independently and autonomously, Kern, Ware and Warschauer (2004) argued that online learning does not necessarily result in effective learning or improved intercultural understanding. In other words, the availability of technology does not mean teaching the same English knowledge on a new online platform, but rather expanding the areas that a traditional approach cannot reach (*ibid.*, 254). For instance, digital technologies could facilitate real-time and delayed-time communication between learners and native English-language speakers (Pachler et al., 2014: 156).

The pedagogy to teach language online is an extension of the pedagogy of traditional classrooms. As Quintas et al. (2017) identified, students' satisfaction with their learning refers more to teachers' beliefs, knowledge and teaching pedagogy. This section reviews some of the pedagogies that have been used in online language learning.

6.4.1 Autonomous pedagogy

Although it is increasingly common to expect students to access teachers' help beyond the face-to-face lesson (Mee and Pachler, 2014), Hamilton (2013: 18) believed that good learners should be autonomous and therefore "responsible for their own learning", even outside the classroom, which not only enables them to learn efficiently but also transfers learning strategies to other subjects and areas. Fisher et al. (2004) argued that helping students to become autonomous learners in language learning and usage is a primary aim for language teachers. Autonomy is achieved only if language learners can use the language independently and efficiently in real communication; otherwise, learners remain dependent and are not successful language learners (*ibid.*).

The autonomous pedagogy can be classified into proactive and reactive autonomy (Littlewood, 1999: 75–6). Proactive autonomy is where learners take charge of their own learning and direct activity, while reactive autonomy is where learners respond to direction, organise resources and work with others to complete the task (Hamilton, 2013). Conversely, Reinders and Hubbard (2013) argued that without good preparation, practice, feedback and teacher support, many learners might fail to use virtual learning environments effectively, regardless of which type of autonomous learner they are. A number of constraints need to be considered.

- **Access**

The availability of online materials does not mean that learners are able to access them autonomously (*ibid.*). Learners need to be trained to become autonomous (Hurd, 1998, 72–3). The EEC course design needed to consider the time to prepare both students and native teachers to use the virtual classroom, Skype, QQ, English learning website and other online learning platforms.

- **Authenticity**

Although online learning creates access to authentic material, the inappropriate level of some material may not be useful, or may even be demotivating. This is because not all online materials are well written in standard English, and some may be far more complicated and beyond learners' language ability. The EEC learning materials were all authentic; it was important to consider which authentic materials students should read, listen to or watch so that they felt challenged but not overwhelmed.

- **Feedback**

Ku, Shih and Hung (2014) conducted a study showing that students who committed more time and followed feedback and guidance made more progress than others (Ku et al., 2014). Technology has developed to the level that feedback on speaking and writing can be given by both intelligent computer-assisted language learning programmes (ICALL) and humans. Online assessment systems can provide learners with instant feedback so that they can learn beyond the classroom (Willcox, Sarma, & Lippel, 2016). However, ICALL can only give learners limited feedback at the basic linguistic level (Ware & Kessler, 2013). Feedback from native English speakers may also not be accurate and useful if the English speakers have not been appropriately trained. Therefore, how feedback is given, and who gives it, should be planned carefully to enhance learners' autonomy (Reinders & Hubbard, 2013).

Feedback, especially from teachers and peers, was regarded as one of the most valuable components of the EEC course. Teachers' feedback on students' presentations with Q&A time and writing tasks was planned to support explicit learning. The feedback was given not just verbally in the lesson but also after each lesson. It was believed that feedback helps students to have more individualised support. Although intelligent computer-assisted feedback was not applied in this study, it will certainly be considered in future studies, when more time, human resources and funding are allocated.

6.4.2 Task-based pedagogy

The principle of task-based pedagogy is based on the belief about experiential or hands-on learning: that a good way to learn a language is to use it in a real-world activity so that learners are more motivated to engage in an authentic task and to interact with others using the target language (Price, 2011). The emergence of task-based pedagogy and online learning was not considered until the mid-1990s (Thomas, 2013). Synchronous learning provides a platform that facilitates real-time authentic and creative dialogues and conversation (Hwang, 2008). By contrast, asynchronous learning platforms, such as blogs, wikis and web-building websites, enable learners to reflect their learning in writing and therefore focus more on linguistic competence (Yamada, 2009).

Thomas (2013) conducted a study by employing a variety of tasks based on a virtual learning environment. The tasks were structured into several steps: assigning pairs, teacher/student modelling, planning the project, designing and conducting the research project, writing a presentation script, creating the visual message, recording the audio/video, integrating the audio and visual message and publishing the podcast/vodcast. Computer applications such as Bubbl.us, PowerPoint, SurveyMonkey, Garageband, iMovie, web search engines, and Second Life were employed for this study (ibid.). Findings from the research showed that task-based pedagogy in the virtual learning environment motivated pairs to participate actively in tasks. However, there was a tendency for the pairs to communicate in their L1 language (ibid., 355).

Instead of pairing up the students, Chen and Brown (2011) asked students to work on the tasks individually to create a website about travel, the state department and the culture gap. The authentic audience were invited to give students feedback about their websites. The findings showed that although some learners spent too much time on web-design skills, the majority were extremely positive about this approach to tasks. In particular, they were impressed by the feedback given by the authentic audience, as this was based mostly on communicative elements

rather than linguistic mistakes. Chen and Brown (2011: 450) reminded us that the course designer must consider three key factors carefully in this approach: task design, audience identity and student goals. Tasks must be “meaningful to students and put them in the position of the expert where he or she was given the opportunity to feel competent in the use of the language” (ibid., 451). Students must be clear about who the audience is and perceive it as important to them (Chen & Brown, 2011). This task-based approach may not suit students seeking to pass standardised English exams (e.g. IELTS), but it is regarded as very useful to improve learners’ communicative competence (ibid.).

Although task-based pedagogy was not the main pedagogy of the EEC course, it was thought that it could support EEC course learners to apply what they had learnt in their other lessons. The course employed task-based pedagogy by assigning students to prepare and present presentations in the lesson, and pairing them to explore and complete a task after the lessons. More tasks can be designed and explored in future.

6.4.3 Interaction

Both synchronous and asynchronous learning facilitate interactions. However, they may both be inauthentic or inappropriate for learners. The lack of focus and systematisation in interaction may also decrease the efficiency of learning. There is a need to plan interactions with a purpose, focus and systematisation (Reinders & Hubbard, 2013). Junk, Deringer and Idaho (2011) identified three types of online interaction: learner to learner, learner to content, and learner to instructor or teacher. Teachers should use good questioning strategies to promote critical thinking skills in students to enhance interactions (ibid.). However, such interactions should be maintained in a harmonious way to produce a supportive learning environment (Kamlaskar & Killedar, 2015).

Interaction is a crucial factor in language teaching and learning (Lin, Zheng, & Zhang, 2017). Social interaction is an essential element of cognitive development and higher-order thinking skills (Junk et al., 2011). However, video-conferencing does not automatically facilitate teacher–student interaction; in fact, there is evidence showing that teachers still tend to dominate classroom interaction in a video-conferencing environment that is similar to a traditional face-to-face classroom (Hampel & Stickler, 2012). Through the turn-taking function, teachers and learners may develop a way to interact through text chat rather than verbal interaction (Hampel & Stickler, 2012). In other words, the interaction through texts may show a more common interactional conversation in a video-conferencing classroom (Hampel &

Stickler, 2012). Learning vocabulary alone can be a tedious and painful learning experience (Hu, 2013). The interaction may also help learners to learn vocabulary through interaction, which learners need in order to pay more attention to both meaning and form (ibid.).

In addition, there is a concern that online courses reduce the opportunities and qualities of interaction, which may affect the learning outcome (Lin et al., 2017). The study by Lin et al. (2017) showed that the quality of learner–teacher and learner–content interactions significantly affects learners' satisfaction, but the quality of learner–learner interactions does not affect learners' satisfaction. On the other hand, only learner–content interactions affect perceived progress (ibid.). To enhance the effects of learner–content interaction, DiPietro, Ferdig, Black and Preston (2008) recommended a few practices: using content that interests students; organising and structuring content clearly; setting deadlines for the content; and employing a variety of media to deliver the content.

In a study by Fisher et al. (2004), a group of students from four countries, Belgium, England, France and Senegal, took part in the study, which organised the students to communicate with one another through asynchronous online text messages in terms of their target language groups. Although text-based asynchronous communication requires learners to spend more time on construction, students can choose topics that they want to discuss, and they can correct one another rather than depending on teachers (ibid.). The opportunity to choose topics that the students are interested in, and less teaching from teachers, help learners to become autonomous (ibid.).

Interaction was one of the leading pedagogies of the EEC course in this study. It employed both learner–teacher and learner–learner interactions and the aim was to promote meaningful, purposeful and natural interaction. As a result of financial and time limitations, this study did not focus on developing learner–content interaction, as it required investment to build up online learning resources. However, learner–content interaction can play a much more important role in future research when conditions allow.

It is not obligatory to employ one pedagogy only in an online course. An online language course can adopt different pedagogies, which can support one another, making learning more diverse and stimulating. When developing a virtual language course, it is worth trying and exploring different pedagogies to find the most appropriate ways to help students improve their communicative competence in English.

6.5 A review of online language-learning courses or programmes

An increasing number of language schools have been offering online language-learning courses or programmes. Here are some courses representing different strategies employed by online language learning:

1. Asynchronous courses supported by synchronous learning
EF Englishtown (EF).
2. Asynchronous language learning courses supplied by social networking for learners
Busuu (<https://www.busuu.com/enc>).
3. Synchronous learning supported by an asynchronous learning network for teachers and learners
WIZIQ (<http://www.wiziq.com/>).

Both the EF Englishtown courses and Busuu language programmes have well-developed interactive asynchronous learning materials. The strength of the EF Englishtown course is that it provides learners with a 24-hour-a-day synchronous learning environment with native English speakers. Giving learners the flexibility to join any lesson at any time means there is little opportunity for learners to build a grounded relationship with teachers and other learners. As a result of the constant change of teachers or classmates, the conversations could be shallow and superficial. This is because for a conversation to reach more depth requires trust between interlocutors, which takes time to develop.

The disadvantage of the EEC course in comparison to the EF Englishtown was its lower flexibility in scheduling. The EEC course required learners to attend the synchronous lessons at a certain time. However, the advantage of the EEC course was that the classmates remained the same, which helped learners develop a relationship with one another to create a familiar learning environment. Unlike EF Englishtown, English teachers taught the whole course and the EEC course invited specialised English speakers to have conversations with the students. With their first-hand knowledge and experience, the students were more likely to be provoked to engage in genuine conversation rather than for the sake of speaking English. In addition, a CT (Chinese tutor) was assigned to follow the same group of students throughout their learning. The CT witnessed the students' progress, recorded performance and identified areas for the learners to improve. This approach also provided an opportunity for the CT and the learners to build up a more grounded teacher–student relationship, which helped learners to open up more in the group discussion, as it was always a familiar environment to them.

Busuu was created in 2008 by a European company to help users learn diverse languages, based on the concept of community (Valencia, 2015). Busuu enables learners to have a 24-hour networking opportunity to learn the language of their choice from native speakers, who are also language learners looking to exchange learning and teaching (ibid.). Besides, Busuu assists learners to produce sentences to make interaction look easier and to help learners build more confidence in using the language (ibid.). The interactions in Busuu are mostly among learners. There is no assurance regarding the quality of the help that learners are providing to one another, as the learners and helpers are all volunteers. The asynchronous language courses that Busuu provides are also targeting basic conversations or linguistic knowledge, which is similar to many other asynchronous language-learning courses. Although Busuu cannot replace the EEC course in terms of synchronous learning, Busuu, or the model of Busuu, could be used to support learners' asynchronous learning and develop some skills to initiate conversations with peers around the world.

WizIQ, on the other hand, gives learners the opportunity to choose their own teachers worldwide online. Yet, the majority of courses are still exam- or linguistic-based, and the standard of courses varies considerably. Although 24-hour synchronous learning gives flexibility in learning time, conversations are based on fixed asynchronous learning content, and the relationships between teachers and learners, and between learners, are shallow because of the frequent change of teachers and other classmates. The learning network empowers learners to choose language-learning friends and to maintain good relationships; the learning relies largely on asynchronous learning content or individual social interests.

The above examples represent three mainstream approaches to online language learning. They have successfully adopted digital learning technologies for the purpose of language learning. However, there is a lack of depth in the thoughts and cultures behind language learning. It is believed that technology is developing rapidly, and that many advanced current technologies may be outdated in a few years' time. By then, the course design will need to have updated itself to be fresh and to cater to learners' thoughts and individual needs.

6.6 Challenges of CALL

Despite the claims about the successful application of CALL in CLT, Turula (2017) identified that we should not ignore the challenges of CALL because of the complex and dynamic nature of online communication. There are four challenges in online education programmes that the course designer needed to consider in this study: technology, pedagogy, preparation of learning

materials and financial restrictions (Adam, 2016; Evans, 2011; Junk et al., 2011).

Technological challenge

The instability of technological infrastructure is one of the most critical factors in the experience of learning online (Adam, 2016). This has been a consistent issue over the years (Liaw, 2006), perhaps because, in order to stay competitive, developers often release their software or apps before they are thoroughly tested (Borko, Whitcomb, & Liston, 2009). Slow Internet connections, time lags and slow transmission speed could also lead to screen freezing and interruptive connections (Yang & Chen, 2007). The instability and breakdown of technology are likely to frustrate and even demotivate online learners (Koehler & Mishra, 2008; Çifçi, 2016). As a result, considerable time spent on video-conferencing could be wasted in setting up the equipment (Yang & Chen, 2007).

To overcome this challenge, the EEC course explored different scheduling patterns in order to avoid peak Internet time, but also to identify the time when teachers and most students could attend the lessons. The course also examined a variety of virtual classrooms and audio software, and designed two of its own learning websites, both in China and overseas, employing a variety of social communication platforms to determine the best way to make online learning as smooth as possible.

In addition to technical problems, political obstacles are also accelerating this problem. The Great Firewall (Li, 2008, 2009), which aimed to protect Chinese propaganda from the “intrusion” of the western media, has also severely reduced access to English resources that could be used in English education in China (Mei, Brown, & Teo, 2018). The ultimate solution to the technical problem relies on not only the technology itself but also the openness of the Chinese government to the world (ibid.).

Pedagogical challenge

The pedagogical challenge is often caused by the perception and experience of teachers regarding online learning (Adam, 2016). Although synchronous online tutoring activities are comparable to face-to-face tutoring (Jong, Verstegen, & Könings, 2017), the online teacher plays four roles (Bonk & Dennen, 2003; Junk et al., 2011). The first is the “pedagogical role”, which is to design and deliver an online course through a variety of resources, activities and interactions (Bonk & Dennen, 2003: 337). The second is the “social role” – to produce a challenging but comfortable and safe learning environment through online discussions and

feedback (ibid., 337). Apart from lesson time, online tutors also have to chat with students online, which is extra work in comparison with face-to-face tutors (Jong et al., 2017). The third is a “managerial role”, to ensure that assignments are assigned clearly, deadlines met and feedback given (Bonk & Dennen, 2003: 337). Finally, there is a technical support role, to train learners to become familiar with online learning technologies and to help them with any technological issues (ibid.). Online tutors also have to deal with technical issues, which distracts them from their discussions with students (Jong et al., 2017; Kear et al., 2012). Delivering successful online courses requires high-quality and experienced teachers, which is a challenge to many working without the support of others (IDKW, 2015). The drop-off rate of web-based courses is higher than that of face-to-face courses, mainly due to the lack of direct guidance and close supervision from teachers (Brown, 2012). It is suggested that a technical helpdesk should be available during online sessions to remove this distraction from online tutors (Jong et al., 2017).

In the EEC course, the pedagogy, managerial and technical support roles were all mainly played by the course designer and researcher. However, there was communication between the course designer and the invited English speakers (IES) before the lessons on how to deliver the course in terms of pedagogical and social roles. A student assistant was also invited to play some of the managerial and technical support roles to reduce the workload of the course designer, who is also a Chinese English teacher. In a future study, a technician and a tutor may also be employed to assist the technical support role and managerial role respectively.

Preparation of learning materials

The third challenge is content or resource preparation. Although an online learning model can be built from a face-to-face learning model, an outstanding online learning course can take much more time to prepare than a face-to-face course if the aim is to produce “astonishing” quality for learners (Junk et al., 2011). This means that the online learning environment should have not only the minimum quality in face-to-face learning but also higher standards regarding presentation, to make it a visually pleasant learning environment (ibid.). Therefore, a significant amount of time and human resources is necessary.

For instance, it could take around five hundred hours for a three-credit course to be prepared, as it is time-consuming to produce videos with a team of people (ibid.). Kozar (2015) provided another example when noticing that there is an absence of pre-determined syllabuses for one-to-one online lessons through Skype. Although this does not affect students’ satisfaction with

the course, it does reveal the problems for this type of online teaching (ibid.). One of the reasons for shortening the pre-determined syllabus is that one-to-one teachers are normally only paid for the hours that they deliver the lesson and not for the time spent preparing the lesson. Therefore, there is an economic problem for such online courses. Second, as it is a one-to-one lesson, it might make more sense to tailor learners' needs to let online teachers decide what bottom-up syllabus should be used after negotiating with the students (Kozar, 2015: 96). Third, because of the lack of preparation time, online teachers tend to use "textbooks" and "lists of questions" instead of exploring online resources (ibid., 97).

The EEC course encountered similar problems, as the foreign English teachers invited to deliver the EEC course were only paid for the hours spent delivering the course. Although this was based on the maximum 30-minute preparation time, such as sending web links for students to prepare for the lesson, creating a high-quality PowerPoint or other learning resources takes much more time. As a result, the course designer had to make some of the online learning resources on behalf of the foreign English teachers to keep the study costs down. Using PowerPoint and other learning resources may not entirely match what the foreign English teachers want to deliver in the lessons and may also restrict them when following other lesson plans. Therefore, in some lessons, no PowerPoint was prepared in advance in order to leave an open space for the foreign teachers. In this case, the Chinese English teacher played a vital role in searching for and sending photos or adding keywords in the Chatbox of Skype while the foreign English teachers were delivering the lessons. This was particularly challenging for the Chinese English teacher.

Financial restrictions

It is widely understood that it is costly to design hardware and software, and to maintain and further develop the technologies for language learning (Lee, 2000). There is an argument that although it is costly at the beginning of the design of hardware or software, the cost will lower with time and with an increasing number of users. However, Herschbach (1994) stated that the new technologies may not necessarily reduce the cost if the number of users does not increase at the same or higher than the rate of investment of the technology. This is particularly critical to the design of an asynchronous learning platform, as learners' preference for technology normally changes faster than the development of the computer program itself. It is less of an issue for synchronous learning, as it can adapt to the change of the learning environment spontaneously and the investment can be adjusted according to the number of students.

The choice of the EEC course to take a synchronous learning approach supported by asynchronous learning was decided by its aim, which was to help learners improve their communicative competence, especially the sociocultural aspect. Dynamic systems theory (DST) required the course design to be spontaneous to respond to the ever-changing world. Therefore, the main part of the EEC course was based on the synchronous learning platform, where the costs of paying the teachers, support staff and technology platforms could be easily calculated and managed. The comparatively lower investment in synchronous learning also made it manageable for a doctorate study. Yet, because of the shortage of funding and human resources, the EEC course in this study only explored existing IT applications to support asynchronous learning. Given sufficient funding, a more sophisticated and innovative asynchronous learning platform could in future be designed to support linguistic learning and some aspects of sociocultural knowledge.

6.7 Summary

The CALL model of the EEC course was composed of two parts: synchronous learning and asynchronous learning (Figure 6.5). The synchronous learning of the EEC course was a conversational-based communicative CALL. The red colour and the bigger size of the synchronous learning circle represent the fact that it played a more important and leading role than asynchronous learning in the EEC course in this study. However, if time and financial conditions allowed, asynchronous learning could also be developed, thereby increasing its importance. Nevertheless, no matter how much asynchronous learning is developed, it will not replace synchronous learning. This is because the aim of the EEC course was to develop communicative competence, which required communication between interlocutors. The EEC course explored a variety of synchronous learning technologies, such as Adobe Connect, WizIQ and Skype, and also experimented with a variety of asynchronous learning technologies, including Edmodo, a self-designed learning website, QQ, QQ group, Sina-microblog and WeChat.

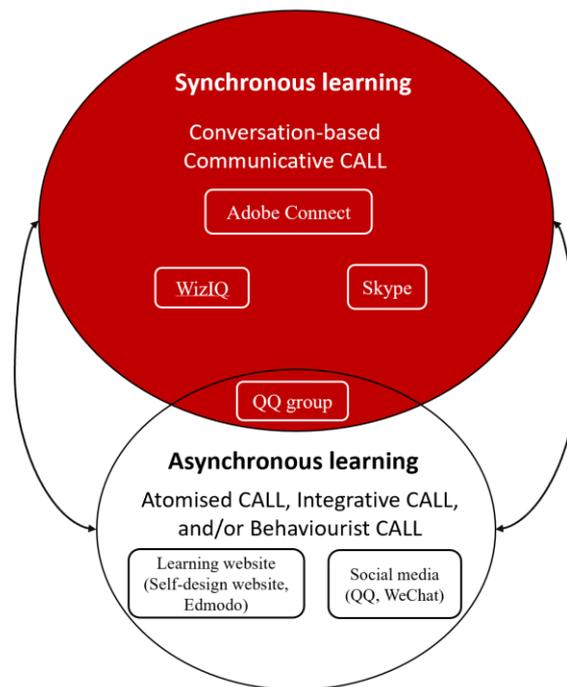


Figure 6.5: The CALL course model of the EEC course

The EEC course had an explicitly synchronous nature – learning took place mainly through real-time communication between teachers and students, and students and students, to help learners improve English communication competence. Although the idea of integrating video-conferencing with traditional lessons was welcomed (Canto et al., 2013), this was not achieved because of my full-time job and the different time zones. However, this is certainly a model that will be considered for the EEC course in future studies, although it requires the openness and consent of the university or English-language education providers.

The EEC course employed a variety of online pedagogies. The amount of hours spent on real-time online lessons was understandably not sufficient for learners to improve their communicative competence significantly. For this reason, this was critical that the EEC course learners became autonomous. The asynchronous web learning and preview and review tasks were designed to help students become autonomous learners and extend their learning outside the virtual classroom.

Overall, the previous chapters have reviewed and discussed the key concept of communicative competence, teaching theory and learning theories. This chapter explored CALL and technologies that support the development of communicative competence. However, how to integrate them in a course design is also critical. The next chapter discusses course design theories.

7. Designing virtual language courses

With the innovation and application of computer and information technology, the world has been changing rapidly and entered into a chaotic and probabilistic era; learning and education are actually complex phenomena; therefore, education can be conceived as a complex system (Mitra, 2014) or a complex adaptive system (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Frei, 2011). The potential impact of complex systems has increasing importance on contemporary education (Fabricatore & López, 2014), as it adapts itself to support learners to prepare for an increasingly complex and ever-changing world (Frei, 2011). However, there is also massive resistance to complex course design for a variety of reasons, such as the history of hierarchical relationships in education, teachers' workload, assessment, and students and parents' expectations. The EEC course was set up in a comparatively independent educational context, which was not restricted by the existing subjects, assessment or education systems. Therefore, the EEC course employed complex educational design (CED) and had the advantage of pioneering the application of this course design model.

Before introducing the CED (Freire, 2013), Section 7.1 reviews the traditional course design model (Graves, 2000) to clarify the difference between the two course design models. Section 7.2 introduces CED and its features, as well as challenges (Freire, 2013). Sections 7.3 to Section 7.8 further articulate some of the core course design processes: articulating beliefs, design rationale, needs analysis, selection of topics or activities, organising the course, and developing learning resources. Section 7.9 summarises and rationalises the course design model of this study.

7.1 General introduction of the course design model

A typical framework for course development processes is defined in the flow chart by Graves (2000) (Figure 7.1). This framework shows no hierarchical level of course design. The course designer can enter it at any point (*ibid.*). However, changing one element also changes the other elements. Defining the context and articulating the beliefs of the course serve as the basis for the other processes.

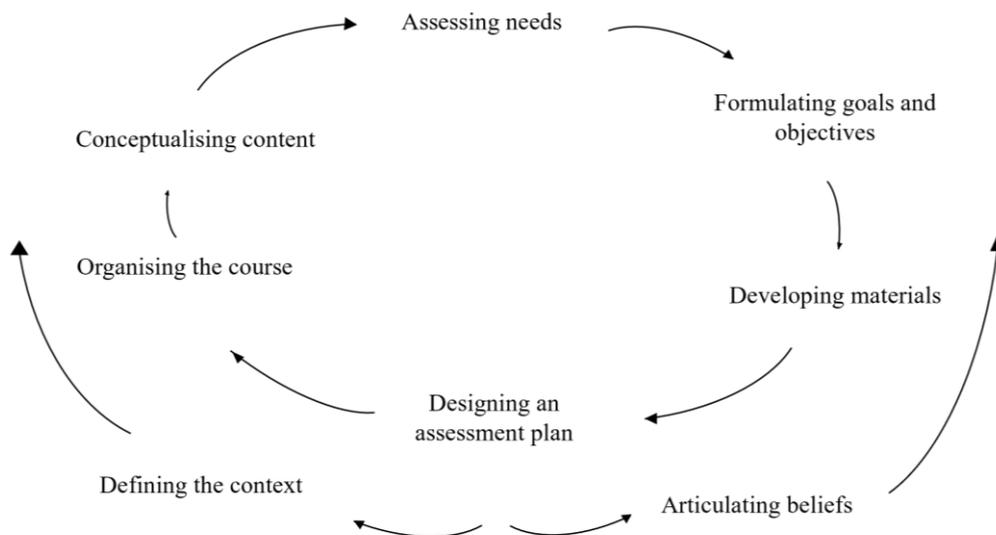


Figure 7.1: A framework of course development processes (Graves, 2000: 3)

Designing or planning the course is only one part of “course development”, which comprises “designing the course, teaching it, evaluating it, and modifying it based on the evaluation, and then teaching it again in the replanned version” (Graves, 2000: 9; Figure 7.2).

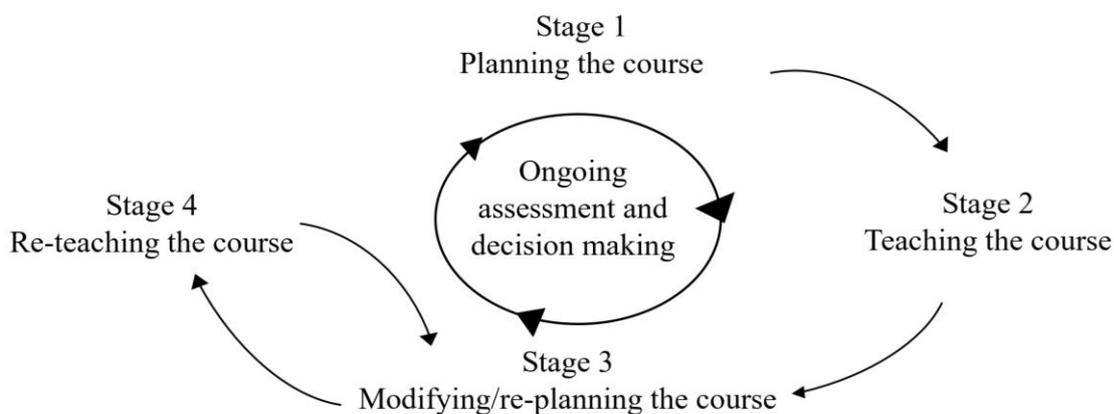


Figure 7.2: The cycle of course development (Graves, 2000: 9)

Grave’s course design model provided a basic framework for the course design, and it fits well within the model of design-based research. However, from Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2, it can be seen that the course development processes and the cycles of course development are almost following one direction rather than interacting with one another. This is one of the key differences between the traditional course design and the complex educational design. The traditional language courses are based on pre-set content-based syllabuses. The genuine interaction between participants is also at a considerably low level. The next section introduces the CED (complex educational design), which promotes the richness of interactions between

each step of the course design.

7.2 Complex educational design (CED)

As discussed in Section 5.1, the complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) supports the CED and has four main features:

- a complex dynamic system is composed of sub-systems;
- a complex dynamic system is constantly changing through interactions between sub-systems;
- the learning progression is unpredictable and non-linear (Lowie, 2017); and
- the sub-systems can be self-organised.

Based on the CDST, Freire (2013: 176) introduced CED (complex educational design) with the intention of setting a guide for the complex and innovative design of a virtual language course to boost interactions between “educational practices and students’ real life” and to establish “genuine partnership among teachers and students”. Through this, CED can facilitate a “non-linear, non-fragmented, and non-restricted” knowledge construction (Freire, 2013: 177). The next section looks into the details of the features of CED.

7.2.1 Features of complex educational design

Complexity, instability and intersubjectivity (Morin, 2005) are emphasised as the three key features of this design. There are three stages forming the complex educational design: preparation, execution and reflection (Freire, 2013, Figure 7.3).

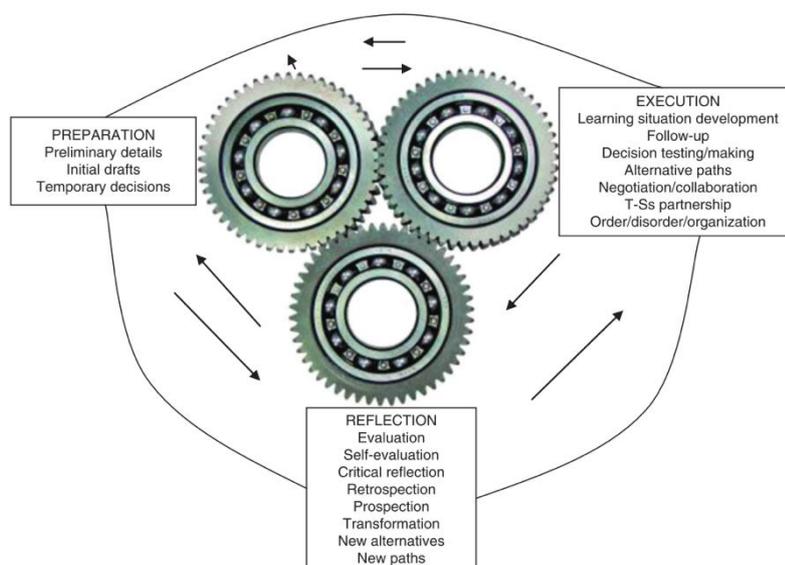


Figure 7.3: The complex educational design: constructs and meanings (Freire, 2013: 181)

In line with the model of Graves (2000), the preparation stage is composed of identifying students' needs, interests, expectations and previous experience, and generating learning goals and objectives, and developing course materials. However, Freire (2013) identified that in order to facilitate the flexibility of complex course design, the course design at this stage is initial and temporary, as sub-systems may change and the course design system should reflect the reaction to such changes (Freire, 2013).

The EEC course had an initial framework to deliver the EEC course. However, it was also open to change according to the needs of learners. This responds to the open feature of CDST and CED. The EEC course had a wide range of topics for students to select, based on interests expressed by former students and the experience of the course designer. However, the EEC course was also open to the new preferences of current students to talk about topics not on the list. Of course, the topics had to be sensible, meaningful and approved by the course designers. Therefore, the preparation stage of the EEC course was only an initial draft and the designers welcomed spontaneous contributions of learners at a later stage.

In terms of learning materials, in comparison to traditional textbook-based or fixed-order topics language course design, CED seeks to free teachers and learners from the textbook "by establishing a dialogue between educational practices and students' real lives, by emphasizing content and not only form, and by acknowledging needs and expectations as well as providing a genuine partnership among teachers and students" (Freire, 2013: 176). The EEC course did not use any textbooks, only authentic materials relevant to the topics. The learning materials were either recommended by the invited English speakers (IES) or the course designer. The challenge was that different IES might have a different preference for learning materials even though they might talk about the same topics. Therefore, the learning materials prepared by the course designer or suggested by the previous IES were also temporary and could be changed by the IES delivering the EEC lessons. Of course, this also had to be approved by the course designers to make sure that the learning materials were not against the laws or ethical beliefs of both the target culture and the learners' mother culture. This also shows the instability and intersubjectivity of CED.

The execution stage is the implementation and development of the course. The execution stage emphasises negotiation and establishing a partnership between teachers and students, which is to boost interactions between sub-systems. The interaction also connects the execution stage closely with the preparation stage as a result of negotiation between the teachers and the

students. Traditional language courses normally have a linear structure (Figure 7.4) and are based on the pre-fixed content syllabus, drill practice, memorisation and non-contextualised exercises, which provide learners with much fewer opportunities to use a foreign language to communicate in a genuine social situation (Freire, 2013). The topics in CED interact more richly with one another (Freire, 2013). Instead of a fixed sequence of units in traditional course design (Figure 7.4), the learning order in CED (Figure 7.5) can be reordered depending on the interactions between different learning situations.

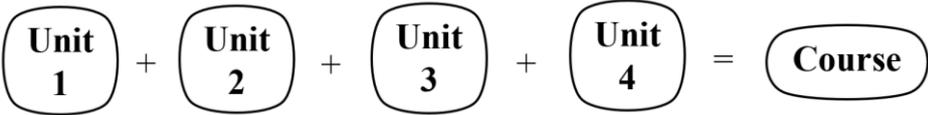


Figure 7.4: A traditional course representation (Freire, 2013: 183)

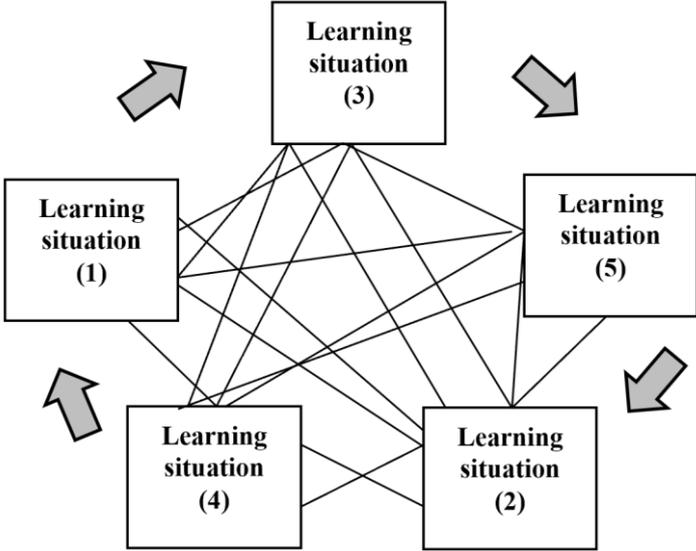


Figure 7.5: A complex (online) representation (Freire, 2013: 183)

Classroom teachers are also empowered to adjust teaching to react to spontaneous conversations between students and the IES (Freire, 2013). Through the above means, teachers and learners can craft an innovative course that connects “contents in various and unpredictable ways” (ibid., 176).

In the last reflection and evaluation stage of this study, the data of pre-tests and post-tests, questionnaires and interviews was collected. Through the observation of the course designer, the interventions were identified to inform the development of the EEC course in the next iteration cycle. The reflection stage not only consisted of the assessment of learners’ progress

but also emphasised students' self-evaluation, the course designer's and teachers' critical reflection upon the active and positive features of the course, as well as highlighting any weaker features requiring further development. CED encourages course designer(s) and teachers to learn through the experience and develop the course in the next cycle. (ibid.). This process not only applies after the executive stage but could occur throughout the preparation stage and the executive stage. For instance, an initial plan could be adjusted after consulting learners. After one or two lessons have been delivered, if the feedback from learners is not positive, or some problems are noticed, action could be taken immediately to change the coming lessons.

The above three stages of the course design are “intense”, “recursive”, “circular”, open and dialogically interconnected (Freire, 2013: 181). There is no particular order between the preparation stage, the executive stage and the reflection stage. The complex course design is orchestrated by the course designer and teacher throughout the course. However, as soon as the interaction starts with the students, the students also play important roles in the course design process (Freire, 2013).

7.2.2 Challenges of complex educational design

However, there are also challenges for CED. The first challenge is the high demands placed on course designers and teachers, especially Chinese tutors (CT), who are expected not only to have solid English language knowledge but also to be able to constantly update teaching content and knowledge to respond to the constantly changing environment. Freire (2013) also possibly considered CED to be an ideal course design theory and not impractical.

The second challenge is that the traditional education system is an exam-driven culture, which barely leaves any room for the complex course design to allow any uncertainty. As a maths teacher who has been teaching in different comprehensive secondary schools and sixth forms in the UK for over 13 years, I understand that the school education system is a closed and almost non-interactive teaching and learning environment. Classroom teachers are constantly monitored by whether they are following the pre-fixed order of scheme of work and whether the students have achieved their target grades every half term. This, in fact, discourages teachers to deepen their interactions with students and other sub-systems influencing learning.

Therefore, Freire (2013) calls for the operation of CED to evidence the model. The EEC course is a brand-new course, which is not exam-driven but built in a dynamic and complex design system. The course designers, teachers and learners are trained to be open and interactive to

teaching and learning. Therefore, the study of the EEC course is expected to illustrate an application of CED regardless of whether or not it is successful.

7.3 Articulating beliefs

Regardless of which course design model was adopted, it was necessary to elicit beliefs. Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 72) identified that learning is not only a “mental process” but also “a process between individuals and society”. Stern (1983) developed a range of contextual factors influencing language teaching and learning (Figure 7.6).

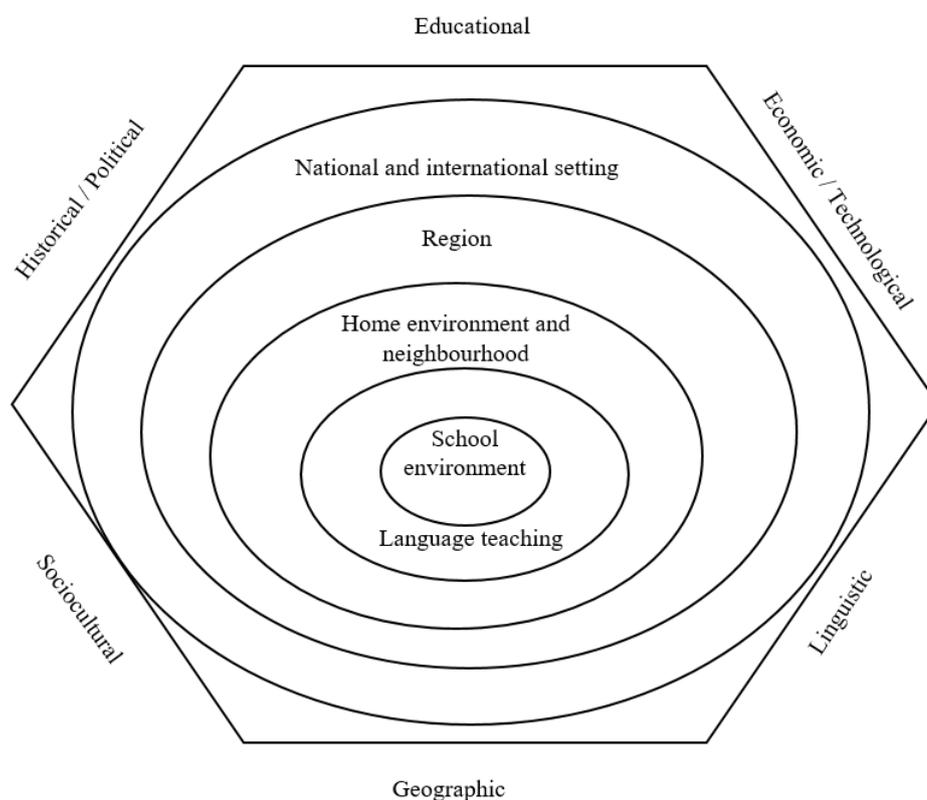


Figure 7.6: An inventory of contextual factors in language teaching (Stern, 1983: 274)

The diagram explains that language teaching is directly affected by the school environment, followed by family, the local community, and national and international settings (Stern, 1983). The outer scales are the elements that make up the influence on the above environments. Stern (1983) emphasised that beliefs regarding language teaching and learning cannot be separated from beliefs about society and culture.

To articulate our beliefs about the EEC course, we had to consider questions such as why learners should study English, what they were studying English for, and what, and how, political background affected the course (Hall, 2011). As the course designer and an EFL learner myself,

I understood that there are several different reasons for learning. For me, a language is a communication tool. Communicative competence mainly decides how one relates to others, which in turn affects one's happiness in life and the harmony of society and the world. Therefore, developing communication competence is not just about being better able to communicate with others, but also ultimately related to happiness. It is not just about the happiness of the individual, but also the happiness of society and the world.

To help learners improve their communicative competence, it was evident that the EEC course should not only help learners improve their knowledge and skills in communication, but also cultivate their personal qualities and inspire them to be self-motivated life-long learners of communication. Knowledge and skills might be sufficient for short-term communication; however, if one wishes to maintain effective communication in the long run, and in diverse contexts, personal qualities may make a significant difference. Personal qualities include those that make learners have integrity, be respectful, exercise emotional control, be self-regulated and responsible, trustworthy, resilient and open-minded, flexible, and so on. Although the EEC course could not fully contribute to developing learners' personal qualities, it was expected that learners would be influenced implicitly and develop such qualities, even unconsciously, through a variety of ways, such as discussion and the role model of teachers.

7.4 Design rationale

The focus of the EEC course was to develop learners' communicative competence. Celce-Murcia et al. (1995: 30) claimed that the framework of communicative competence provides "an integrated and principled basis for designing a language program". As discussed previously, communicative competence has a collection of sub-components. The aim of many traditional Chinese English courses is to develop learners' linguistic competence. To supplement those courses, the majority of the EEC course's learning time was devoted to developing learners' sociocultural competence and interactional competence. This is because when learners have completed six years of language learning, the emphasis on language learning should shift away from grammar teaching to a more implicit communicative learning process (Rutgers & Evans, 2015).

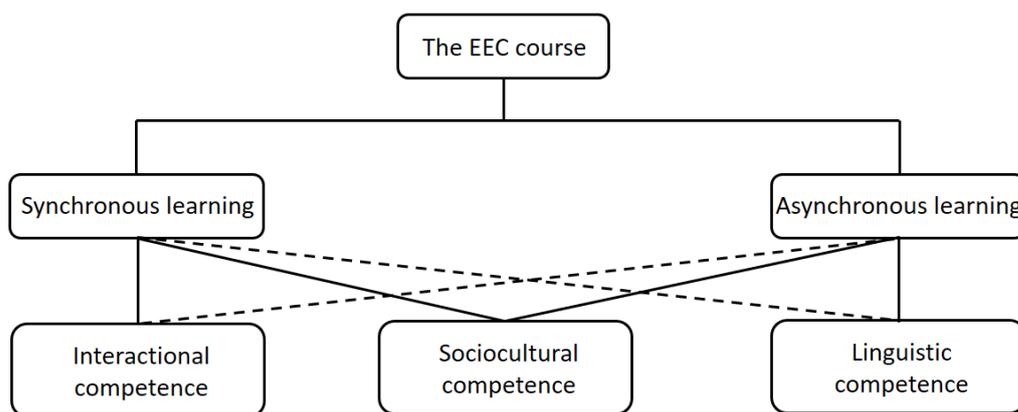


Figure 7.7: Design rationale of the EEC course (“----” means implicit language learning; “—” means explicit learning)

Undenwood (1984: 23–7, cited in Bangs & Cantos, 2004) identified some basic pedagogical principles, which were also useful to the design of the EEC course:

1. To provide learners with meaningful practice rather than drills.
2. To maximise the use of English rather than learners’ native language.
3. To teach grammar implicitly rather than explicitly.
4. To model the correct usage of language rather than correcting learners’ errors.
5. To produce a relaxed learning atmosphere to enable learners to communicate more openly and deeply.

Explicit learning is an approach whereby learners learn with conscious and deliberate attempts to achieve a learning objective (Dörnyei, 2009). In contrast, implicit language learning is where learners learn without a “conscious attempt” (ibid., 35). Dörnyei (2009) argued that although implicit language learning helps infants to grasp their first language proficiency efficiently, it does not help most school learners to grasp their second language. In other words, pure implicit language learning does not help language learners to fully grasp communicative competence in the target language learning, and vice versa (ibid.). The challenge is how to maximise the learning outcome through the cooperation of implicit and explicit learning (ibid., 36).

As an EFL learner, I agree that explicit learning is important, especially in the early stages of language learning, to help learners acquire linguistic and discourse competence. However, once learners have acquired such knowledge and skills, implicit language learning may need to play a more important role to develop learners’ interactional competence. Sociocultural competence could be taught in a more natural, implicit approach to raising learners’ sociocultural awareness

rather than merely learning cultural facts. Nonetheless, it is always useful for teachers to teach students explicitly when appropriate.

Besides, some of the principles used for the production-oriented approach (POA) (Wen, 2007) might also be useful to the EEC course. For instance, the aim of the learning-centred principle (ibid.) is to maximise the use of every minute to engage students in learning. Although it was evident that the EEC course would not be able to do this for students in the synchronous lesson, it was important to bear this principle in mind to increase the chances of students participating in the lesson as much as possible. Another principle, the whole-person education principle, regards the aim of English language teaching as being not just instrumental, but also as cultivating learners' personal qualities as a whole (Wen, 2013). Indeed, this was an important principle of the EEC course. Wen (2013) suggested that this could be developed through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities.

The rationale behind the EEC course consisted of two parts. The first part was the conceptual framework of the communicative competence defined in Chapter 2. The second part was the pedagogical strategy required to fulfil the first part. The pedagogical strategies were mainly supported by CLT (communicative language teaching) theory, CDST (complex design systems theory) and VST (Vygotsky's sociocultural theory), and CALL (computer-assisted language learning). The goal of the EEC course was to explore ways to improve learners' communicative competence in a natural communication environment. Communicative competence was taught largely implicitly in the synchronous lessons.

7.5 Needs analysis

The nature of needs analysis is qualitative (Brown, 2011). Gallagher-Brett (2004) listed 700 reasons to learn languages. At the top of the list, relevant to Chinese English learners, are communication, employability, globalisation, intercultural competence, key skills, mobility/travel, personal and social development of the individual, and values. This list provided a good collection of needs to be analysed in the pre-course questionnaire. However, the needs analysis requires further discussion.

Needs analysis in course design refers to the processes of gathering information about the needs of particular groups of learners (Brown, 2011). "Needs" are perceived as "wants, desires, demands, expectations, motivations, lacks, constraints, and requirements" (Brindley, 1984, 28). Richterich (1983) pointed out that learners may not be clear about what they need and may not

be able to describe their needs accurately. Moreover, it is likely that their needs will change after the course starts (*ibid.*). Course designers tend to overemphasise learners' linguistic needs while ignoring their other needs (Brown, 2011). Pachler et al. (2014) identified that most language learners may be able to meet the communication criteria set by the examination; yet they could struggle to communicate more complex ideas, emotions, opinions and abstract thoughts.

In the traditional approach, the curriculum and course contents are predetermined; the ongoing needs analysis may be conducted by teachers through assessment and professional judgement. However, they can hardly tailor the curriculum to the needs of students. The EEC course, on the other hand, took a complex dynamics learning approach (Freire, 2012), which was open to the needs of the students at the time. Therefore, the pre-course needs analysis and the ongoing needs analysis informed an important part of the course design. The ongoing needs analysis could be taken by questionnaire, interview or informal talk between teacher and learners. A balance had to be considered to avoid being overwhelmed by a huge amount of data. However, this approach to needs analysis had to be reviewed throughout this study.

7.6 Selection of topics or activities

One way to reflect on the understanding of students' needs is through topics. Students at different ages and levels may be interested in different topics in language learning. Byram, Zarate and Neuner (1997: 78) suggested three criteria to select topics to develop learners' sociocultural competence:

- subject-matter-oriented criteria (e.g. full details of one aspect);
- learner-oriented criteria (learners' interests; learners' needs); and
- teachability/learnability of sociocultural phenomena.

Walsh (2003) pointed out that when learners have the freedom to choose and talk about a topic, learning potential is maximised significantly. In a learner-oriented approach, the needs of the topics may vary significantly for travellers, overseas students and businessmen (Byram et al., 1997). However, all of these require day-to-day communicative ability. Evans (2011) suggested two ways to choose topics to engage students in cross-cultural online learning. The first was to discuss updated news topics, and the second was topics about the seasons of the target culture and the learners' mother culture (*ibid.*, 107). However, students may expect teachers to keep their opinions neutral so that they do not feel restricted in expressing their own opinions (Evans, 2011). The EEC course applied Evans' principle regarding the choice of topics (*ibid.*), and

topics were chosen according to the needs of the students, as well as my perception of the needs of Chinese students from my own experience as an EFL learner in the UK.

7.7 Organising the course

One of the issues relating to course organisation is the amount of time that the course should take and its frequency. Hammerly (1985: 56–9) considered that 750–950 hours are required from beginner to advanced level, while Takala (1997) suggested that 2,350 hours should be completed by students in order to move from Level 1 to 7 in the Finnish scale of general language education. Stern (1992) extended this to 3,000–5,000 hours to master the target language. Most Chinese students start learning English in school from the age of 12, spending approximately 8–10 hours per week, including homework time, to learn English. If we count 32 weeks per year, when students enter university at the age of 19, they should have spent 1,536–1,920 hours learning English and should, therefore, have reached the intermediate level. The EEC course in RC2 to RC4 focused on Year 1 and 2 university students (age 19–20), who on average spent approximately four hours per week learning English at university. The EEC course, to them, was an additional English course. The weekly time scheduled for the EEC course was two hours of synchronous learning plus two hours of asynchronous learning – a total of approximately four hours per week. According to Huhta (2002), the time required for learners to improve from one level to the next is around two hundred hours. This means that 25 weeks is the minimum course length. As a result of the time limit of the study, the EEC course was only delivered for approximately 10 to 13 weeks. Therefore, it was reasonable to expect learners on the EEC course to improve around half a level by the end of the course. However, as the definition and measurement of levels might be different in different assessment scales, it was felt that it might be more sensible to compare the progress made by the intervention group with that of the comparison group.

Another issue was the length of time. Macaro (2000) suggested that a lesson for secondary-school students should be less than 50 minutes, as it would otherwise be more difficult for students to concentrate. As the EEC course could only be delivered at weekends, it was felt that 50 minutes of lessons per week would be too short. Therefore, the EEC course divided a lesson into two or three sections. The first section was roughly 30 minutes, the second was about 1 hour, and the last plenary section was between 15 and 30 minutes. It was expected, through the change of activities, to extend the attention of the students. The findings are discussed in Chapters 7 to 10.

7.8 Developing learning resources

Selecting suitable learning materials is one of the crucial factors affecting the outcomes of learning (Burdová, 2007). Textbooks are regarded as essential and more credible for learning than “teacher-generated” or “in-house” materials (Litz, 2005: 5). They are cost-efficient and enable learners to study independently (Litz, 2005). Textbooks also reduce the workload of teachers and support them in developing their teaching strategies (ibid.). However, critics of textbooks have pointed out their inflexibility (Allwright, 1981) and inherent social and cultural biases (Renner, 1997). Some have stated that many scripts in textbooks are not natural and are remote from real-life practice (Yule, Matthis, & Hopkins, 1992).

Hutchinson and Waters (1992:107) advocated that “good materials do not teach; they encourage learners to learn”. Authentic texts enable learners to familiarise themselves with real-life language and to learn a more genuine discourse structure (Lee, 1995). However, some argued that authentic materials may demotivate learners as a result of their overwhelming vocabulary or unfamiliar cultural background (Harmer, 1996). Thus, semi-authentic textbooks are considered good material for students to build correct linguistic knowledge, as well as for learning the culture behind the language (Litz, 2005).

However, there is one important need that goes beyond the reach of textbooks. Regardless of the frequency with which the textbook updates itself, it is always lagging behind recent news, events and stories. In real life, people talk more about what is happening in the present or about what happened in the past in relation to the present. For a language course promoting communicative competence for learners at the intermediate level or above, employing the latest authentic materials is assumed to be vital to engaging learners. As a result, learning can be more natural and effective. Cultivating this learning environment can not only increase students' learning motivation but also help them to nurture the habit of observing what is happening around the world and to be able to express their opinions without being afraid and while being mindful of others.

This did not mean that the EEC course had to abandon the idea of “textbooks” or “e-textbooks”. The strength of textbooks remains in certain areas of language learning, such as knowledge of communication skills, common mistakes in communication, analysis of typical communication scenarios, and step-by-step guidance on becoming a confident communicator. In considering the above, in the part about synchronous learning, we had to ensure that the EEC course updated its topics and content with selected authentic materials, including text, audio and video; in terms

of asynchronous learning, the EEC course blended authentic materials and self-produced materials, which could be developed into textbooks in a future study.

7.9 The course design in this study

This chapter has reviewed the theories and studies of course design. Freire's complex educational design model (Freire, 2012) was employed for the EEC course, with the aim of confirming whether or not this design model was practical. Based on CED (Freire, 2013), this study developed a specific framework of course design model (Figure 7.8), composed of five stages:

1. Why and who is to take the course
2. What to achieve
3. How to assess the progress and evaluate the course
4. How to design and deliver the course
5. What are good features and what to develop

Although it is easier to understand if the course design is undertaken in the above order, in complex course design there is no particular order. As discussed in Section 7.2.1, complexity, instability and intersubjectivity (Morin, 2005) are the key features of CED. Therefore, the arrows in the diagram show such mutual impact of the five stages. However, this does not mean that there has to be a mutual impact between the two sub-systems. Sometimes there might be no mutual impact at all. In other words, it means the arrows only indicate the possibility of such mutual impact.

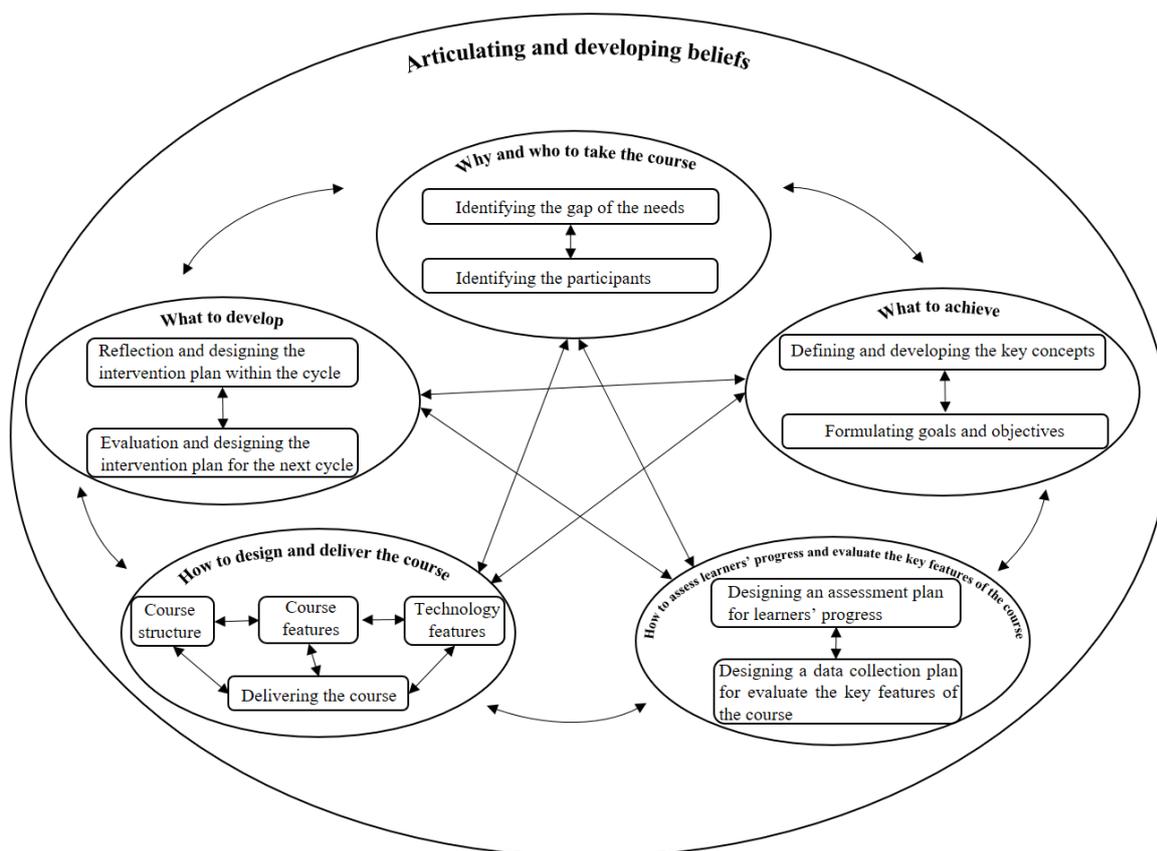


Figure 7.8: The complex course design model of the EEC course

For example, when identifying participants, a particular intervention group and a comparison group of students are identified as potential participants. However, when the assessment and evaluation plans are developed and some test collection problems are identified, this might suggest a need to adjust the initial participant group. Failing to adjust the participant group may result in the failure to collect the assessment data, which might slow down the process of course development, as it may involve more rounds of cycles to develop. Similarly, the understanding of the key concept might be developed alongside the implementation of the course. Therefore, the design of the assessment and/or evaluation plan may also be changed, especially the ones to be conducted at the end of the course. How the students perceived the five stages in this study is presented and analysed in Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12.

This chapter reviewed the course design theory, which plays a central role in bringing the previous chapters together to create a complex educational design model. Course design serves for the development of learners' communicative competence. To respond to the research questions, whether learners have made improvement in communicative competence and which course features contributed to the development, requires a justified methodology. The next chapter reviews the literature on methodology employed by the study.

Part III

8. Research methodology

This chapter reviews the literature related to the chosen research paradigm and methodology and justifies its choices. It explains why the study chose pragmatism as the research paradigm and justifies the choice of design-based research. Furthermore, the sampling, methods of data collection and data analysis including coding frameworks are examined and presented in detail in order to prepare the reader for the following four chapters describing each of the four research cycles. Validity, reliability and ethical considerations are also clarified.

8.1 Research paradigm

I consider the research paradigm underlying this study to be pragmatism. The ontology of pragmatism believes that in social science, although reality or truth can be measured based on past or existing contexts, the future reality or truth could be changed through “an active process of inquiry that creates a continual back-and-forth movement between beliefs and actions” (Morgan, 2013: 5). In other words, pragmatism regards positivism and interpretivism as two viewers describing two sides of the same coin (ibid.). I regard science and religion or spirituality as viewing objects from different angles. I accept the knowledge proved by science but also accept that the truth may exist beyond our knowledge. “Truth” may also change when conditions change. The research findings may only reflect the truth for certain moments under certain conditions. Therefore, this study embraced the paradigm of pragmatism and intended to test and produce knowledge in practice, namely, to discover and improve strategies and elements that could help Chinese university learners improve their English communicative competence.

The ontology of this study is mainly about communicative competence and approaches to help English learners improve this competence. Communicative competence is a concept that has been negotiated in past decades, but there is no precise definition of communicative competence. However, we can define and evaluate some aspects of communicative competence and design programmes to develop these aspects accordingly. There is no single truth for communicative competence; rather, it is a negotiated and interpreted concept. The approach to improving one’s communicative competence is also not a single fact.

The epistemology of pragmatism emphasises actions more than doctrines; experience more than rules (Dewey, 2008). From the research aims, it was believed that through this study the progress in the students’ communicative competence achieved through the EEC course could

be measured as a fact, but also the learning outcome could be improved through developing or designing new approaches to the course based on evaluation of the previous assessment of the learning outcome. RQ1 (Research Question 1) reflected the aspect of positivism, as its aim was to evaluate the learning outcome of the participants, and the aim of RQ2 (Research Question 2) was to interpret and renegotiate a better method to solve problems in order to improve communicative competence.

RQ1: *Does the EEC course improve learners' linguistic, interactional and sociocultural communicative competence in English, in comparison with learners undertaking the usual university course in English? If so, in what ways?*

RQ2: *How do learners perceive the features of the EEC course, which influence their progress in linguistic, intercultural and sociocultural communicative competence in English?*

Pragmatism can be supported by design-based research and is closely related to mixed-methods research, including both quantitative and qualitative methods (Biesta, 2010). Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) pointed out that pragmatists tend to design their study in a more holistic way. Quantitative and qualitative data can not only deepen and broaden but also triangulate findings (ibid.). Qualitative research enables participants' voices to be heard, while quantitative research can help to generalise findings that qualitative research could hardly do (ibid.). The next section reviews design-based research and discusses the reasons why I chose to use it for this study.

8.2 Research strategy

8.2.1 Design-based research

Design-based research is “a term used to describe a particular stance taken to design-based and intervention-based studies of learning in naturalistic settings” (Tabak, 2004: 226). It is sometimes also called “design research” (Oha & Reeves, 2010), “design experiments” (DiSessa & Cobb, 2004) or “development research” (Conceicao, Sherry, & Gibson, 2004; Oha & Reeves, 2010). It has three key features:

- A design feature: based on theory, literature or a degree of practical knowledge and intuition, design an intervention that seeks to promote a set of learning goals typically recognised to be important but difficult to achieve.
- An empirical feature: implement the intervention in a naturalistic setting and collect data about its success to promote the intended learning goals.

- An iterative feature: integrate a cyclical approach to the design, implementation and refinement of the intervention.

(Cobb et al., 2003; Akker, Gravemeijer, McKenney, & Nieveen, 2006)

In other words, design-based research is a research strategy that aims not only to build theory but also to impact practice through designing and testing interventions with a number of iterations (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012). The theories that design-based research has built up can be “descriptive, explanatory, or predictive in nature”; they can also be “more prescriptive/normative, providing guidance for future design efforts” (McKenney & Reeves, 2013: 98). Such a theory is expected to contribute to teaching and learning, and maybe even educational reform (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). Some individual design-based studies have shown significant impact on practice, such as the studies of Barab, Gresalfi and Ingram-Goble (2010), Clarke and Dede (2009) and Swan (2007). However, it has been argued that most design-based research could only show the potential impact on practice rather than its genuine impact because many were ongoing rather than complete (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; McKenney & Reeves, 2013). It is also considered that the nature of design-based research requires a single research programme to go through multiple cycles of study over a long time (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). However, the impact of design-based research can first be built at a local level, then developed at a national level and finally at a global level (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003).

The CED theory of the EEC course underpins the design-based research. Both the design feature and empirical feature are represented not only in the preparation stage (Figure 7.3), but also through the interactions between the preparation, execution and reflection stages. The iterative feature is represented in the development of the EEC course from one research cycle to the next and in the parallel developing understanding of how to better promote Chinese students’ English communicative competence.

McKenney, Reeves and Oliver (2007) suggested that design-based research fits into a doctorate study fairly well in terms of length. For established researchers, design-based research requires conditions that allow them to conduct research over a number of years with sufficient funding (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012).

To generalise the effectiveness of interventions in all contexts, a study also needs to be undertaken in a variety of contexts, as interventions that might be successful in one context may not necessarily prove effective in another (The Design-based Research Collective, 2003). To

avoid the attempt to identify irrelevant factors as elements of the intervention, interventions should be focused on “interactions between materials, teachers, and learners”, which may also include “activity structures, institutions, scaffolds, and curricula” (The Design-Based Collective, 2003: 5–6).

The study of Anderson and Shattuck (2012) demonstrated that out of 47 articles related to design-based research between 2002 and 2011, approximately 73 per cent were conducted by researchers in the USA, followed by 5 per cent in the Netherlands and 4 per cent in the UK and Singapore. Out of 45 articles, roughly 51 per cent of research topics were about science and only 5 per cent on the English language. Out of 34 articles, approximately 23 per cent were based on two-year cycles, 18 per cent on three-year cycles, 9 per cent on four-year cycles, 6 per cent on five-year cycles and 9 per cent on seven-year cycles (*ibid.*). The research methods were a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative methods played a key role in evaluating the success of an intervention, while the qualitative methods played a vital role in clarifying features supporting the effectiveness of a certain intervention (*ibid.*).

Ruthven and Hofmann (2013) employed design-based research to produce a probability module that represents the STEM pedagogical model to improve maths teaching and learning at early secondary level. A few trials took place prior to the formal iteration stage. The iterative development of modules was composed of three cycles over two years, and any problems were identified. Careful consideration and more detailed observations were suggested to judge the conflicting feedback. The learning gains between pre- and post-test were evaluated against the comparison groups. This study is a good example of how to apply design-based research in education. Ruthven (2013) also indicated that an increasing number of researchers, such as Hoyles, Noss, Vahey and Roschelle (2013), Sensevy, Forest, Quilio and Morales (2013), and Swan, Pead, Dorman and Mooldijk (2013), have adopted design-based research to develop effective ways of generating innovative educational designs to inform educational improvement.

8.2.2 The choice of design-based research

Design-based research is a relatively new methodology that emerged in the 1990s. However, why did this study choose design-based research rather than similar research strategies, such as quasi-experimental research or action research? Focusing on the ultimate aim of design-based research helps us to understand how action research and design-based research differ, even though they both serve the same research paradigm – pragmatism (Cole, Purao, Rossi, & Sein, 2005). Although both approaches set out to improve an issue identified in practice through a

cyclical process, action research seeks to solve problems or issues of existing phenomena (Denscombe, 2007: 123), while design-based research sets out to develop a design that may not have existed before the study (Cobb et al., 2003). Elliott (1991: 49) noted that “the fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge”. Taber (2014: 8) supported this statement and further pointed out that decisions about action research “may be made which compromise methodological purity for the sake of practical outcomes”. As the EEC course was not an existing course but designed in this study to generate new knowledge, this study does not fit into the key feature of action research, which is to improve existing practice.

Similar to design-based research, quasi-experimental research also employs pre-tests, treatment or intervention, and post-tests; it also compares results between the intervention and the comparison groups. Quasi-experimental research aims to analyse an existing physical or psychological phenomenon, while design-based research seeks to develop new theories and hypotheses (Collins, 1992). A quasi-experiment would normally be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a given intervention, such as “an instructional program, a textbook, or a policy”; whereas design-based research would seek to develop an effective intervention to address an important problem (related to students’ learning) for which a solution is not yet available and to create new “learning conditions” that are “not commonly practised or are not well understood” (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003: 5). Of course, in the process of developing an effective intervention, a design experiment would also engage in the evaluation of learning outcomes. In this sense, it is legitimate, even desirable, for design-based research to include pre- and post-tests, as well as a comparison group that is comparable to the intervention group (De Corte, 2000).

The learning goals targeted by the intervention of the EEC course were to improve Chinese students’ English communicative competence, which is valued in China, but existing courses are failing to reach the expected level. The course as a whole was an intervention, which was refined after each cycle to improve the achievement of the learning goals. The EEC course as an online course was delivered in a naturalistic setting. An evaluation was conducted, and data was collected to inform the refinement of the intervention from one cycle to the next.

The study designed its own new online virtual course (the EEC), which was different to studying an existing treatment in quasi-experimental research. On the whole, this study entailed all three features of design-based research: a design feature, an empirical feature and an iterative

feature. Therefore, I consider this study to be design-based research. Four research cycles, including evaluation in support of the intervention to refine the course design, were conducted over four years. In comparison to the study of Anderson and Shattuck (2012), where only 9 per cent of design-based research was conducted over four-year cycles, the scale of this research as a doctorate study compares favourably with other design-based research.

8.2.3 The difference in status between RC1/2 and RC3/4

In design-based research, every research cycle informs the intervention plan for the next cycle. However, there were some significant differences between the purposes of RC1/2 and RC3/4. First, although this study identified research questions at the beginning of RC1, it was not clear which elements of communicative competence the EEC course had more impact on, and it was also not clear which assessment methods could collect the data to show the progress of both the intervention group and the comparison group, and in which elements of communicative competence. Therefore, the aim of RC1/2 was to deliver the EEC course and explore clearer answers to the above questions by investigating the perceptions of the intervention-group students and further reviewing the literature. By the end of RC1/2, interactional and sociocultural competence had been identified as the two sub-competencies of communicative competence where the EEC course had the most impact on the students. A short IELTS general writing test and PQA (presentation with a focus on Q&A) test were also identified as two practical tests that could be used to collect the test data from both the intervention group and the comparison group. The identification of these two tests was based on several test trials in RC1 and RC2. Therefore, the data collected in RC1 and RC2 was mainly used to inform the design of RC3 and RC4.

The second difference between RC1/2 and RC3/4 concerned foreign English teachers. In RC1/2, the EEC lessons were mainly delivered by the researcher, a Chinese teacher of English. However, in RC3/4, the main lessons were all taught by the IES (invited English speakers). The first reason for not inviting foreign English speakers to deliver all the main lessons in RC1/2 was because, as the course designer, I wanted to know how the EEC course could be delivered. Second, I was short of funding. For a doctorate student, it was costly to invite foreign English teachers to deliver all the lessons. Thus, RC3/4 represented more of the EEC course, while RC1/2 represented only trials of the course. It is hoped that clarification of the differences between RC1/2 and RC3/4 will help the reader understand why the data collection and analysis were lighter in RC1/2 than in RC3/4.

8.3 How the EEC course incorporates opportunities for the development of sociocultural and interactional competence

Although communicative competence was the aim of the EEC course, initially it was not clear which aspects of communicative competence the EEC course was able to help learners to improve. It was through the iteration process that the EEC course developed its course features to facilitate the development of communicative competence, which are discussed at the end of each research cycle chapter (Section 9.4, 10.5, 11.6, 12.6).

The EEC course was designed to develop learners' sociocultural and interactional competence. Tables 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3 demonstrate how the course features of the EEC course in RC1 to RC4 supported the development of the above two sub-communicative competencies and linked with the related literature reviewed. As a result of the word limit, this section discusses a few examples of how the EEC course incorporated opportunities to develop sociocultural and interactional competence and related such course features with the literature reviewed in the previous chapters.

Course feature example 1: Having conversations with IES specialised in the topics (Tables 8.1 and 8.2)

Nunan (1991, cited in Sreehari, 2012: 88) pointed out that teachers should provide learners with a learning environment so that they can communicate through interaction in the target language. Yet, this requires "a high level of proficiency in the target language and strong sociolinguistic competence in the target language culture" (Hu, 2002: 99). Not only Chinese English teachers but also native English teachers may not satisfy this expectation to teach all aspects of the target culture with expert knowledge or first-hand experience. Therefore, the EEC course employed the advantages of Internet technology, with the intention of resolving this problem by inviting different foreign English speakers to lead the conversation about topics that the students were interested and specialised in, in a synchronous learning platform, in order to really trigger students' motivation and curiosity to learn the target culture. This was also in line with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (VST) (1978) to help learners reach their zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) through interaction with more knowledgeable others (MKO).

Although it is increasingly popular to invite native English speakers to teach English online, the EEC course selected its IES mainly based on whether the IES had knowledge or experience in the topics, and whether the topics were what the students were interested in, or could benefit

from.

One of the critiques of this approach of teaching is that although the specialised IES could provide students with their specialist knowledge in the topics through authentic conversations, they might not necessarily know how best to teach the lessons to achieve the learning objectives and develop students' communicative competence with a good understanding of teaching pedagogy. This, in fact, was the intention of the EEC course: to provide students with authentic communication experience with IES who were genuinely having a conversation with them. However, strategies have also been designed to address this issue. First, the course designer would discuss with the IES and draft an initial plan to decide the focus of the lesson, possible delivery approaches, and suggest some key questions for the IES to use to provoke students' thinking. The reason for not asking the IES to follow a rigid lesson plan was to give teachers the flexibility to respond to the unpredictable when interacting with the students. This is because a CED promotes interactions among sub-systems (Freire, 2013) according to the learning theory of complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). Second, a CT (Chinese tutor) played a critical role in assisting the IES to steer the direction of the lesson towards achieving the learning goals and ensuring that the content of the conversation did not go against the ethics or breach the law. The CT also assisted the IES with typing in the keywords/sentences or posting the relevant photos instantly to assist students' understanding. The CT also drew attention to the performance of each student and made sure that every student was engaged and interacting in the lesson with an approximately equal opportunity.

Course feature example 2: Encouraging and respecting different opinions in the discussion (Tables 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3)

To help learners improve, for instance, critical thinking skills (Hu, 2002), educators should cultivate a good social learning environment to provide learners with a warm, healthy and fertilising learning soil (Vygotsky, 1997). Communicative language teaching (CLT) encourages the construction of knowledge through communication and regards students expressing their own opinions as a positive contribution to learning (Hu, 2002). This is very different from traditional Chinese education culture, in which the teacher is regarded as the authority of knowledge. On the other hand, Chinese learners tend to be shy in order to avoid “appearing bold and overly assertive or standing out in the group” (Dong et al., 2014). Therefore, Chinese students may not want to express themselves, especially when they know their opinions are different from others. The EEC course was intended to help students overcome shyness and be more open to expressing their individual opinions. To achieve this, both the IES and CT were

expected to be role models for respecting different opinions even though they might disagree with the opinion. In this way, the EEC course produced an open and relaxed environment in which students would feel comfortable expressing themselves and interacting with others.

Course feature example 3: Choose topics that are meaningful and interesting to the students (Table 8.2 and 8.3)

As Vygotsky (1997) identified, in order to attract and maintain students' interest, the only way is to teach students things that are meaningful to them. For most English courses in China, meaningful means passing exams. Although it is essential to pass the exams, my personal experience tells me that, to study and live overseas, it is more important to understand the target culture and be able to adapt oneself to the target culture when required. These abilities may not be gained through preparing for exams, as the current English exams are restricted mainly to linguistic competence and limited sociocultural competence in simple contexts. As a result, this is something that is missing in many English language courses, as their focus is on passing exams.

The choice of topics of the EEC course was based on what was meaningful and interesting to students. Topics that are meaningful might not appear interesting to students in the first place. For instance, the topic of John Lennon and Yoko Ono was meaningful to the students, as it tells a love story representing when eastern culture meets western culture. However, the topic may not be attractive to students, as the figures are remote to Chinese students, who have little knowledge of them. This requires the teacher, who has substantial knowledge and interest in this topic, to deliver it in such a way as to transfer this passion to the students. The topics of the EEC course also reacted to what was happening around the world spontaneously. For instance, when the Olympics was held in London, the EEC course delivered a series of topics about London, the Olympics and British culture. When Nepal encountered an earthquake, the EEC course delivered a lesson about the earthquake and discussed students' own experiences of the earthquake, escaping skills and other related geographic issues.

Ultimately, however, the extent to which a topic and its presentation by the teacher were of interest to the students was an empirical question that was explored partly through students' perceptions about the EEC. The effective choice of topics was also measured by whether the topics provoked students' desires to express themselves and interact with others (Walsh, 2012: 12). Through a meaningful and interest-based choice of topics, the EEC course intended to integrate language and whole-person education to develop their communicative competence

holistically (Sreehari, 2012: 91).

Both Tables 8.1 and Table 8.2 illustrate how the EEC course features were designed to develop learners' sociocultural competence and were linked to the related literature. The course features were further illustrated as activities, which were classified into synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. The related literature was also associated with the corresponding activities. Table 8.1 addresses the course features that develop social and cultural awareness and the ability to control appropriateness. Table 8.2 explains how the EEC course features were designed to develop learners' personal qualities for sociocultural competence, which includes: openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking. Table 8.3 clarifies how the EEC course features addressed the development of interactional competence, including: understanding the interlocutor's message; the ability to respond (appropriately) to the interlocutors; and using alternative communicative strategies.

Table 8.1: How the EEC course addressed the development of students’ sociocultural awareness and the ability to control appropriateness

Key elements	Key features identified in the literature	Synchronous learning		Asynchronous learning	
		Activities	Related literature	Activities	Related literature
<p>Appropriateness is the fact or quality of being suitable or right for a particular situation or purpose (Cambridge Dictionary)</p>					
Appropriateness (Hymes, 1972; Alptekin, 2002; Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006)	Controls the cultural or stylistic appropriateness and the appropriateness of conversations, speeches or writing in different social contexts	Presentation with a focus on Q&A (students choose their own topics)	<p>Why let the students choose their own topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To draw and maintain students’ interest, the only way is to teach learners things that are meaningful to them (Vygotsky, 1997) <p>Why focus on Q&A?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning to communicate should be through interaction in the target language (Nunan, 1991, cited in Sreehari, 2012) CLT encourages learning from constructing knowledge through communication (Hu, 2002) If anxiety is at the right level, it could promote learners to take challenging tasks. Teachers can adjust the anxiety level to help learners cultivate their best potential (Cui, 2016) 	Authentic (online) learning resources/tasks	<p>What is authentic material?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authentic material refers to any form of resources that are not specially prepared for pedagogical purposes (Richard, 2001) <p>Why choose authentic (online) learning resources?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT decides its own teaching and learning materials, which are most authentic from real life (Tomlinson, 2001) The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013)
		Discussion with foreign English speakers who are specialised in the topic (see Course Feature example 1)	<p>Why organise students to discuss with foreign English speakers who are specialised in the topic?</p> <p><i>Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, especially ZPD</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge is gained through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978) Based on the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (Veer & Valsiner, 1991), learners can reach the zone of proximal development (ZPD) with the assistance of more knowledgeable others (MKO) (Veer & Valsiner, 1991) ZPD is between the actual zone that learners can achieve by themselves and the zone that learners cannot achieve even with help 	Individual feedback and support	<p>Why give individual feedback and support?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing on communication itself is not sufficient for language learning (Alamri, 2018). CLT requires teachers to correct learners’ form errors, especially critical ones related to “interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning” (Alamri, 2018: 134). To draw and maintain students’ interest, the only way is to teach learners things that are meaningful to them (Vygotsky, 1997) The whole-person education principle can be achieved through thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013)

			<p><i>CLT theory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT encourages learning from constructing knowledge through communication (Hu, 2002) • Learning to communicate should be through interaction in the target language (Nunan, 1991, cited in Sreehari, 2012) • CLT requires teachers to have "a high level of proficiency in the target language and strong sociolinguistic competence in the target language culture" (Hu, 2002: 99) • "Teach language skills in integration so that learners can learn the language holistically" (Sreehari, 2012: 91) • If anxiety is at the right level, it could promote learners to take challenging tasks. Teachers can adjust the anxiety level to help learners cultivate their best potential (Cui, 2016). • <i>Physical learning environment limitation</i> • Students do not have to go abroad to develop intercultural communicative competence. If students have opportunities to interact with foreign English speakers, they have a chance to improve sociocultural competence (Zhang & Zhang, 2015). • It is more difficult for Chinese English learners to develop sociocultural communicative competence with peers in a "homogeneous culture" (Sun, 2014: 1066) 		
		Plenary discussion with Chinese English teacher	<p>Why conduct plenary?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT encourages learning from constructing knowledge through communication (Hu, 2002) 	Writing tasks	<p>Why choose writing tasks?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on communication itself is not sufficient for language learning (Alamri, 2018). CLT requires teachers to correct learners' form errors, especially critical ones related to "interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning" (Alamri, 2018: 134).
		Role-play activities	<p>Possible role-play activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corbett (2010) suggested a variety of activities to help learners deal with conflicts in sociocultural communication. Most 	Social media	<p>Why use social media?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers should not only play the role of facilitator or adviser but also interact productively with

			<p>activities were designed to take place in 40-minute lessons and for intermediate and above-average language learners (ibid.). The activities included "requesting and complaining", "answering job interview questions", "resolving personal incidents", the "language of conflicts", "listening to complaints", "understanding and resolving differences", "making suggestions and seeking consensus", and "stating opinions" and "defending positions" (ibid., 32–51).</p>	<p>learners, both inside and outside the lessons (Alamri, 2018)</p> <p>What are the principles when using social media?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use social media as lifelong learning support (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003:3) • Upload posts that are meaningful to students to attract and maintain students' interest (Vygotsky, 1997) • Use social media as a platform for whole-person education (Wen, 2013)
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Table 8.2: How the EEC course addressed the development of personal qualities for sociocultural competence

Key elements	Key features identified in the literature	Synchronous learning		Asynchronous learning	
		Activities	Related literature	Activities	Related literature
Openness	Respects and opens to other cultures and others' opinions	Openness indicates how an individual can free the mind from "previous ways of thinking that have worked in the past" and to tolerate the ambiguity of not knowing or being able to predict the likely outcomes of one's actions (Matsumoto et al., 2001: 486)			
		Main lesson discussion with foreign English speakers who are specialised in the topic of the target culture to open students' views (see Course feature example 1)	<p>Why discuss with invited English speakers (IES) to open views?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is more difficult for Chinese English learners to develop sociocultural communicative competence with peers in a "homogeneous culture" (Sun, 2014: 1066) CLT requires teachers to have "a high level of proficiency in the target language and strong sociolinguistic competence in the target language culture" (Hu, 2002: 99) Based on the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (Veer & Valsiner, 1991), learners can reach the zone of proximal development (ZPD) with the assistance of more knowledgeable others (MKO) (Veer & Valsiner, 1991) CLT encourages learning from constructing knowledge through communication (Hu, 2002) 	Authentic online learning resources/tasks	<p>What is authentic material?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authentic material refers to any form of resources that are not specially prepared for pedagogical purposes (Richard, 2001) <p>Why choose authentic (online) learning resources?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT decides its own teaching and learning materials, which are most authentic from real life (Tomlinson, 2001) The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013)
		Encourages and respects different opinions in the discussion (see Course feature example 2)	<p>How to encourage students to respect different opinions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher should create understanding jointly by organising students to debate or discuss a topic from a variety of views (Walsh, 2002) CLT encourages students to develop critical thinking skills, and it is not regarded as disrespectful to challenge the teacher (Hu, 2002) Vygotsky (1997) encourages the cultivation of a good social learning environment to provide learners with a warm, healthy and fertilising learning soil to let learners develop themselves 	Social media	<p>Why use social media?</p> <p>Teachers should not only play the role of facilitator or adviser but also interact productively with learners, both inside and outside the lessons (Alamri, 2018)</p> <p>What are the principles when using social media?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use social media as lifelong learning support (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003:3) Upload posts that are meaningful to students to draw and maintain students' interest (Vygotsky, 1997) Use social media as a platform for whole-person education (Wen, 2013)

Flexibility demonstrates one's ability to take alternative approaches if the previous approach is not working (Matsumoto et al., 2001)				
Flexibility	Thinks of alternative solution approaches to the problem	Encourages students to contribute more than one solution to a problem in the discussion	Flexibility supports individuals to find alternative approaches when the previous social experience proves to be unsuccessful (Matsumoto et al., 2001)	<p>Individual feedback and support</p> <p>Why give individual feedback and support?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on communication itself is not sufficient for language learning (Alamri, 2018). CLT requires teachers to correct learners' form errors, especially critical ones related to "interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning" (Alamri, 2018: 134). • To draw and maintain students' interest, the only way is to teach learners things that are meaningful to them (Vygotsky, 1997) • The whole-person education principle can be achieved through thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013)
				<p>Social media</p> <p>Why use social media?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers should not only play the role of facilitator or adviser but also interact productively with learners, both inside and outside the lessons (Alamri, 2018) <p>What are the principles when using social media?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use social media as lifelong learning support (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003:3) • Upload posts that are meaningful to students to draw and maintain students' interest (Vygotsky, 1997) • Use social media as a platform for whole-person education (Wen, 2013)
	Responds flexibly or spontaneously	Trains students to answer questions spontaneously	<p>Why train students to answer questions spontaneously?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT encourages language learners to communicate in the target language through the process of struggling to communicate (Finocchiaro & Brumfitqtd, in Brown, 2007: 49) <p>How to train students to answer questions spontaneously?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vygotsky (1997) encourages the cultivation of a good social learning environment to provide learners with a warm, healthy and fertilising learning soil to let them develop themselves 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If anxiety is at the right level, it could promote learners to take challenging tasks. Teachers can adjust the anxiety level to help learners cultivate their best potential (Cui, 2016). <p>What are the potential problems when training students to respond spontaneously?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shyness is defined as “a mental attitude that predisposes people to be extremely concerned about the social evaluation of them by others” (Zimbardo & Radl, 1981: 9). However, it is argued that shyness in China may be a regulated social action to avoid “appearing bold and overly assertive or standing out in the group”, which is regarded as positive and encouraged by Chinese culture (Dong et al., 2014) and politics. • Teachers should encourage and engage learners in the conversation when there is silence or shyness in the discussion (Walsh, 2012) 		
	Asks students to chair presentation with a focus on Q&A time in turn	<p>Why ask students to chair the presentation with a focus on the Q&A section?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT encourages learning from constructing knowledge through communication (Hu, 2002) • “Teach language skills in integration so that learners can learn the language holistically” (Sreehari, 2012: 91) 		
Transfer new ideas or thoughts to real life	Teaches up-to-date spontaneous hot topics, which raises the attention of the world (see Course feature example 3)	<p>Why teach spontaneous hot topics?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning should connect what learners are interested in to their real life in the real world (Vygotsky, 1997) • To draw and maintain students’ interest, the only way is to teach learners things that are meaningful to them (Vygotsky, 1997) • “Teach language skills in integration so that learners can learn the language holistically” (Sreehari, 2012: 91) 		
	Encourages students to talk about their real-life stories, which shows their flexibility	<p>Why encourage students to talk about their real-life stories?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vygotsky (1997) emphasises connecting what learners are interested in to their real life in the real world • To draw and maintain students’ interest, the only way is to teach learners things that are meaningful to them (Vygotsky, 1997) • The course should be designed in such a way that students can apply what they have learnt in the course to their real life to reconstruct themselves (Barnett, 1997) 		

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Teach language skills in integration so that learners can learn the language holistically” (Sreehari, 2012: 91) • Teachers should not only play the role of facilitator or adviser but also interact productively with learners, both inside and outside the lessons (Alamri, 2018) • Vygotsky (1997) encourages cultivating a good social learning environment to provide learners with a warm, healthy and fertilising learning soil to let them develop 		
Emotional regulation	Emotional regulation refers to how individuals continue to think clearly in sociocultural incidents "without retreating into psychological defences", which is regarded as a "gatekeeper skill" for sociocultural adjustment (Matsumoto et al., 2001: 485)				
	Understands and manages one’s own emotions in positive ways	Discusses topics or undertakes activities that are related to emotional regulation	<p>What are the possible topics or activities relating to emotional regulation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corbett (2010) suggested a variety of activities to help learners deal with conflicts in sociocultural communication. Most activities were designed to take place in 40-minute lessons and for intermediate and above-average language learners (ibid.). The activities included "requesting and complaining", "answering job interview questions", "resolving personal incidents", the "language of conflicts", "listening to complaints", "understanding and resolving differences", "making suggestions and seeking consensus", and "stating opinions" and "defending positions" (ibid., 32–51). • “Teach language skills in integration so that learners can learn the language holistically” (Sreehari, 2012: 91) • The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013) 	Authentic online learning resources/tasks	<p>What is authentic material?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentic material refers to any form of resources that are not specially prepared for pedagogical purposes (Richard, 2001) <p>Why choose authentic (online) learning resources?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT decides its own teaching and learning materials, which are most authentic from real life (Tomlinson, 2001) • The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013)
	Empathises with others	Teachers lead examples or encourage students to show empathy for others	<p>Why develop students’ empathy for others?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vygotsky (1997) encourages cultivating a good social learning environment to provide learners with a warm, healthy and fertilising learning soil to let them develop • “Teach language skills in integration so that learners can learn the language holistically” (Sreehari, 2012: 91) • The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013) 	Individual feedback and support	<p>Why give individual feedback and support?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on communication itself is not sufficient for language learning (Alamri, 2018). CLT requires teachers to correct learners’ form errors, especially critical ones related to “interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning” (Alamri, 2018: 134). • To draw and maintain students’ interest, the only way is to teach learners things that are meaningful to them (Vygotsky, 1997)

	<p>Asks the students challenging questions to push them out of their comfort zone and help them develop strategies to control emotions and respond appropriately in such unexpected situations</p>	<p>Why ask students challenging questions to push them out of their comfort zone?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT encourages language learners to communicate in the target language through the process of struggling to communicate (Finocchiaro & Brumfitqtd, in Brown, 2007: 49) • One of the pedagogies to help learners build up a robust internal cue is to expose them to an uncomfortable situation in communication but to validate every little effort or improvement they make by listening to learners with patience and responding to their speaking with "praise" or "constructive criticism" (Valerie, 2005: 55) • If anxiety is at the right level, it can promote learners to take challenging tasks. Teachers can adjust the anxiety level to help learners cultivate their best potential (Cui, 2016). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole-person education principle can be achieved through thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013)
	<p>Manage stress/pressure and dealing with conflicts or dilemmas</p> <p>Encourages students to talk about their real-life experience in dealing with conflicts</p>	<p>Why encourage students to talk about their real-life experience in dealing with conflicts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vygotsky (1997) emphasises connecting what learners are interested in to their real life in the real world • It is believed that interactional competence may only truly be grasped through real-life experience (Sun, 2014) • It was also necessary to design the course in such a way that the students could apply what they had learnt in the course to their real life to reconstruct themselves (Barnett, 1997) • To draw and maintain students' interest, the only way is to teach learners things that are meaningful to them (Vygotsky, 1997) • Two features of CLT (Nunan, 1991, cited in Sreehari, 2012: 88): "An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning."; "An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom" • CLT decides its own teaching and learning materials, which are most authentic from real life (Tomlinson, 2001) • CLT encourages learning from constructing knowledge through communication (Hu, 2002) 	

Critical thinking is not only comparing the original culture with the target culture in an analytical way but also monitoring one's own behaviour and reflecting upon oneself and the others around oneself (Matsumoto et al., 2001)					
Critical thinking	Organises arguments towards an idea or thoughts to reduce biased opinion and breed clarity of thoughts	Encourages students to express their different views or challenge their own views in the discussion (see Course feature example 2)	Why encourage students to express different views or challenge their views? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching English should embrace critical thinking skills by provoking students to think from different perspectives (Halualani, 2011) CLT encourages students to develop critical thinking skills, and it is not regarded as disrespectful to challenge the teacher (Hu, 2002) 	Authentic online learning resources/tasks	What is authentic material? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authentic material refers to any form of resources that are not specially prepared for pedagogical purposes (Richard, 2001) Why choose authentic (online) learning resources? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT decides its own teaching and learning materials, which are most authentic from real life (Tomlinson, 2001) The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013)
		Comparing the target culture and learners' culture	Why compare the target culture with learners' native culture? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scarino (2010: 324) pointed out that teaching the culture of a foreign language should not be separated from students' mother culture and their own identities and values Compare both the target culture and the students' mother culture (Singh & Singh, 1999). It also integrates elements such as personal values, social values, personal qualities and the construction of oneself to help students build up a foundation of sociocultural competence (Byram, 2014). 		

Table 8.3: How the EEC course addressed the development of interactional competence

Key elements	Key features identified in the literature	Synchronous learning		Asynchronous learning	
		Activities	Related literature	Activities	Related literature
Understanding the interlocutor's message (May, 2011)	Shows willingness to listen and the ability to understand interlocutor's message	Chooses topics that are interesting or meaningful to the students (see Course feature example 3)	<p>Why choose topics that are interesting or meaningful to the students?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To draw and maintain students' interest, the only way is to teach learners things that are meaningful to them (Vygotsky, 1997) The interaction should be context-based, which means there is a context provoking students' real intentions to express themselves and interact with others (Walsh, 2012: 12) The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013) 	Authentic online learning resources/tasks	<p>What is authentic material?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authentic material refers to any form of resources that are not specially prepared for pedagogical purposes (Richard, 2001) <p>Why choose authentic (online) learning resources?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT decides its own teaching and learning materials, which are most authentic from real life (Tomlinson, 2001) The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013)
		English-speaking teachers or Chinese tutor type the keywords or sentences in the chat box to assist students' understanding	<p>Why type keywords or sentences in the chat box to assist students' understanding?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT does not intend to throw learners into a swimming pool of communication to let them sink or swim (Harmer, 1982). Teachers should not only play the role of facilitator or adviser but also provide learners with feedback, correct their mistakes or inappropriateness and interact effectively with learners, both inside and outside the lessons (Alamri, 2018). 	Social media	<p>Why use social media?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers should not only play the role of facilitator or adviser but also interact productively with learners, both inside and outside the lessons (Alamri, 2018) <p>What are the principles when using social media?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use social media as lifelong learning support (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003:3) Upload posts that are meaningful to students to attract and maintain their interest (Vygotsky, 1997) Use social media as a platform for whole-person education (Wen, 2013)

		Use PowerPoints, pictures or texts to assist students' understanding	<p>Why use PowerPoint, pictures or texts to assist students' understanding?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the most influential classifications of learning styles is according to learners' learning preference: visual, auditory, tactile, and kinaesthetic (Reid, 1987). The most popular learning styles for Chinese learners are visual and auditory (Cui, 2016). 	Learning website	<p>Why design and use a learning website?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT does not intend simply to throw learners into a swimming pool of communication to let them sink or swim (Harmer, 1982). Teachers should not only play the role of facilitator or adviser but also provide learners with feedback, correct their mistakes or inappropriateness and interact effectively with learners, both inside and outside lessons (Alamri, 2018). • The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013)
Ability to respond (appropriately) to the interlocutor (May, 2011)	Expresses ideas and opinions	Every student must do a presentation weekly in turn	<p>Why must every student do a presentation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT encourages learning from constructing knowledge through communication (Hu, 2002) 		
	Responds to interlocutor	Every student must answer questions multiple times with equal opportunity, no matter how good or bad the answers are (see Course feature example 2)	<p>Why must every student have multiple chances to answer the questions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing learners with opportunities to “complete loops of conversation” is suggested as an effective way to help learners gain interactional competence through real-life situations (Sun, 2014: 1067). • CLT encourages language learners to communicate in the target language through the process of struggling to communicate (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, in Brown, 2007: 49) <p>Why not emphasise flawless speaking?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the common misconceptions is that language teaching should train learners to be flawless native-like speakers or conflict-free communicators who speak in a way that avoids conflict and who get along with everyone (Carr, 1999) 		

		<p>Every student must have multiple chances to ask questions in responding to the teacher(s)' or other student(s)' talks</p>	<p>Why must every student have multiple chances to ask questions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT encourages language learners to communicate in the target language through the process of struggling to communicate (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, in Brown, 2007: 49) • Providing learners with opportunities to “complete loops of conversation” is suggested as an effective way to help learners gain interactional competence through real-life situations (Sun, 2014: 1067) • If anxiety is at the right level, it could promote learners to take challenging tasks. Teachers can adjust the anxiety level to help learners cultivate their best potential (Cui, 2016). 		
		<p>Reduces teacher’s talking time, mainly error correction, and teacher echoe time, to maximise learners’ interaction opportunity</p>	<p>Why reduce teachers’ talking time, especially error correction and echo time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the pedagogies to help students improve interactional competence is to reduce “teacher talking time” (Walsh, 2002: 3). Strategies to improve the quality of teachers’ talk include keeping “error correction” and teacher echoes to a minimum to reduce interruption time and maintain the verbal flow (Walsh, 2002). 		
		<p>Invites one foreign English teacher to teach 2–3 EEC lessons</p>	<p>Why arrange one IES to teach 2–3 lessons instead of 1 lesson?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is evident that "familiarity" and "commonality" are two critical factors to help learners generate learner-internal cues (ibid., 98). In other words, when learners are familiar with interlocutors or a particular environment, they will feel more open and confident to speak out and communicate, and vice versa (ibid.). • 		

	Initiates and organises a conversation	Every student acts as the host of the presentation and Q&A section in turn	<p>Why ask every student to act as the host of the presentation and Q&A section in turn?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to communicate should be through interaction in the target language (Nunan, 1991, cited in Sreehari, 2012) • If anxiety is at the right level, it could promote learners to take challenging tasks. Teachers can adjust the anxiety level to help learners cultivate their best potential (Cui, 2016). 		
Contributes to the authenticity of the interaction		Teachers respond to learners with genuine personal reactions	<p>Why should teachers respond to learners with genuine personal reactions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the quality of teachers' interaction, teachers should respond to learners with genuine personal reactions (Walsh, 2002) • Vygotsky (1997) encourages cultivating a good social learning environment to provide learners with a warm, healthy and fertilising learning soil to let them develop • One of the basic pedagogical principles is to produce a relaxed learning atmosphere to enable learners to communicate more openly and deeply (Undenvood, 1984: 23-27, cited in Bangs & Cantos, 2004) • The interaction should be context-based, which means there is a context provoking students' real intentions to express themselves and interact with others (Walsh, 2012: 12) 	Authentic online learning resources/tasks	<p>What is authentic material?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentic material refers to any form of resources that are not specially prepared for pedagogical purposes (Richard, 2001) <p>Why choose authentic (online) learning resources?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT decides its own teaching and learning materials, which are most authentic from real life (Tomlinson, 2001) • The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013)
		Teachers model the correct expression over students' mistakes occasionally when the students make severe mistakes	<p>Why teachers model the correct expression over students' severe mistakes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT is not intended simply to throw learners into a swimming pool of communication to let them sink or swim (Harmer, 1982). Teachers should not only play the role of facilitator or adviser but also provide learners with feedback, correct their mistakes or inappropriateness and interact effectively with learners, both inside and outside lessons (Alamri, 2018). • One of the basic pedagogical principles is to model the 		

			correct usage of language rather than correcting learners' errors (Undenwood, 1984: 23–27, cited in Bangs & Cantos, 2004)		
	Teachers give feedback to students' interaction performance in the lesson		<p>Why teachers give feedback on students' interaction performance in the lesson?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT is not intended simply to throw learners into a swimming pool of communication to let them sink or swim (Harmer, 1982). Teachers should not only play the role of facilitator or adviser but also provide learners with feedback, correct their mistakes or inappropriateness and interact effectively with learners, both inside and outside lessons (Alamri, 2018). 	QQ	
Demonstrates assertiveness/persuasiveness through communication	Challenges students' views to provoke their assertiveness		<p>Why challenge students' views to provoke their assertiveness/persuasiveness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the pedagogies to help learners build up a robust internal cue is to expose them to an uncomfortable situation in communication but to validate every little effort or improvement they make by listening to learners with patience and responding to their speaking with "praise" or "constructive criticism" (Valerie, 2005: 55) • CLT encourages language learners to communicate in the target language through the process of struggling to communicate (Finocchiaro & Brumfitqtd, in Brown, 2007: 49) • If anxiety is at the right level, it can promote learners to take challenging tasks. Teachers can adjust the anxiety level to help learners cultivate their best potential (Cui, 2016). 		
Works collaboratively with a partner(s) and helps partner(s) out				<p>Paired writing task</p> <p>Sets tasks in which students can work collaboratively</p>	<p>Why set paired tasks?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole-person education principle can be achieved through the careful selection of topics, teaching materials and thoughtful student activities (Wen, 2013) • CLT encourages learning from constructing knowledge through communication (Hu, 2002)

	Does not dominate interaction	Breaks teacher's long talk into small talks to engage students to ask or answer questions throughout the lesson	<p>Why break teachers' long talk into small talks to engage students to ask or answer questions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Littlejohn (1983: 605) advocated that teachers should not dominate the lesson time but rather help students to conduct student-directed lessons • Video-conferencing does not automatically facilitate teacher-student interaction; in fact, there is evidence that teachers still tend to dominate classroom interaction in a video-conferencing environment that is similar to a traditional face-to-face classroom (Hampel & Stickler, 2012) 		
		Clarify the turn-taking rule to all the students before the start of the EEC course; remind the students, especially the fluent and active English learners to take care of other students to let the others contribute to the lesson	<p>What is turn-taking?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn-taking is the awareness of not dominating interactions and helping partners out (May, 2011) • Conversational competence refers to the turn-taking system in conversation (Sachs et al., 1974) 	Video-conferencing room	<p>Why use the turn-taking function?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the turn-taking function, teachers and learners may develop a way to interact through text chat rather than verbal interaction (Hampel & Stickler, 2012)
Using alternative communicative strategies (May, 2011)	Asks for clarification	Encourages students to ask for clarification in English when they do not understand	<p>Why encourage students to ask for clarification when they do not understand?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for clarification is an element of using appropriate communicative strategies (May, 2011) • Teachers should encourage learners to seek all approaches and strategies to communicate (Gol & Aminzadeh, 2015) • "Resource expansion" plays a positive role in that one may ask for help from interlocutors, either directly or indirectly (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991: 18) • To equip learners with such strategic competence, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) suggested a few activities, ... and the fourth is to appeal for help directly 		

	<p>Uses alternative strategies to express the meaning to help interlocutors to understand</p>	<p>Both teachers and students use alternative ways to express the meaning rather than using native language Chinese</p>	<p>Why and how to use alternative ways to express the meaning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic competence is the competence that the speaker can use to continue communication when other competencies “fail to cope with the situations” (Nguyen & Le, 2013: 857; Canale & Swain, 1980). The individual will be able to use verbal or non-verbal approaches to keep the communication going (Bachman, 1990; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). • Teachers should encourage learners to seek all approaches and strategies to communicate (Gol & Aminzadeh, 2015) • One of the basic pedagogical principles maximises the use of English rather than learners’ native language (Undenvood, 1984: 23–27, cited in Bangs & Cantos, 2004) • The second type of resource expansion strategy is trying to use one’s own resources in alternative ways, such as describing a word using a sentence or paragraph, an approximate word, non-verbal behaviour or invented words (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991: 18) • To equip learners with such strategic competence, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) suggested a few activities, ...the third is to paraphrase what the interlocutor says when he/she is not sure about his/her understanding... 		
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8.4 Sampling strategies

The sampling strategies were developed to suit the purposes and circumstances of each research cycle. Therefore, the detailed sampling strategies and construction of intervention and comparison groups are discussed in the first section of each research cycle (Sections 9.1, 10.1, 11.1 and 12.1). However, to prepare the reader with an overall picture of the rationale supporting the choice of the sampling strategies, this section provides some general discussion of the sampling strategies. Section 8.4.1 justifies the reasons for the choice of sampling strategies, and Section 8.4.2 discusses strategies to minimise the bias of the selected sampling strategies.

8.4.1 Justifying the reasons for the choice of sampling strategies

In order to determine whether the EEC course was the factor contributing to the progress of the intervention group, this study required a comparison group as reference. From Table 8.4, it can be seen that the sampling strategies for the intervention groups in all four research cycles were convenience sampling. There were three reasons for this choice. First, the researcher, as a part-time doctorate student, had limited time to organise one group of students to attend the EEC course in each research cycle. In each class, the technical ability of the virtual classroom could only facilitate around ten students to attend the lesson at a time. Therefore, probability sampling strategies, such as stratified sampling, did not suit this small-scale study. Second, the EEC course was conducted at weekends, which required the students to give up their weekend time to attend the course. Therefore, the EEC course had no authority to force any student to attend but relied on the volunteering of the students. Therefore, random sampling was also not a choice of this study. Third, this study, in RC1, 3 and 4, chose the school and the university from Chongqing city, as it is my hometown and where I built a network when I was working in the local education authority. In considering the above three reasons, this study chose convenience sampling as the sampling strategy to select the intervention group.

The sampling strategies for the comparison group were also mainly convenience sampling (RC2, RC3, RC4), albeit for different reasons. RC1 employed purposive sampling. In RC1, the intervention group students had 83 classmates, who were taught by the same English teacher at the same school. As there were only 9 students in the intervention group, 9 of the 83 classmates were to be selected to form the comparison group. After comparing their school English exam results, there was a wide range of scores. Therefore, the purposive sampling strategy was employed, as it allowed for a comparison group who had the closest English scores to the intervention group at the start of the EEC course in order to make progress easier to compare.

In RC2, as a result of the intervention-group students coming from different universities and being taught by different English teachers, there was a plan to form the comparison group by asking the intervention-group students to find a classmate of their own. However, this type of convenience sampling proved to be impractical. Without the support of their English teacher at the universities, the EEC course had no power to ensure that the comparison-group students took the tests, especially the post-tests.

Therefore, in RC3 and RC4, it was ensured that the intervention group and the comparison group were both from the same university and taught by the same university English teacher. Similar to RC1, the intervention group had a larger number of classmates who were taught by the same university English teacher. However, because of the time limit of their university English lessons, there were only seven classmates in RC3 and seven in RC4, who completed both the pre-test and the post-test of the presentation with a focus on Q&A. Therefore, it was necessary to choose the available data to form the comparison group in RC3 and RC4.

Table 8.4: Summary of sampling strategies in each research cycle of the EEC course

Research Cycle	Participants						
	From	Intervention group			Comparison group		
		Male	Female	Sampling strategy	Male	Female	Sampling strategy
RC1	Senior 2 students (age 16–17) from a high school	4	5	Convenience sampling	6	2	Purposive sampling strategy
		The intervention group were the Senior 2 students who volunteered to attend the EEC course, from the two groups taught by Mrs Li			The comparison group students were from the same two groups as the intervention group. As there were over eighty students in the two groups taught by Mrs Li, with a wide range of English levels, the comparison group was selected according to how well the school pre-test scores of the comparison group matched those of the intervention group.		
RC2	Year 1 students from three different universities	3	3	Convenience sampling	0	0	Convenience sampling
		The intervention group were the Year 1 university students who were non-English major students and from three different universities and were introduced by two volunteer students			It was initially planned that every intervention-group student would identify a classmate from the non-English major subject to form the comparison group. However, as there was only one student from the comparison group who managed to do the pre-test and the post-test, RC2 failed to collect data from the comparison group.		
RC3	Year 2 students from the same university	1	7	Convenience sampling	3	4	Convenience sampling
		The intervention group were the Year 2 university students who were not majored in English or language subjects and taught by the same university English teacher (Mrs Li). The intervention-group students were on a volunteer basis.			The comparison group were from the same English classes as the intervention group and taught by the same university teacher (Mrs Li). As a result of the time limit to conduct the presentation with a focus on Q&A test, the comparison group were also based on those who volunteered to do the pre-test and the post-test.		
RC4	Year 2 students from the same university	5	3	Convenience sampling	5	2	Convenience sampling
		The intervention group were the Year 2 university students who were not majored in English or language subjects and taught by the same university English teacher (Mrs Yu). The intervention group students were on a volunteer basis.			The comparison group were from the same English classes as the intervention group and taught by the same university teacher (Mrs Yu). Because there were only seven students who answered the questions in both the pre-test and the post-test, they formed the comparison group.		

8.4.2 Strategies to minimise bias of convenience sampling

As indicated above, the participants of this study were mainly chosen through convenience sampling. This is one of the most popular sampling methods in studies of university students because of limited resources (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2009). In this sampling method, participants are “selected by convenience rather than making a serious attempt beforehand to select participants that are representative of the theoretical population” (ibid., 125). Yet, convenience sampling might result in non-representation of the theoretical population (ibid.).

This type of bias is selection/participant bias and successful research is based on selecting participants who meet the research aims (Smith & Noble, 2014). To minimise the possible bias of convenience sampling, I set up two criteria to select participants from the population. The first was the selection of the university. There are over 2,500 state and private universities in China and around 65 universities in Chongqing. The universities include comprehensive universities, which provide a combination of humanity and scientific degree courses, and specialised universities, which mainly provide specialised subject areas, such as education, medicine or art degrees. I chose a comprehensive university, as it better reflects the impact of different subjects on students’ learning in English. I chose Chongqing University, as it recruited a high proportion of students from other regions of China, making it more demonstrative of English-language education across China.

The second criterion concerned the selection of students at Chongqing University. Both the intervention group and the comparison group were from the same English class and taught by the same English teacher. If the students were from different English classes taught by different teachers, it could introduce more variables, leading to findings that could be difficult to interpret. For instance, if students in the intervention group were taught by different teachers with different teaching experience or overseas experience, the teachers themselves could be a significant variable, which might cause different learning outcomes. It would be very difficult to identify whether such a difference was due to the EEC course or the university English teachers themselves. In addition, strategy was also used to blind participants’ identities through marking the pre-test and post-test at the same time, which were also mixed up, so that the examiners would not be able to identify the pre-test and post-test to avoid unconscious biased marking.

8.5 Methods of data collection

As the methods used to collect and process data in each cycle were different, a detailed

discussion of how this study collected data is described at the beginning section of each cycle. Table 8.5 shows the data-collection, processing and analysis process used in responding to the research questions. Although there are other types of data, such as observation data, that could also have served this study well, this was not practical, as it takes much more time to process and analyse, which would have been particularly demanding for the researcher, who was a full-time school teacher when she was conducting this EdD study as a part-time student. The principles of how this study aimed to collect, process and analyse the data are explained below.

Table 8.5: Data-collection, processing and analysis process used in responding to research questions

Research questions	Purpose	Data	At the beginning of the EEC course	At the end of the EEC course	Processing and analysing data	Discussion	
RQ1	To assess learners' progress in communicative competence through the EEC course	Test(s) through writing	Pre-test	Post-test	Design assessment criteria and mark the tests;	Discussion of findings of RQ1 and relate to the reviewed literature	Overall discussion and generate intervention plan for the next iteration cycle
		Test(s) through speaking	Pre-test	Post-test	Compare the learners' starting performance and progress		
RQ2	To find learners' perceptions of the EEC course features that influence their progress in communicative competence	Questionnaires		Yes	Triangulate with RC1 data; Inform interview questions	Discussion of findings of RQ2 and relate to the reviewed literature	
		Interviews		Yes	Triangulate with RC1 and questionnaire data; Deepen the understanding of questionnaire data		

8.5.1 Pre-tests and post-tests

Further to the discussion in Chapter 3, in order to compare the changes in learners before and after taking the EEC course, pre-tests and post-tests had to be conducted and assessed under the same conditions. To avoid the potential bias of assessors giving the post-tests higher scores, the marking was conducted blind after the completion of both pre-tests and post-tests. All the test details were put into the “Details” of the “Properties” before they were assigned random numbers as their new file names. The assessors marked the pre-tests and post-tests in a mixed order, with comments supporting their scores. The data was entered into a spreadsheet, and the original test information, including test-takers’ names, was revealed from the “Details” of the “Properties”.

The difference between each participant’s post-test and pre-test score, and their means, were calculated to determine the progress of the participant in the assessed areas. The sub-category scores were grouped to calculate the progress in linguistic, interactional and sociocultural competence respectively. As a result of the small sample size of this study, a Mann-Whitney test was applied to evaluate the significance of such progress. The results helped RQ1 to be addressed. However, the possible reasons for such differences are discussed in conjunction with the findings from the questionnaire and interviews.

8.5.2 Questionnaire

The design of the questionnaire took into account several considerations. The first was that the questions needed to be meaningful and logical to serve the research questions. Second, the questionnaire had to avoid common mistakes, such as jargon, questions entailing specialist terminologies, offensive questions, leading questions, ambiguous questions, overlapping questions, non-exhaustive questions, questions requiring memory in the distant past, and so on (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Third, there had to be a measurement to improve the validity of the questionnaire (ibid., 216–17), which was achieved by designing a balanced structure and purposeful questions so that the data collected through the questionnaire could answer each research question within the capacity of a questionnaire.

The questionnaire in this study was designed to answer RQ2 and triangulate findings related to RQ1. As the comparison group did not attend the EEC course, the questionnaire was only given to the intervention group after the post-tests. The questionnaire was constructed in four sections. The first section investigated how the intervention group students perceived their progress in communicative competence. The second section examined students’ perceptions about the

virtual learning environment of the EEC course, the topics covered, and the synchronous and asynchronous learning environments. The third part explored students' perceptions of the design of the EEC course. The last part collected some personal data to assist the analysis of the students' progress in the pre-tests and post-tests.

The response scales to the questions in Parts I to III were Likert scales. Below is an example of a question in the questionnaire.

To what extent do you consider that the EEC course has improved your interest in learning English?

The least extent	A small extent	Moderate	A notable extent	A very great extent
1	2	3	4	5

Numbers “1” to “5” are codes for students' perceptions, from “the least extent” to “A very great extent”. Jamieson (2004) pointed out that as these numbers are an ordinal rather than an interval scale, it is inappropriate to use mean and standard deviation to measure the central tendency; instead, mode and median should be considered the most suitable measurement to analyse this type of question. Although percentages could be used to display the distribution of the responses, that would be more appropriate if the sample size were large. However, Pell (2005) argued that the data collected from Likert scales could also be treated as parametric in order to use parametric tests to analyse the data. Carifio and Perla (2008) also noted that there has been much controversy regarding acknowledgement of Likert scale data as ordinal, but researchers still treat it as interval data for analysis in practice. Based on the past practice of many studies, it is deemed acceptable to treat Likert scale data as parametric data and to use a wide range of parametric measurements to analyse it (Carifio & Perla). As a result of the small sample size of this study, I treated the Likert scale data in the questionnaire as both ordinal data analysed by frequency and interval data analysed by mean and standard deviation to triangulate the findings of RQ1.

A questionnaire has limitations, such as a lack of in-depth understanding of the underlying answers and restriction of “respondents to answer in their own way” (Matthews & Ross, 2010: 217). Thus, the design of semi-structured interviews followed the analysis of the questionnaires. Participants were required to write their names on the questionnaires so that they could be followed by interviews. Although it could be argued that there was no anonymity if the students wrote their names on the questionnaires and the students might give answers to please the researcher, it was discovered in the pilot studies that the students did not mind writing their

names on the questionnaires, and they were not afraid to be critical of the EEC course during the interviews. The benefit of having a transparent questionnaire (with a student's name on) was to inform the research questions in the interview and to gather the qualitative data to explain further the reasons why a student chose a certain scale.

8.5.3 Interview

All the students in the intervention group were invited to a one-to-one interview via Skype. To collect interview data, researchers should not rely on their memory in the interviews (Bernard, 2013). The technology facilitated the interview process to be recorded through video-recording, audio-recording, and note-taking; this study chose a mixture of all three approaches. Taking notes in the interview was done not just as a back-up plan in case the technology failed but also to make the data analysis process more efficient. The notes also included a description of the surroundings, interruptions, keywords, and so on, to supplement the audio-recording. Chinese note-taking software XunFeiYuJi was used in RC4, which took notes automatically during the interview. Although it did not take all the notes correctly and missed some, it took many more notes than the hand notes and provided a good basis for correcting and completing the transcription through listening to the audio-recording at a later stage.

There are several stages to processing and analysing interview data. Burnard (1991) identified 14 stages in a traditional process without the assistance of software or a computer. Casterlé, Gastman, Bryon and Denier (2012) reduced the list to 10 stages as a contemporary process with the support of software. However, Casterlé et al. (2012) pointed out that there is a danger in relying on the software too heavily and too quickly. Researchers should allow plenty of time to read repeatedly through the interview data to understand the meaning behind the words before initiating the next stage. The above process is based on reading with paper and pencil (Casterlé, 2012). When a researcher is trying to read and understand what an interviewee is actually talking about, there is always a danger of bias, as the interpretation is based on the researcher's individual understanding (Burnard, 1991). However, this is difficult to avoid unless the interview transcripts are given out without any interpretation, which is time-consuming for readers and not practical (*ibid.*). In large-scale research, this weakness of the analysis process could be minimised by inviting a number of researchers to work as a team and go through the same materials, followed by comparing and discussing their interpretations to reach a common understanding (Casterlé, 2012). However, this could be very costly for a doctoral study. As the only researcher, I was constantly reminding myself of potential bias and tried to review the interview data a few times at intervals in order to view it from different angles. Every time I

went through the interview data, I took notes to begin formulating the codes. These open codes were changed or classified into different sub-groups after the second reading. However, a decision was made after the third coding. The next stage started the actual coding process and required the use of qualitative software (ibid.). As there were only around ten students involved, I used the spreadsheet to generate, classify and process codes.

Another issue was that the interviews were conducted in Chinese, as this was a more convenient and accurate way for the students to express themselves. Translation was therefore an additional stage of this study. To minimise mistakes in the translation, the translated paragraphs were translated back to Chinese to check whether the meanings had remained the same.

Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality before the interview (Bernard, 2013). There were several further issues that I needed to be aware of when conducting the interviews. Like the questionnaires, the interview questions paid attention to the wording and sequencing of questions. Probing with further questions efficiently can elicit deeper information, as required. Moreover, I tried to maintain a professional and neutral attitude throughout the interviews. The critical point was that I should try to get as much relevant in-depth information as possible.

8.6 Data-analysis strategy

Different research methods produce various types of data and therefore lead to diverse methods of data analysis. In general, there are three ways to conduct data analysis: a qualitative approach, a quantitative approach, or a mixture of both (Matthews & Ross, 2010). As design-based research, this study adopted a mixed approach.

Quantitative data analysis is commonly related to “counting and measuring aspects of social life” using numbers, while qualitative analysis is associated more with “producing discursive descriptions and exploring social actors” meanings and interpretations using words (Blaikie, 2010: 204). Although a questionnaire was used in this study, the number of questionnaires collected was very small, and it was done not to serve the purpose of a survey but to inform the interview questions.

For RQ1, the test results were collected and analysed. All pre- and post-tests were marked by a native English teacher and the researcher to improve the reliability of the outcome of the tests. The marking criteria were referred to in the assessment specification in Appendix XVI, XVII

and Table 8.5. Sub-scores were given to each criterion and added together to get the total score. In addition, comments were also added to the sub-scores and total scores to support the analysis in more depth. Similar to Huang, Wang and Liu's (2015) study, which had a small sample size in both the experimental and the control group, this study employed a Mann-Whitney U test to examine the degree of significance in the difference between the two groups.

For RQ2, as the sample size was small, the validity and reliability required by quantitative analysis were not the strong points of this study. Therefore, qualitative analysis was employed to analyse the data collected by questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and computer-mediated communication. The questionnaires were undertaken and analysed before the interviews to inform the design of the interview questions. Analysis of the questionnaire and interviews went hand in hand. Mean score analysis of the questionnaires was supported by relevant qualitative interview data. The whole-group analysis was supported by individuals' data.

8.7 Primary data-processing procedures of the writing task

The writing task was developed from one research cycle to another in this design-based research. This section uses the writing test in RC4 (Figure 8.1) as an example of how the writing test was processed and analysed to inform the students' progress in sociocultural competence. Table 8.6 presents the assessment criteria to assess sociocultural competence. Overall assessment criteria, including both linguistic competence and sociocultural competence, are presented in Appendix XV. This process is composed of selecting the writing task, formulating assessment criteria and coding framework, and adjustment of the analysis process. The results of the analysis are discussed in Section 13.2.

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

You live in a room in college which you share with another student. However, there are many problems with this arrangement and you find it very difficult to study/work.

Write a letter to the accommodation officer at the college. In the letter:

- describe the situation
- explain your problems and why it is difficult to study/work
- say what kind of accommodation you would prefer

You should write at least 150 words.

Figure 8.1: The writing task of RC4 (IELTS general writing task)

Table 8.6: Assessment criteria and coding descriptions for sociocultural competence

Band score	Skill level		Assessment criteria	Descriptions
9	Expert user	Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies communication goal clearly, with full appropriateness to the task 	Identifies communication goal clearly, with full appropriateness to the task
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The supporting arguments are completely convincing, with full appropriateness 	<p>Supports the communication goal with relevant, supportive and fully convincing arguments</p> <p>Has tried to communicate with the counterpart before writing the letter</p> <p>Uses the right register of words, as well as sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question to the highest level</p>
		Personal quality assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +0 band score Shows four of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking -0.5 band score Shows less than four of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking 	
			* Openness	<p>Demonstrates willingness/action to communicate with the people who they have a conflict with</p> <p>Demonstrates willingness to understand and/or accept diverse circumstances, perspectives and novelties</p>
			* Flexibility	Demonstrates willingness or ability to accept change and/or differences and act in a variety of ways accordingly
			* Emotional regulation	<p>Shows positive thoughts, attitudes or gratitude to the others</p> <p>Uses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with neutral or positive connotations, especially in a conflict/uncomfortable situation</p>
			* Critical thinking	<p>Demonstrates willingness/ability to view the writer's own actions or the situation from different perceptions</p> <p>Reflects or evaluates the writer's own actions or the situation</p>

Band score	Skill level		Assessment criteria	Descriptions
8	Very good user	Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies communication goal clearly, with high appropriateness to the task 	Identifies communication goal clearly, with high appropriateness
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The supporting arguments are highly convincing, with the appropriateness to a very high level 	<p>Supports the communication goal with relevant, supportive and considerably strong, convincing arguments</p> <p>Has tried to communicate with the counterpart before writing the letter</p> <p>Uses the right register of words, as well as sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question, to a high level</p>
		Personal quality assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +0.5 band score Shows more than three of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking +0 band score Shows three of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking -0.5 band score Shows less than three of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking 	
			* Openness	<p>Demonstrates willingness/action to communicate with the people who are in conflict with the writer</p> <p>Demonstrates willingness to understand and/or accept diverse circumstances, perspectives, and novelties</p>
			* Flexibility	Demonstrates willingness or ability to accept change and/or differences and act in a variety of ways accordingly
			* Emotional regulation	<p>Shows positive thoughts, attitudes or gratitude to the others</p> <p>Uses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with neutral or positive connotations, especially in a conflict/uncomfortable situation</p>
			* Critical thinking	<p>Demonstrates willingness/ability to view the writer's own actions or the situation from different perceptions</p> <p>Reflects or evaluates the writer's own actions or the situation</p>

Band score	Skill level		Assessment criteria	Descriptions		
7	Good user	Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies communication goal clearly, with considerable appropriateness to the task 	Identifies communication goal clearly, with at least considerable appropriateness		
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The supporting arguments are considerably convincing, with some inappropriateness 	<p>Supports the communication goal with relevant, supportive and overall convincing arguments</p> <p>Has tried to communicate with the counterpart before writing the letter</p> <p>Uses the right register of words, as well as sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question, to a moderately high level</p>		
		Personal quality assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +0.5 band score Shows more than two of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking +0 band score Shows two of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking -0.5 band score Shows less than two of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking 			
			* Openness	<p>Demonstrates willingness/action to communicate with the people who are in conflict with the writer</p> <p>Demonstrates willingness to understand and/or accept diverse circumstances, perspectives, and novelties</p>		
			* Flexibility	Demonstrates willingness or ability to accept change and/or differences and act in a variety of ways accordingly		
			* Emotional regulation	<p>Shows positive thoughts, attitudes or gratitude to the others</p> <p>Uses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with neutral or positive connotations, especially in a conflict/uncomfortable situation</p>		
			* Critical thinking	<p>Demonstrates willingness/ability to view the writer's own actions or the situation from different perceptions</p> <p>Reflects or evaluates the writer's own actions or the situation</p>		

Band score	Skill level		Assessment criteria	Descriptions
6	Competent user	Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies communication goal clearly to the task 	Identifies communication goal clearly
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The supporting arguments are moderately convincing, with considerable inappropriateness 	Supports the communication goal with relevant, supportive and considerably strong, convincing arguments Has tried to communicate with the counterpart before writing the letter Uses the right register of words, as well as sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question, to a high level
		Personal quality assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +0.5 band score Shows more than two of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking +0 band score Shows two of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking -0.5 band score Shows less than two of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking 	
			* Openness	Demonstrates willingness/action to communicate with the people who are in conflict with the writer Demonstrates willingness to understand and/or accept diverse circumstances, perspectives and novelties
			* Flexibility	Demonstrates willingness or ability to accept change and/or differences and act in a variety of ways accordingly
			• Emotional regulation	Shows positive thoughts, attitudes or gratitude to the others Uses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with neutral or positive connotations, especially in a conflict/uncomfortable situation
			* Critical thinking	Demonstrates willingness/ability to view the writer's own actions or the situation from different perceptions Reflects or evaluates the writer's own actions or the situation

Band score	Skill level		Assessment criteria	Descriptions
5	Modest user	Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies communication goal clearly to the task 	Identifies the communication goal clearly
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The supporting arguments are not convincing, with considerable inappropriateness 	Provides some irrelevant or unconvincing arguments Uses considerable inappropriate register of words and sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question
		Personal quality assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +0.5 band score Shows more than one of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking +0 band score Shows one of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking -0.5 band score Shows none of the openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking 	
			* Openness	Demonstrates willingness/action to communicate with the people who are in conflict with the writer Demonstrates willingness to understand and/or accept diverse circumstances, perspectives and novelties
			* Flexibility	Demonstrates willingness or ability to accept change and/or differences and act in a variety of ways accordingly
			* Emotional regulation	Shows positive thoughts, attitudes or gratitude to the others Uses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with neutral or positive connotations, especially in a conflict/uncomfortable situation
* Critical thinking	Demonstrates willingness/ability to view the writer's own actions or the situation from different perceptions Reflects or evaluates the writer's own actions or the situation			

Band score	Skill level		Assessment criteria	Descriptions
4	Limited user	Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies communication goal clearly, with wide-ranging inappropriateness to the task 	Identifies the communication goal clearly
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The supporting arguments are not convincing, with wide-ranging inappropriateness 	Provides some irrelevant or unconvincing arguments Uses considerable inappropriate register of words and sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question
		Personal quality assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +0.5 band score Shows more than one of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking +0 band score Shows one of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking -0.5 band score Shows none of the openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking 	
			* Openness	Demonstrates willingness/action to communicate with the people who are in conflict with the writer Demonstrates willingness to understand and/or accept diverse circumstances, perspectives and novelties
			* Flexibility	Demonstrates willingness or ability to accept change and/or differences and act in a variety of ways accordingly
			* Emotional regulation	Shows positive thoughts, attitudes or gratitude to the others Uses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with neutral or positive connotations, especially in a conflict/uncomfortable situation
			* Critical thinking	Demonstrates willingness/ability to view the writer's own actions or the situation from different perceptions Reflects or evaluates the writer's own actions or the situation

Band score	Skill level		Assessment criteria	Descriptions	
3	Extremely limited user	Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies communication goal vaguely to the task 	Identifies communication goal vaguely	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The supporting arguments are largely not convincing with wide-ranging inappropriateness 	Provides some irrelevant or unconvincing arguments Uses wide-ranging inappropriate register of words and sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question	
		Personal quality assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +0.5 band score Shows more than one of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking +0 band score Shows one of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking -0.5 band score Shows none of the openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking 		
			* Openness	Demonstrates willingness/action to communicate with the people who are in conflict with the writer Demonstrates willingness to understand and/or accept diverse circumstances, perspectives and novelties	
			* Flexibility	Demonstrates willingness or ability to accept change and/or differences and act in a variety of ways accordingly	
			* Emotional regulation	Shows positive thoughts, attitudes or gratitude to the others Uses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with neutral or positive connotations, especially in a conflict/uncomfortable situation	
* Critical thinking	Demonstrates willingness/ability to view the writer's own actions or the situation from different perceptions Reflects or evaluates the writer's own actions or the situation				

Band score	Skill level		Assessment criteria	Descriptions	
2	Intermittent user	Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either misinterpreted the task but has identified a communication goal • or does not identify communication goal clearly but shows the context of the communication 	Misinterprets the task but identifies a communication goal that is not relevant to the task	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The supporting arguments show wide-ranging inappropriateness despite whatever the communication goal is 	<p>Does not identify communication goal clearly but shows some indication of the context of the communication</p> <p>Shows no convincing arguments despite whatever the communication goal is</p>	
		Personal quality assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +0.5 band score Shows more than one of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking • +0 band score Shows one of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking • -0.5 band score Shows none of the openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking 		
			* Openness	Demonstrates willingness/action to communicate with the people who are in conflict with the writer	Demonstrates willingness to understand and/or accept diverse circumstances, perspectives, and novelties
			* Flexibility	Demonstrates willingness or ability to accept change and/or differences and act in a variety of ways accordingly	
			* Emotional regulation	Shows positive thoughts, attitudes or gratitude to the others	Uses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with neutral or positive connotations, especially in a conflict/uncomfortable situation
			* Critical thinking	Demonstrates willingness/ability to view the writer's own actions or the situation from different perceptions	Reflects or evaluates the writer's own actions or the situation

Band score	Skill level		Assessment criteria	Descriptions
1	Non-user	Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either misinterprets the task and does not identify communication goal • or does not identify communication goal and the context of the communication is also not (entirely) clear 	The writer has neither identified the communication goal nor made the context of the communication clear
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +0.5 band score Shows one or more than one of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking • +0 band score Shows none of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking 	
		Personal quality assessment criteria	* Openness	<p>Demonstrates willingness/action to communicate with the people who are in conflict with the writer</p> <p>Demonstrates willingness to understand and/or accept diverse circumstances, perspectives and novelties</p>
			* Flexibility	Demonstrates willingness or ability to accept change and/or differences and act in a variety of ways accordingly
			* Emotional regulation	<p>Shows positive thoughts, attitudes, or gratitude to the others;</p> <p>Uses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with neutral or positive connotations, especially in a conflict/uncomfortable situation</p>
			* Critical thinking	<p>Demonstrates willingness/ability to view the writer's own actions or the situation from different perceptions</p> <p>Reflects or evaluates the writer's own actions or the situation</p>

8.7.1 Selecting the writing task and formulating assessment criteria and framework

The first reason for choosing the writing task in Figure 8.1 was that it provides a meaningful communication purpose to the students, which many of them have experienced in their university or school life in China. Second, it presents the students with a conflict situation, which gives them more opportunities to show a wider range of sociocultural competence than if they only needed to write a thank you letter or state their opinions about a matter.

The assessment criteria of the writing task cover four elements: sociocultural competence, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy. The assessment criteria for coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy were derived from the IELTS general writing test, which represented linguistic competence. The assessment criteria for sociocultural competence were developed by the researcher in this study.

The initial draft of the assessment criteria of sociocultural communicative competence was based on the literature review of this concept. It was further developed and refined by marking the students' writing tests.

According to a wide range of literature reviews of sociocultural competence, the key element for this concept is “appropriateness”. This includes appropriateness to communication goals, as well as appropriateness to the sociocultural context, which forms the core assessment criteria of sociocultural competence. However, personal qualities that influence appropriateness in the sociocultural context are also considered to be supporting assessment criteria for sociocultural competence. The four essential personal qualities are openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking, which are identified by Matsumoto et al. (2007).

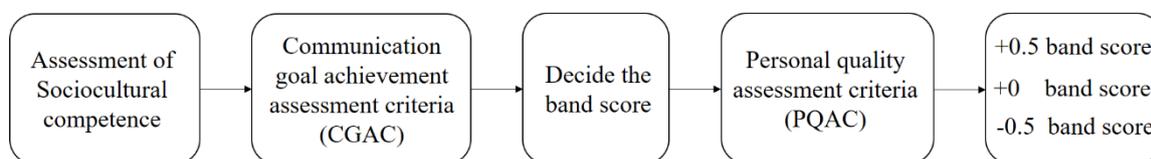


Figure 8.2: Marking process of assessing sociocultural competence

In other words, the assessment criteria of sociocultural competence are composed of two parts: “communication goal achievement assessment criteria” (CGAC) and “personal quality assessment criteria” (PQCA). The CGAC reflect the elements of sociocultural competence to convince the reader by presenting the social or cultural appropriateness in a given context. The

PQAC reveal the personal qualities that contribute to sociocultural competence.

As indicated in Figure 8.2, the CGAC determine the band score. The PQAC determine whether the student gets the full band score or 0.5 level higher or lower than the band score. For example, if a student scored 7 according to CGAC, as in Appendix XX, the examiner would check the assessment criteria of personal qualities in Band 7. As indicated in the PQAC (Table 8.5), only two out of four personal qualities (openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking) are required to maintain band score 7. The writer has presented all four personal qualities; therefore, 0.5 is awarded, which leads the final score of sociocultural competence to be 7.5 (band score 7 plus awarded score 0.5). If the writer did not address a minimum of two out of four categories, as indicated above, 0.5 would be deducted from the band score of 7, which would lead to 6.5.

The reason for not combining the CGAC and PQAC and giving more weight to CGAC in assessing sociocultural competence is because it is the CGAC, not the PQAC, that play the critical role in assessing whether the writing could achieve or not achieve the communication goal. This decision was made based on the marking of the writing tests in this study. Although some students presented three or even all of the four categories of PQAC (openness, flexibility, emotional regulation, and critical thinking), they totally failed in the communication, as they did not express what communication goals they wanted to achieve or they simply misinterpreted the task. If in this case we had given PQAC a separate band score, it could have significantly introduced bias to the final score.

It may be argued that since the PGAC have no direct impact on the communication goal and it is not easy to differentiate them to 9 levels, one could drop this part of the assessment criteria. The argument is that embedding these four elements in communication is likely to generate a more positive communication outcome, as they were identified by Matsumoto et al. (2007) as the most influential factors affecting a person's communicative competence in an international environment.

For example, a complaint letter can be written in a positive or negative way. A positive complaint letter could potentially build up a positive relationship between the writer and the reader. However, a negative complaint letter may achieve the communication goal, but the impact of the complaint letter on the reader could lead to very negative future relationships between the writer and the reader. In this writing task, a positive complaint letter could make

the accommodation officer feel their work is valued and the writer's roommate is respected, leading them to see the integrity of the writer and share more sympathy with the writer. In contrast, a negative complaint letter could make the accommodation officer feel a lack of respect from the student, or worse, which might result in a bad report from the accommodation officer to the student's tutor.

Such positive or negative impact would have more significance if the complaint letter were written by an employee to an employer, whose relationship continues after resolving the complaints. Showing more openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking are more likely to give the employer a more positive impression of the employer, which may even turn a complaint into an opportunity to show the strengths of the employer.

In contrast, if the complaint letter were written in a way that was close-minded, with no flexibility, and a lack of emotional regulation or critical thinking, even if the employer took measures to satisfy the employee's requests, the impression of the employer on the employee would be likely to remain negative, which could restrict the future opportunities of the employee at work. Consequently, the employee is unlikely to feel happiness at work, which could either affect his/her mental health or he/she could ultimately choose to leave the workplace.

As shown in Table 8.5, the assessment criteria for the CGAC are differentiated to 9 levels according to 2 categories: whether the communication goal is identified clearly and/or appropriately; and whether the supporting arguments are convincing and appropriate. Therefore, the coding descriptions are the combined outcome from both the initially drafted assessment criteria based on the literature review and the students' writing tests in RC4. In other words, supporting assessment criteria and coding descriptions have a mutual impact on the process of defining them. Some samples illustrating the application of the assessment criteria and coding descriptions can be found in Appendices XIX to XXVI.

In reviewing the existing writing test assessment criteria, such as Cambridge Assessment English (CAE), the CGAC identified in this study are similar to that of "communication achievement" in the C2 writing test of CAE. However, there is no indication of the PQAC in the existing major English examination assessment criteria. The next section explains the detailed process I followed in developing the coding framework for the PQAC of sociocultural competence.

8.7.2 Coding framework for the personal quality assessment criteria (PQAC)

As Matsumoto & Hwang (2013) identified, while openness reflects people’s ability to be open to a culture or environment that are different to what they are used to, flexibility emphasises the ability to take actions to change oneself to adapt to the different environment or culture. Emotional regulation addresses one's ability to control emotions, especially in a conflict or complex situation. Critical thinking helps a person with making reasoned judgements in order to make communication more logically appropriate. This study developed descriptions and a coding framework from the above concepts and provided specific coding descriptions and examples. The specific coding descriptions were generated from the students' writing tests. Examples are given to support the coding descriptions.

Openness

Table 8.7 indicates that there are four specific coding descriptions to support the assessment descriptions of openness.

Table 8.7: The summary of coding descriptions and examples related to openness

Assessment descriptions	Specific coding descriptions for this task	Examples (from students’ original writing)
Demonstrates willingness/action to communicate with the people who they have a conflict with	Tries to communicate with the conflict party (roommate) first	"I have tried to talk to them..."
Demonstrates willingness to understand and/or accept diverse circumstances, perspectives and novelties	Acknowledges the difference between individuals	"...each individual must be distinctive..." "So the only thing I can do is to learn to receive the differences between others and me."
	Identifies willingness to live with the roommate(s) or shows willingness to cooperate with the roommate(s)	"Now I live in a room in college which I share with another student. It may be good for us to communicate and learn to stay with others..." "I hope my roommates can give me some suggestions."
	Tries to understand the roommate's situation or treats roommates equally, fairly, respects roommate's rights, and willing to help each other	"She make money through the way. So she have to do her home work at night." "we should treat every person equally rather than discriminating or isolating someone" "everyone has their own secrets and eccentricities. We should not search others' privacy" "when roommates meet with difficulties, we should give them help." "I have been having second thoughts about living in the same apartment with my roommate."

The following paragraphs explain the rationale behind choosing the indicated specific coding descriptions for openness.

- **Tries to communicate with the conflict party (roommate) first**

This, in fact, reflects a very important process in communication, which may sound easy but many people find it challenging in reality for a variety of reasons, such as avoiding confrontation, a lack of confidence or a lack of communication skills. Many people tend to ignore this step and either get angry with the conflict party without informing them or complaining to senior leaders who have the power to control the conflict party. Holding anger inside a person builds resentment or misunderstanding, which can cause more problems. Although the problem could also be solved through complaining to the more powerful party, the relationship between the complainer and the conflict party is likely to be damaged, which could cause unhappiness and an unhealthy relationship between the parties.

This coding description could be applied to many other assessment tasks that require the writer to solve a conflict problem. If this coding description is set as a standard assessment criterion, it is likely to have an impact on test-takers to raise awareness to adopt this strategy in their real-life communication.

- **Identifies willingness to live with roommate(s) or cooperates with or takes suggestions from roommates for a better living environment**

Despite the conflict, showing willingness to live with the conflict party or listen to the conflict party requires openness, as it takes courage and effort to live or talk to the conflict party.

- **Tries to understand the roommate's situation or treats roommates equally and fairly, respects roommate's rights, and willing to help each other**

Being able to understand others' situation, especially that of the conflict party, shows the writer is able to view things from different perspectives. People tend to get stubborn in their own views and fail to view the situation from other perspectives, especially the conflict party's position, which could be one of the main problems in stopping the communication.

- **Acknowledges the difference between individuals**

This coding description shows people's tolerance. It identifies whether a person is likely to have a positive attitude towards others. Not being able to appreciate the difference between individuals could result in unhappiness, as a person may regard other individuals as obstructing

his/her life. This may severely hold back interpersonal skills.

Flexibility

While openness emphasises how well a person is able to open his/her mind towards different cultures, the person may also not be willing to take actions to adapt to such differences or change. Flexibility highlights the actions or willingness to take actions to adapt to the culture or environment that is different from what a person is used to. Table 8.8 indicates three specific coding descriptions to identify flexibility from the writing test.

Table 8.8: The summary of the coding descriptions and examples related to flexibility

Coding descriptions	Specific coding descriptions for this task	Examples
Demonstrates willingness or ability to accept change and/or differences and act in a variety of ways accordingly	Shows willingness or actions to be flexible to adapt to different people's living styles and be more tolerant with others	<p>"Although we may have differences, but we live in society, we should learn to get on with others and forgive others' shortcomings."</p> <p>"But about a month later, all of us begin to adapt to others' schedule and try to coordinate everyone's time."</p> <p>"We should keep the same pace with roommates."</p> <p>"He always sleeps during the day, but that is not a problem...I do not wish it is perfect, but is should be quiet and clean at least."</p> <p>"...next morning he will get up three hours later than me...I can't turn on the lights, also can't make any noise."</p> <p>"I want to make a change...I hope my roommates can give me some suggestions."</p> <p>"I must keep quiet carefully every morning to avoid disturbing him."</p>
	Shows the positive experience of living with the roommate(s)	"it has about half a year since I entered in the university and I have a well time living with my roommates."
	Shows actions to search alternative ways to the solutions, no matter whether they are successful or not	"...experience the life with three students in a room, I really find some difficulties and also find some ways to solve it."

- **Shows willingness to be flexible to adapt to different people’s living styles and more tolerant with others**

In a multicultural or diverse society, it is important for people to consider others and to adapt to reduce conflicts and produce harmony in a shared living environment or society. The willingness to adapt one’s living styles in order to harmonise with others shows flexibility.

- **Shows positive experience of living with others (roommates)**

No two individuals have exactly the same habits, which can produce potential conflicts. Therefore, having a positive living experience with roommates shows that the writer has the ability to adapt him/herself to others’ living styles.

- **Shows actions to search for alternative ways for solutions, no matter whether they are successful or not**

Having the willingness or ability to search for alternative ways is an important signal of a person who is flexible. This coding shows the “can-do” attitude, which is an important characteristic of a person that is required by many employers. In this case, when a conflict occurs, the person who tries different ways to solve the problem can be regarded as having the quality of flexibility.

The importance of presenting flexibility in the assessment criteria is to urge learners and test-takers to take actions to adapt themselves to the ever-changing environment instead of expecting the environment to change to suit them.

Emotional regulation

Emotional regulation is the ability of a person to control his/her emotions, especially in conflict and complex or difficult situations (Twenge and Baumesiter, 2002). This does not mean that a person cannot show personal emotions such as excitement or sadness; rather, it means that a person is able to control his/her emotions so as not to let others feel unwilling to communicate with the person, not to damage the relationship, or cause an unexpected negative consequence. On the other hand, a person who is capable of regulating emotions can let the conflict party see his/her maturity, reliability, consistency and the ability to take control of the situation. Table 8.9 shows the coding descriptions of emotional regulations.

Table 8.9: The summary of coding descriptions and examples related to emotional regulation

Coding descriptions	Specific coding descriptions in this task	Examples
<p>Shows positive thoughts, attitudes or gratitude to others</p> <p>Uses nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with neutral or positive connotations, especially in a conflict/uncomfortable situation</p>	<p>Shows a positive attitude towards others (roommates) or the environment despite the conflicts or unpleasant situation</p>	<p>"All my roommates are nice person, I can't criticize them for the problem."</p> <p>"The study environment is really good, and I learn a lot of knowledge here."</p>
	<p>Shows willingness/action to develop/keep a good relationship with others (the roommates) or look after others' feelings</p>	<p>"And we all know, a good relationship between us, this problem must be solved, so everyone do our best to be friendly to our classmate."</p> <p>"everyone living in a room should consider other people's feeling."</p>
	<p>Shows appreciation to others (the accommodation officer/the reader) even in a conflict or difficult situation</p>	<p>"My roommate and I are greatly appreciated for your hard work."</p>
	<p>Shows the ability to control emotions in an uncomfortable situation</p>	<p>"I have been having second thoughts about living in the same apartment with my roommate...Please understand that I wouldn't have written this letter unless there was a substantial problem happening."</p>

- **Shows a positive attitude towards others or the environment despite the conflicts or unpleasant situation**

A person who can control his/her emotions is not necessarily able to embrace a positive attitude towards the conflict party. This is because a person may be able to control his/her emotions, but he/she might keep negative thoughts in his/her mind, which could severely damage his/her (mental) health in the long run. However, if a person can show a positive attitude towards the conflict party or the difficult situations, it shows the ability of the person to control his/her emotions in a positive mindset.

- **Shows willingness/ability to develop/maintain a good relationship with others or look after others' feelings**

Having the willingness or ability to develop or maintain a good relationship with others requires consideration of others' feelings or positions. This means that a person needs to take control of his/her emotions in order to achieve this aim. The intention or actions to look after others' feelings shows the intention to control emotions, especially when the writer has conflicts with a roommate.

- **Shows appreciation to others even in a conflict situation**

Showing appreciation itself does not necessarily mean that the person has the ability to control

emotions. However, if the person can show appreciation in a conflict situation, this reflects the person's ability to maintain a certain level of emotional regulation.

- **Shows the intention and action to control emotions in an uncomfortable/conflict situation**

When a person shows the intention and action to control emotions in a conflict or difficult situation, it is a direct sign of emotional regulation. This could avoid the level of conflicts rising into an uncontrollable situation.

The extent to which a person can control emotions provides a foundation of how well a person is able to communicate effectively in a conflict or difficult situation. Being able to regulate emotions shows one's ability to take control of oneself and the situation despite the influence of the surrounding environment. A good communicator can use techniques to control emotions and not speak out about things that could raise the level of conflicts. An advanced communicator can not only do what a good communicator can do, but also be able to draw him/herself out of the conflict situation to hold a holistic view, think through a variety of consequences and deal with problems strategically with appropriateness and wisdom. An advanced communicator can also foresee potential conflicts and adopt strategies to prevent such conflicts happening (Twenge & Baumesiter, 2002). This writing task did not allow the test-taker to show such a level of emotional regulation, only to the level of a good communicator. Assessing the advanced level of communicator in terms of emotional regulation requires a specifically designed task. This can be further explored in a future study.

Critical thinking

Critical thinking plays important roles, not only in advanced academic study but also in making a reasoned judgement (Beyer, 1995) and evaluating one's own behaviour or the situation critically. In other words, critical thinking not only helps a person to balance his/her judgement to make the decision more reasonable and appropriate, but it also helps a person to reflect on his/her own actions to become a better communicator. Table 8.10 shows the coding descriptions of critical thinking.

Table 8.10: The summary of coding descriptions and examples related to critical thinking

Coding descriptions	Specific coding descriptions in this task	Examples
Demonstrates willingness/ability to view the writer's own actions or the situation from different perceptions	Views the situation from different perspectives	"Every coin has two sides, four people live together very lively, but I found that there are some problems."
Reflects or evaluates the writer's own actions or the situation	Tries to reflect or evaluate his/her own action	"Sometimes I may also make others feel aloud, and I have difficulty in thinking about what others' thought...That is to say, I have problems in communicating with others..."

- **Views the situation from different perspectives, especially opposite perspectives**

The ability to view things from different perspectives, especially opposite perspectives, is one of the key features of critical thinking. This ability not only helps the writer to make a more reasoned judgement, but it also helps to strengthen his/her arguments and makes them more convincing to the reader.

- **Tries to reflect on or evaluate his/her own actions**

The intention or ability to reflect on or evaluate one's own actions or the situation shows a person's competence in critical thinking. In fact, it is more challenging to be critical of one's own action than to others or the situation. Therefore, it is valuable to make it distinct from the general situation, as stated above.

Being able to view things from opposite or different perspectives can help a communicator to have a more balanced judgement, which helps him/her to communicate in a more appropriate way. Being able to reflect on or evaluate one's own actions could also help an individual to develop into a better communicator. Therefore, critical thinking can be regarded as a drive for balanced thoughts and a drive for self-improvement.

8.7.3 Summary of analysis of primary data of writing test

In summary, the assessment criteria of the writing test in this study were composed of CGAC and PQAC. The CGAC determine the effectiveness and appropriateness of achieving the specific communication goal(s). The coding framework for the PQAC was generated from the key features of four personal qualities identified by Matsumoto & Hwang (2013) and the analysis of students' writing tests. How the intervention group and the comparison group performed in the assessment is discussed in Chapter 12.

8.8 Validity and reliability considerations

8.8.1 Review of validity and reliability

Design-based research usually employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse data to evaluate the outcome of interventions and develop the intervention for the next cycle (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). It is valuable to understand the common issues that are generally encountered in design-based research, which might cause bias and reduce the reliability and validity of the data collection and analysis.

Reliability and validity have different meanings in quantitative and qualitative research (Golafshni, 2003). In quantitative research, reliability reflects the consistency of measurement in repeated tests, over time, and its application in similar situations within a given period (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Validity “determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are” (Joppe, 2000: 1). In qualitative research, reliability is regarded as an examination of trustworthiness (Seale, 1999), which is a consequence of validity (Patton, 2001). Golafshni (2003: 604) supported the idea that reliability should not be separated from validity in qualitative research. Instead, the two terms can be replaced by “trustworthiness, rigour, and quality” in qualitative research, which aims to diminish bias. Triangulation is a validity procedure, which may employ “multiple methods of data collection and data analysis” (Golafshni, 2003: 604) to control bias (Creswell & Miller, 2000: 126).

There are some common problems in design-based research. The first is that a single and complex intervention may involve hundreds of people, including designers, researchers, teachers and students; and to replicate the invention precisely is a substantial challenge to design-based study (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). Therefore, the validity of design-based research requires it to be set in a real educational setting (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012) and to maintain good partnerships with participants over a long period of time; and reliability demands triangulation of data, “repetition of analysis across cycles of enactment, and use (or creation) of standardized measures or instruments” (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003: 7).

Another problem of design-based research is that if a researcher has multiple roles in the study, such as conceptualising, designing, implementing and developing the interventions, this may introduce bias (Barab & Squire, 2004), as the researcher might intend to focus on the positive effect of the intervention and ignore the negative effects. However, this is similar to the

potential problems affecting strategies that have been applied in other qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

8.8.2 Validity and reliability considerations of the study

To overcome the above potential problems, this study followed a number of strategies to improve the reliability and validity of data sources and analysis. The first was to employ a triangulation method to collect and analyse the data. Howe (2012) believed that quantitative data describes the phenomena, while qualitative data discovers the reasons behind them. Fielding (2012) explained that qualitative data may be transformed into quantitative data by coding and counting the frequency of the codes, and further pointed out that caution should be taken, as such data may not be measurable. Mertens and Hesse-Biber (2012) suggested that triangulation should not merely use one to validate another but also build up the dialogue between and integrate the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Yet, Bergman (2008) argued that integration is a vague word and that a more detailed approach should be explored to make it more practical.

This study has two research questions, reiterated here:

RQ1: *Does the EEC course improve learners' linguistic, interactional and sociocultural communicative competence in English, in comparison with learners undertaking the usual university course in English? If so, in what ways?*

RQ2: *How do learners perceive the influence of the EEC course on their progress in linguistic, interactional and sociocultural communicative competence in English?*

The first research question was addressed using a quantitative approach and the second using a mostly qualitative approach. This research used two tests to answer RQ1: the IELTS general writing test was employed to assess students' linguistic and sociocultural competence; and presentation with a focus on question and answer time was designed to assess students' linguistic, interactional and sociocultural competence. To increase the reliability and validity of the two tests, I used the standard IELTS writing test assessment criteria and IELTS speaking test assessment criteria. As an international English language examination board, its assessment criteria were based on a large number of tests, which have been evaluated using a formal assessment system. However, the IELTS assessment criteria do not evaluate intercultural and sociocultural competence. In this case, I produced two sets of criteria to assess intercultural and

sociocultural competence. Although these two sets of criteria were self-designed, they were produced and based on the theories and definitions of intercultural and sociocultural competence, as reviewed in Chapter 3.

As I, the researcher, was also the designer and teacher–facilitator of the EEC course, caution also had to be taken to minimise personal bias on data collection and interpretation of the research results. For this reason, this study invited a native English teacher to be the second assessor of the pre- and post-tests. Ideally, it is better to invite at least two native English teachers to be assessors and the researcher should not be involved in the assessment at all to reduce potential bias (Robson, 1993). However, because of financial constraints, only one native English assessor was involved in this study. The assessors in RC3 and RC4 remained the same to preserve consistency in marking and documenting participants’ progress.

Admittedly, the reliability and validity of these two competencies may not have been as high as in linguistic competence. However, it is expected that this study can contribute to the methods to measure interactional communicative competence and sociocultural communicative competence and the future development of assessment measures of interactional and sociocultural communicative competencies.

8.9 Ethical considerations

Considering ethical issues is essential to all research; in particular, ethical considerations create “a mutual respect, win–win relationship” between researcher and participants, as well as the community (McAuley, 2003: 95). This section discusses some key ethical issues related to this study.

- **Worthiness of the project**

As discussed in the Introduction, there was an urgent call to develop Chinese English learners’ communicative competence. The findings of this study were intended to benefit intermediate and advanced English-language learners in China and inform future studies and the development of online virtual English courses. It aimed to provide a positive influence on language learning and communication between Chinese English learners and people from other cultures and countries.

One of the unique aspects of both the EEC course and this study was that I – a Chinese English learner who has personally encountered communication difficulties during my overseas study, and living and working as a teacher in the UK for over a decade – have been continuously

overcoming communication barriers and improving my own communicative competence. The course was designed by me from this unique perspective to reflect better the communication needs of the Chinese English learners, particularly those who intend to study or work overseas. This was different not only to courses aiming for linguistic competence or examination, but also to many oral English courses, which emphasise pronunciation and basic conversations. It was felt that it would be valuable to evaluate, explore and develop a course like the EEC course to fill in the gaps in this area.

- Informed consent and voluntary participation

The study was introduced to the students by their university English teacher. All participants from both the intervention and comparison groups were given the information about the study and the course. The intervention group was formed on a voluntary basis, with clear and full information about the study and the course.

Participants were informed that all the texts, audio, videos and web data in this study might be used for the purpose of the research. However, anonymity and confidentiality were assured throughout and after the research. Although the participants were asked to write their names on their questionnaires, the report of this study did not use their real names. Participants were required to sign written consent forms before the start of each cycle of the design-based study (Appendix XIX).

- No harm but benefits to the participants

An online course poses no physical risks to participants. Although the participants needed to give their time to attend the EEC course at weekends, the opportunity to communicate with native English speakers in a small class was free of charge, whereas commercial English lessons can be extremely expensive. In addition, the aim of the EEC course was to provide lessons to help students improve their communicative competence; few courses in China were providing such courses. Therefore, this was a rare opportunity for them to benefit from this study. Participants were also given the right to withdraw from the research and the EEC course at any time. In fact, this put more pressure on the researcher, as the only way to retain participants was to deliver good lessons.

There might be a question about how this study posed no harm but rather benefit to the students in the comparison group. First, the pre-tests and post-tests for the comparison group were adapted to suit the teaching and assessment aims and style of their original English course at

university. It was integrated into their normal study and assessment, thereby posing no inconvenience to them. In the presentation test, it was requested that Q&A time be added at the end of the presentations. This represented a challenge for participants, as they were only used to delivering a presentation without interacting with the audience. However, this special request from the study challenged them to develop their interactional competence, which also benefited their speaking English. Therefore, on the whole, there was no inconvenience to participants in both the intervention and comparison groups.

- **Anonymity and confidentiality**

Ethical attention must be drawn to individual participants to protect them from any harm that might be caused by the study (Babbie, 2014). This study avoided linking their performance in the tests, questionnaires and interviews with their real names to protect their anonymity. However, their given English names were consistently used in the test results, questionnaire and interview data to see the relationships between the three types of data.

In summary, I always bore in mind that the research aimed to explore whether the EEC course could help learners to improve their English communicative competence and explore ways in which it could be improved. It was intended that the findings would benefit the participants and society. In addition, I did my best to protect the participants from any harm.

8.10 Summary

This chapter has discussed the methodology of this study, including research paradigm, design-based research as the research strategy, the selection of participants, methods of data collection and analysis, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations. The research paradigm of this study was pragmatism, which provided theoretical grounds for design-based research and mixed-methods research. The reason for employing design-based research in comparison with action and quasi-experimental research was discussed in Section 8.2.2. Convenience sampling was considered the most practical and appropriate sampling method in this study. However, selection criteria were considered to minimise the possibility of bias in data collection.

To triangulate the data to improve validity and reliability, three types of data were collected in this study: pre-tests and post-tests, questionnaires and interviews. The progress of the students between pre-tests and post-tests was measured by mean and standard deviation. The Mann-Whitney test was employed to test significance given the small sample size. The data collected through questionnaires was treated as both ordinal and interval data, analysed by bar charts and

by mean and standard deviation, respectively, to make the analysis more reader-friendly. The interview questions were designed to match the questionnaires. Therefore, interview data was analysed in conjunction with questionnaire data by supporting it with more detailed qualitative data. On the other hand, interview data was also coded to determine whether other key factors had been missed in the questionnaire. Strategies to improve the validity and reliability of the data collection and analysis were discussed in Section 8.7. Consideration of the ethical issues involved in this study was explained in Section 8.8.

The following four chapters present each of the four research cycles (RCs) and their findings.

Part IV

9. Findings from Research Cycle 1

Research Cycles 1 (RC1) and 2 (RC2) were conducted in the first two years of my doctorate study. The aims of RC1 and RC2 were to determine whether the process of delivering the EEC course and data collection was practical. Therefore, the data collected in RC1 and RC2, especially the pre-tests and post-tests, was mainly used to inform the design of RC3 and RC4.

9.1 Sampling strategies of RC1

The design and exploration of the EEC course started before my doctorate course. Initially, approximately six students from junior secondary schools, aged 12 to 13, attended the course between January and May 2011 (pre-RC1). Although the students stated in the interviews that they enjoyed the EEC course, the conversations between the teachers and students were very basic. Although some students had started learning English from primary school, they were still struggling with grammar, and their interests remained in basic cultural facts and vocabulary. Quite often I had to use Chinese to support their understanding. It was difficult to engage them in more in-depth conversations. Therefore, it was difficult to demonstrate the strengths of the EEC course for beginners in English-language learning. For that reason, I decided to invite older students who had completed or almost completed grammar learning in English.

I chose senior secondary-school students in RC1. The participants in RC1 were from two Senior 2 classes taught by the same English teacher, Mrs Li. As the school was one of the most competitive grammar schools of Chongqing, China, there were 2,200 students in 45 classes in the same Senior 2 year group in this school. The size of each class was between 40 and 50. Senior 2 students are aged around 16 to 17 years old, equivalent to Year 12 students in the English education system. Mrs Li helped to advertise the EEC course to all the students in her two English classes (Class 17 and Class 25). The students were informed that there would be 10 places available to attend the EEC course and the first 10 students would be accepted onto the EEC course. Mrs Li passed the contact information of approximately 12 students to me from which to select 10 students. I contacted all 12 students and informed them of the time and schedule of the EEC course. Nine students committed their time to attend the EEC course (Table 9.1), four students from Class 17 and five from Class 25.

Table 9.1: The profile of the intervention group students in RC1

Student number	Class	Participants	Gender	Year group	Ranking of English tests in the whole year group (before the EEC course)
1	17	Moonlight	Female	Senior 2	641
2	17	Tom	Male	Senior 2	958
3	17	Sky	Male	Senior 2	993
4	17	Qin	Female	Senior 2	1316
5	25	YoYo	Female	Senior 2	199
6	25	Orca	Male	Senior 2	344
7	25	Air	Female	Senior 2	874
8	25	Paradise	Male	Senior 2	629
9	25	Amie	Female	Senior 2	392

The comparison group (Table 9.2) was made up of the rest of the students from the same two Senior 2 English classes taught by Mrs Li as the intervention group. There were 37 and 46 students respectively from the 2 classes (besides the students of the intervention group). Four students were chosen from Class 17 and five from Class 25 to match the number of the intervention group. Although random sampling was a possible method to select students to form the comparison group, as the ranges of the ranking of English tests were fairly high, 1,054 for Class 17 (highest rank 1,820; lowest rank: 766) and 1,653 for Class 25 (highest rank: 1,756; lowest rank: 103), a different sampling strategy, namely purposive sample, was adopted. Based on the ranking of the intervention group in the school pre-tests, the students from the rest of Class 17 and Class 25 with the closest ranking in comparison to the intervention group were chosen to form the comparison group.

Table 9.2: The profile of the comparison group students in RC1

Student number	Class	Participants	Gender	Year group	Ranking of English tests in the whole year group (before the EEC course)
1	17	Shuang	Female	Senior 2	766
2	17	Zhe	Male	Senior 2	857
3	17	Feng	Male	Senior 2	1009
4	17	Yu	Male	Senior 2	1345
5	25	Teng	Male	Senior 2	247
6	25	Lian	Male	Senior 2	893
7	25	Rao	Male	Senior 2	641
8	25	Si	Female	Senior 2	379

As a result of an intervention group student (YoYo) from Class 25 leaving the school for overseas study towards the end of the EEC course, and her not taking the post-test at the school, the comparison group did not consider the paired student to YoYo. Therefore, there were only eight students in the comparison group. The test data of YoYo was not considered in answering Research Question 1 (RQ1). However, the data collected through questionnaire and interview from YoYo was analysed to contribute to Research Question 2 (RQ2).

9.2 Findings of Research Question 1

As indicated in Section 8.2.3, at the beginning of the study, it was not clear which elements of communicative competence the EEC course could help learners to develop. Therefore, Research Question 1 (RQ1) and Research Question 2 (RQ2) in RC1 and RC2 were formulated in a more general way than the research questions in RC3 and RC4.

RQ1: *Do learners perform differently on the English communicative competence assessment before and after the EEC course? If so, in what ways?*

Two tests were originally planned to be trialled in RC1, the IELTS speaking test and the IELTS academic writing tests (Appendix XV), to assess certain aspects of students' communicative competence. The students of the intervention group were requested to take the IELTS speaking test and the IELTS academic writing tests (Tasks I and II) before and after the EEC course.

However, it was soon noticed that it took much longer than originally anticipated to conduct the IELTS speaking test and writing tests. The IELTS speaking test had to be conducted individually and the time it took to organise the speaking tests was therefore considerable. Often students could not hear the questions clearly on Skype; therefore, I had to repeat the questions, meaning that the speaking test took much longer to complete. Similarly, the full IELTS academic writing tests (Tasks I and II) took the students one hour to complete. Not all students could attend the writing tests at the same time. It was almost impossible to organise all the students to complete the writing tests online at the same time; therefore, they were allowed to complete the writing tests on their own. When we received the writing tests back, the writing was much better than what had been achieved in the written lessons. The credibility of conducting the writing test in this way was therefore questionable. Furthermore, although I managed to get the students in the intervention group to complete the IELTS speaking test and writing tests before the EEC course, there was a sharp drop in the number of students completing the post-tests after the EEC course, for a variety of reasons. One was because it took

too long to complete. In this situation, it was neither realistic nor ethical to ask the comparison group to complete the IELTS speaking test and academic writing tests.

In order to compare the progress of the intervention group and the comparison group, another test was introduced, which was students' school English exam results before and after the EEC course. Although the students' school tests showed that five out of eight EEC learners progressed better in English grammatical competence than in the comparison group, it was difficult to use the tests for further analysis. This was because the school English tests were mainly testing students' linguistic competence, which only indicated the progress that students made in linguistic competence.

Therefore, the school English test would not be a good assessment tool even though it might be an indicator of linguistic competence's development. Although there were two tasks in the IELTS academic writing tests, it was felt that it was better to use only the second task, which was about debating a statement. Whether the IELTS speaking test would be kept or not depended on whether a better test was found in the next cycle of the study.

9.3 Findings of Research Question 2

RQ2: *What course design features influence learners' progress in English communicative competence?*

9.3.1 Data-collection process

The questionnaire for the intervention group was sent and collected via QQ email, and interviews were conducted via Skype and recorded by Pamela and through hand notes. Each interview took approximately thirty to forty-five minutes.

In RC1, questionnaires (Appendix I and II) and interviews (Appendix IX) were not conducted in a particular order. Consequently, some interesting findings from the questionnaires could not be investigated during the interviews, as some participants had already been interviewed. This suggested that an order should be set regarding which questionnaires should be returned before conducting the interviews.

9.3.2 Students' overall impressions of the EEC course

The questionnaire showed that all learners enjoyed the EEC course and agreed that it had increased their interest in learning English (mean 4.6, sd=0.518).

Table 9.3: The extent to which students perceived that the EEC course helped them to improve their communicative competence

	Mean	Std. deviation	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
Listening	4.3	0.886	3	5
Reading	3.5	0.926	2	5
Writing	3.6	1.408	1	5
Speaking	4.1	0.991	3	5
Cultural awareness	4.9	0.354	4	5
Communication strategies	4.4	0.744	3	5
Overall	4.4	0.518	4	5

Table 9.3 shows that students perceived that the EEC course helped them most with cultural awareness (mean 4.9, sd=0.354), followed by communication strategies (mean 4.4, sd=0.744), listening skills (mean 4.3, sd=0.886) and speaking skills (mean 4.1, sd=0.991). On the other hand, writing (mean 3.6, sd=1.408) and reading skills (mean 3.5, sd=0.926) were perceived as the least progressed skills. Although learners also indicated that the feedback on their writing practice had helped them to improve their writing skills, at the mean rating 4.3 (sd=0.7559), they also pointed out that the lack of opportunity to practise writing hindered their improvement. This suggests that if the aim of the EEC course was to help learners improve their writing and reading skills, the amount of time allocated to students to practise their writing should be increased.

In the interviews (Appendix X) the students commented on the features of the EEC course that were attractive to them, including learning English through cultural awareness, more interactive conversations, a relaxed environment and a course that was not exam-based. However, two students pointed out:

The EEC course was not for our university entry exam. So I did not have much motivation to attend the EEC course. (Air)

I have attended an one-to-one writing course in an English training school. I felt that I have improved a lot more only after a few hours' learning. (YoYo)

However, some other students argued the following:

In our school English tests, especially for reading and writing questions, quite a few reading questions were related to the topics that we have discussed in the EEC course. I found it easier to read the paragraphs and understand the exam questions. (TianCi)

I remember we talked about the London Olympic tower (Orbit Tower). And we had a question about this (in the school English test). I felt easier to do the question because I remembered we talked about it in the EEC course and I knew some vocabulary about the topic. (RQ)

This was actually a surprising finding, as predicting exam questions was certainly not the aim of the EEC course. However, it indicates that talking about the spontaneous hottest topics at the time might help students in their school exams.

Nevertheless, as the students commented that the EEC course was not designed for their school exams or university matriculation exams, even though the course could help their school tests to some extent, the aim of the students studying the EEC course was not the same as that of the EEC course. To the senior high-school students the EEC course seemed a luxury. In other words, the learners who could benefit more from the course might not be senior high-school students because of their exam pressure. Therefore, the target learners of the course should be reconsidered to align the course's aims with participants' expectations and maximise the course's impact on the students.

9.3.3 Students' perceptions of the course design of the EEC course

Figure 9.1 shows the course structure, course features and technology features of the EEC course in RC1. The students commented on these structures and features and suggested some further improvements. On the whole, the students agreed that 30 minutes of preparation plus 1 hour for the main lesson was a good time structure for the EEC lesson. However, one female learner suggested that there should be another session after the lesson to allow them to chat and socialise. Learners also preferred to know the topic in advance so that they could prepare beforehand and talk more confidently in the lesson. In addition, some participants mentioned that they needed some encouragement to do their homework; otherwise, they might lack the motivation to complete it, particularly when they had a lot of other school homework to do.

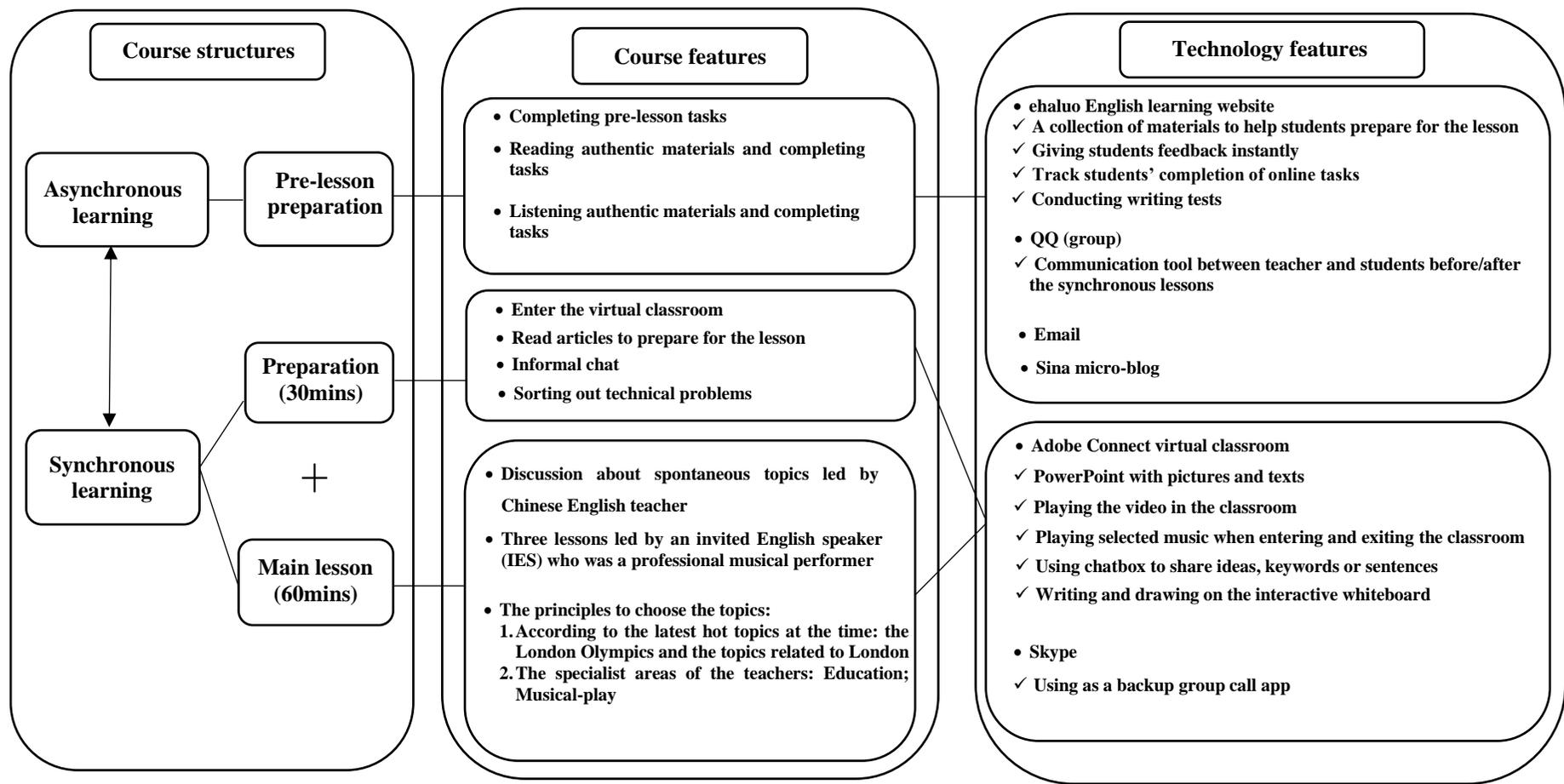


Figure 9.1: Course structures, course features and technology features of the EEC course of RC1

One student also pointed out:

Sometimes we had an extended lesson for about 2.5 hours. It was too long. We should not extend the lesson time to more than 2 hours. (Moonlight)

Although the lesson time was only around one and a half hours, sometimes it took too long to sort out technical problems, and sometimes I did not control the time well and let the students talk for too long. Therefore, as a Chinese teacher, I felt that I should pay more attention to controlling the lesson time in future. In addition, it was felt that an assistant would be beneficial to enable the teacher to focus on the lesson rather than being distracted by administration.

Regarding the lesson time, one student pointed out:

The lesson time between 5:30pm and 7pm was not a good choice, as it was dinner-time. (YoYo)

If the EEC lessons started an hour earlier, this meant that teachers in the UK had to start even earlier on a Saturday morning, around 7.30 or 8.30am. Nevertheless, it was felt that it was worth trying in the next cycle.

- **Students' perceptions of the first half an hour of the EEC course**

The first half an hour was the time for students to enter the virtual classroom and prepare for the lesson. During this time, students were directed to read articles to prepare for the lesson, or to have an informal chat. I had to use this time to remind the rest of the students to log into the lesson and help them sort out any technical problems they encountered. It was particularly difficult for me, a Chinese teacher, to do teaching, administration and technician roles at the same time. As a result, my teaching role was severely compromised by the other two roles.

The students seemed to understand the difficulty and suggested that:

We could watch the video too during this time. (Tom)

However, one student answered this question fairly boldly:

Do not ask me questions that should be considered by the teacher. (Air)

It was a shock to me that this student expressed herself in this “rude” way. In fact, this student had good attendance and participation in the lessons, and she had also expressed her appreciation and admiration for the teacher. This suggested that the EEC course should not just focus on increasing knowledge or understanding of cultural awareness, but also create strategies to help students improve them. For instance, if a student answered a question in this way, the teacher or other students should explain to the student that this was not appropriate, and then suggest to the student more appropriate ways to express the same meaning. A discussion of some typically inappropriate communication could also be discussed in the lesson.

- **Students’ perceptions of the 60-minute main lesson**

In this part of the lesson, special attention was devoted to raising cultural awareness, interaction with the students through questioning, and engaging students in the discussion on the weekly topic. I was the main teacher delivering this part of the lesson, although an invited English speaker (IES), who was a native English teacher, was also invited to deliver three lessons. On the whole, the students perceived that the course contents met their needs, at the mean rating 4.3 (sd=0.756).

- **The topics of the EEC course**

Table 9.4 shows the ranking of topics by the students. The selection of topics mostly depended on the hot topics at the time. Therefore, it took me a long time to get familiar with the topics at least one or two weeks in advance and to prepare the PowerPoint and learning resources for the students. This was particularly time-consuming and challenging when I had a full-time teaching job at the school.

From the ranking, it can be seen that the students were interested in the topics that were current at the time and which were personalised. For instance, meeting with a musical actor was a personalised topic, as they could interact with the native English musical actor directly in the lesson. On the other hand, London hosted the Summer Olympics in August 2012, and RC1 was delivered between January and June of 2012. Therefore, the students were very interested to know more about London and the London Olympics. In the same year, Queen Elizabeth II had her Diamond Jubilee celebration. Therefore, the students showed more interest in this topic than the royal wedding. In fact, the topic of the royal wedding was welcomed in the previous EEC course held in 2011, as Prince William and Kate Middleton were married in 2011. However, it was less attractive to the students in 2012, although mainly in the case of the male students. Nonetheless, the students also suggested other topics that they would be interested in, such as

same-sex marriage, attractions, history, opera, songs and innovations.

Table 9.4: The extent to which students perceived that the topics were interesting to them

Ranking	Topics	Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
1	Tour of London	5.0	0.000	5	5
2	Meeting with a musical actor	5.0	0.000	5	5
3	London Olympics	4.9	0.378	4	5
4	Queen's Diamond Jubilee	4.6	0.535	4	5
5	British education	4.6	0.787	3	5
6	Madame Tussauds	4.6	0.787	3	5
7	A Midsummer's Night Dream	4.6	0.787	3	5
8	William Shakespeare	4.3	0.756	3	5
9	Easter and Christianity	4.3	0.951	3	5
10	The royal wedding	3.9	1.464	1	5
11	Revision	3.7	1.496	1	5

Out of 11 topics, 3 topics, meeting with a musical actor, William Shakespeare and *A Midsummer's Night Dream* were delivered by the IES, and the rest of the topics were taught by me because of financial limitations. The topics delivered by the IES were decided by both the IES and me based on his speciality and suggestions. As the IES was a professional musical actor, who had performed many musical plays, I asked him to suggest plays of William Shakespeare that he would like to talk about with the students. He suggested *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as it was one of the most straightforward plays of Shakespeare, and he assumed the students would find it easier to understand. From the ranking of the students' preferences, it can be seen that the students were very interested in the musical teacher himself but less interested in the topics of William Shakespeare and *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. The students explained that:

I have read A Midsummer Night's Dream before so I was not really interested in this play. (Sky)

I'd like to talk about The Merchant of Venice or Macbeth. (Orca)

The findings suggested that there was a gap between the needs or interests of the students and the assumed needs or interests predicted by the IES regarding the topics. Therefore, there should be a balance between the perceptions of native English teachers and the students regarding the

topics. However, this balance might only be found through a number of trials and improvements.

As critiques of the EEC course remained from the Chinese English learning environment in the pre-RC1, I assumed that the students preferred to be taught by native English teachers only. However, most learners stated that they preferred to be taught by both native English teachers and Chinese English teachers. In the view of the students, overseas teachers sometimes did not understand their needs. Chinese teachers could bridge the gap between learners and western culture.

9.3.4 Students' perceptions of the technology features of the EEC course

The EEC course in RC1 used Adobe Connect and Skype to support synchronous learning, and a self-designed learning website, QQ, Sina Micro-web and email to support asynchronous learning. On the whole, the students liked the online learning environment of the EEC course (mean 4.4, $sd=0.787$). This section discusses the findings about students' perceptions of the technology features of the EEC course.

- **Synchronous learning**

This section examines how the students perceived that the detailed features of Adobe Connect and Skype supported students' learning in the EEC course. In general, the students liked the Adobe Connect virtual classroom (mean 4.1, $sd=0.690$).



Figure 9.2: A synchronous EEC lesson via Adobe Connect in RC1

Figure 9.2 shows the general presentation of the synchronous EEC lesson via the Adobe

Connect virtual classroom. In the middle of the classroom, the picture was one of the slides of the PowerPoint. To its right was the chatbox, whereby it was evident that I was trying to get the students into the classroom and to assign them to preparation tasks while sorting out connection problems and chasing up other students. Underneath the middle picture were two London Olympic themed music files to be played to welcome the students to the lesson. To the left side of the classroom was the list of classroom participants. The left top corner was designated to the webcam images, which were not used in most of the lessons, as they required a high Internet speed and could significantly slow down or even break down the other functions of Adobe Connect.

From Table 9.5, it can be seen that the students ranked the functions of playing video (mean 4.9, sd=0.378) and showing PowerPoint (mean 4.9, sd=0.378) in the Adobe Connect classroom as the top two most useful functions to their learning. The students commented on the positive features of Adobe Connect as follows.

Table 9.5: The extent to which students perceived that the synchronous learning technologies (Adobe Connect and Skype) were helpful to their learning in the EEC course

Ranking	Technology features	Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
1	Playing video function	4.9	0.378	4	5
	Showing PowerPoint function	4.9	0.378	4	5
2	Chatbox	4.7	0.488	4	5
	Playing music function	4.7	0.488	4	5
3	WebCam function	4.6	0.535	4	5
4	Interactive whiteboard	4.4	0.787	3	5
5	Skype	3.7	1.113	2	5

PowerPoint

I really liked the PowerPoint, as it showed us pictures, as well as texts, and made it easier to understand the lesson. (YoYo)

As discussed before, it was very time-consuming to produce a PowerPoint for the lesson. However, it seemed valuable to the students' learning. I tried to combine both photos and text in each slide to make it visually attractive, but there was also text to help students learn more vocabulary and to use it in context. As I was the principal teacher, I could create PowerPoints

to suit my teaching style.

Video

Figure 9.3 illustrates that the EEC course prepared a considerable amount of short videos to enrich learning in the synchronous EEC lesson. This function was particularly useful when, I, as a Chinese English teacher, had to deliver the EEC course. The video performed like native English speakers to help learners listen to authentic conversations between native English speakers.



Figure 9.3: Videos, interactive whiteboard and music files presented in the Adobe Connect virtual classroom in an EEC lesson

However, the students pointed out that:

The video often could not be played smoothly. I could not really enjoy watching the video when it broke from time to time. (YoYo)

Some videos were too old to be interesting. (Sky)

The different perceptions of the students on the questionnaire and the interview possibly show that the questionnaire questions needed more clarification to differentiate between the function itself and the experience of using the function, if such functions were to be examined in future cycles.

Chatbox

It was very good to be able to write in the chatbox to express what we could not express in speaking. (YoYo)

Chatbox provided good support for classroom conversations when the teacher required all the students to contribute to the ideas or discussions. I also tried to type in keywords or the most important sentences to help the students' understanding. Sometimes the students typed in Chinese if they were really struggling to find English words to describe themselves. I reminded them to try to use alternative ways to describe the meaning, such as a sentence instead of a word. Gradually, the students used more English than Chinese.

Music

I like that we could listen to music in the classroom. (Moonlight)

I like the choice of music. (YoYo)

In the first half an hour of the lesson, themed music was played in the Adobe Connect classroom to welcome the students and tune them into the channel of the lesson. The music was usually selected according to the topic of the lesson. It also took time to search and compare different pieces of music and to choose a suitable piece that would be themed to the topic.

Webcam

We hardly used the function of the webcam. If we had used it, I would have felt too shy to speak. (YoYo)

As mentioned earlier, the reason for not using the webcam was because of the poor Internet speed. Although one student expressed that she might be too shy to speak if there were a webcam, if Internet speed allowed, it would be a good challenge to encourage the students to switch on the webcam when speaking. Because body language is also a significant element of communication, it was regarded as one of the weaknesses of the EEC course compared to the physical face-to-face course, as you could only hear the other participants or see them when they switched on the webcam. Nevertheless, this function could be used more efficiently when

Internet conditions allow.

Interactive whiteboard

Figure 9.4 shows the use of an interactive whiteboard at the end of the EEC lesson, and Figure 9.5 illustrates the use of the interactive whiteboard to support individual students' learning after the lesson. The students could type or draw on the interactive whiteboard.

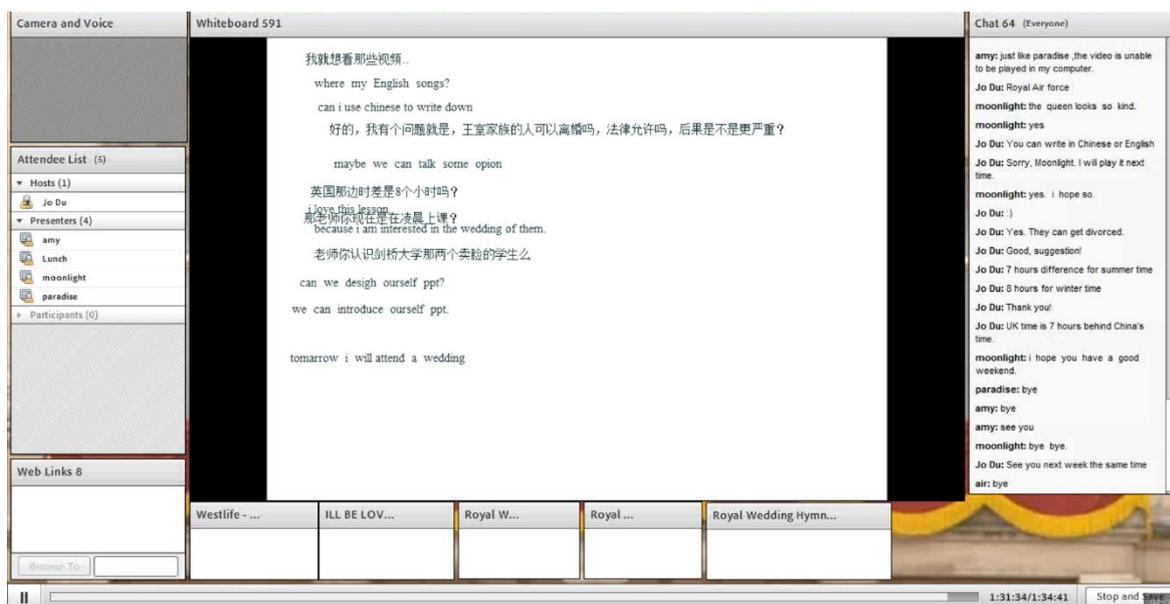


Figure 9.4: The use of an interactive whiteboard at the end of the EEC lesson

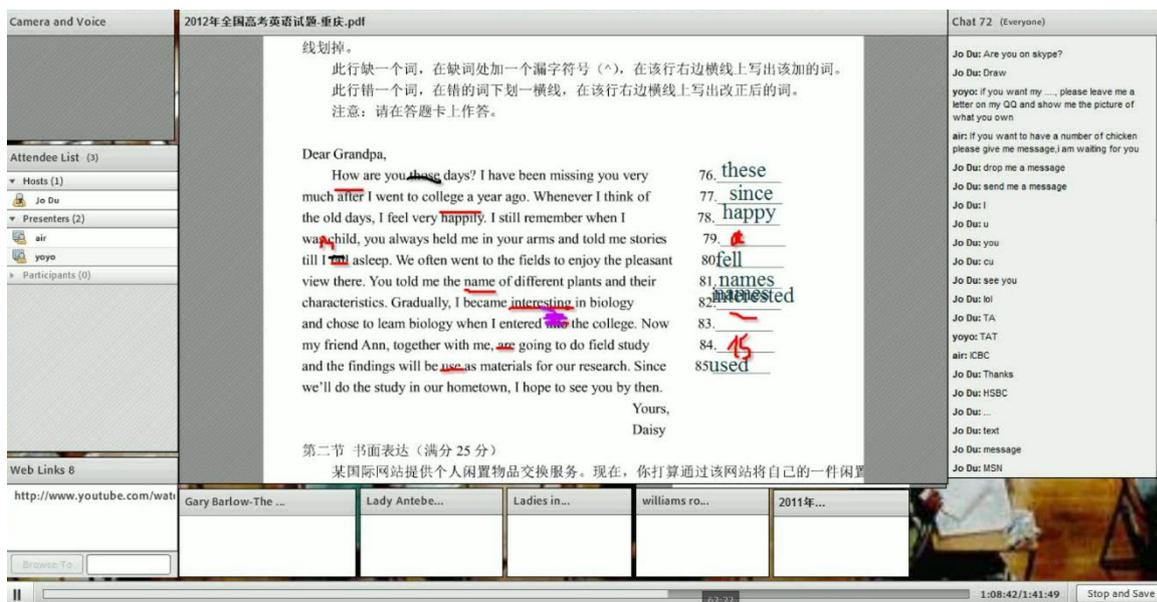


Figure 9.5: The use of an interactive whiteboard to support students' writing in small groups after the EEC lessons

Surprisingly, the interactive whiteboard was ranked lowest on the scale (mean 4.4, sd=0.787)

of features of Adobe Connect, albeit still positively overall. One student commented:

We could write on the interactive whiteboard. But we did not use it very often. We only used it when the teacher asked the students to write something on the board. (YoYo)

As there were approximately eight students and one or two teachers in a lesson, the interactive whiteboard was not large enough for all the students to write or draw on. The only time they could use the interactive whiteboard was towards the end of the lesson. In fact, it was very challenging to draw or write by hand on the interactive whiteboard, even with a pen and pad. However, typing texts on the interactive whiteboard could allow more students to write on the board. Yet, if the students wanted to write more, Chatbox allowed space for more extended writing.

Skype

As a result of the instability of the audio function of Adobe Connect, Skype was used to support Adobe Connect when the audio function was not playing well. There was a mixed preference for Skype (mean 3.7, sd=1.113):

I like Skype, as it has better audio quality. (Moonlight)

I preferred to talk on QQ than Skype. Because we Chinese do not normally use Skype. It was not as convenient to log into Skype as QQ. (Tom)

However, Tom changed his mind later, saying that there was no particular disadvantage to Skype compared to QQ and that it seemed a good idea to get used to Skype, as it was popular overseas and useful for international communication.

The questionnaire did not ask questions about the Internet stream of the face-to-face EEC course. However, interviewees pointed out that the weakest feature of the virtual learning environment were the technological issues. Quite often, they could not watch videos smoothly, if at all, during lessons. This was much worse if the videos were played through Adobe Connect. To solve this problem, videos were uploaded to the SkyDrive of an Outlook account. It was found that there were still students who could not watch videos smoothly. As a result, it was decided that all the videos would be watched before or during the first 30 minutes of the lesson so that it would not interrupt the flow of the lesson. This solution, in fact, might increase the discussion

time during the main lesson.

On the whole, participants liked the Adobe Connect virtual classroom and Skype. However, poor Internet speed added considerable frustration to the students' learning experience. There was a need to explore other virtual classrooms, which might run more smoothly under poor Internet conditions.

- **Asynchronous learning**

The students were asked to preview and review the lesson through the self-designed website, QQ, email and Sina micro-blog. This section discusses the findings of the features of the above asynchronous learning platforms in RC1.

Table 9.6: The extent to which students perceived that the asynchronous learning technologies were helpful to their learning in the EEC course

Ranking	Content	Mean	S.D.
1	Self-designed learning website	4.3	0.756
2	QQ	3.7	1.496
3	Email	3.4	1.397
4	Sina micro-blog	3.0	1.153

Self-designed website

The students were expected to complete tasks at home to reinforce their learning on the self-designed learning website. I invited a web designer to help me design the website. I was in charge of designing, adding and managing the content of the website, and the web designer produced the website according to my design. It took about three months before the website was ready for the students to use.

Table 9.6 shows that the students regarded the self-designed website to be the most useful asynchronous learning platform (mean 4.3, sd=0.756). However, mixed opinions were expressed in the interviews. The positive features of the website that the students perceived were:

The homepage of the website (Figure 9.6) was attractive and the framework of the website functions was very simple and clear. (YoYo)

I like the design of the website. It has a lot of content in the study zone (Figure 9.7 and Figure 9.8). And it has good links to make it easy to find the content that I needed. (Moonlight)

I like the web pages with pictures. (Qin)



Figure 9.6: Self-designed website (homepage)



Figure 9.7: Self-designed website (study zone homepage)

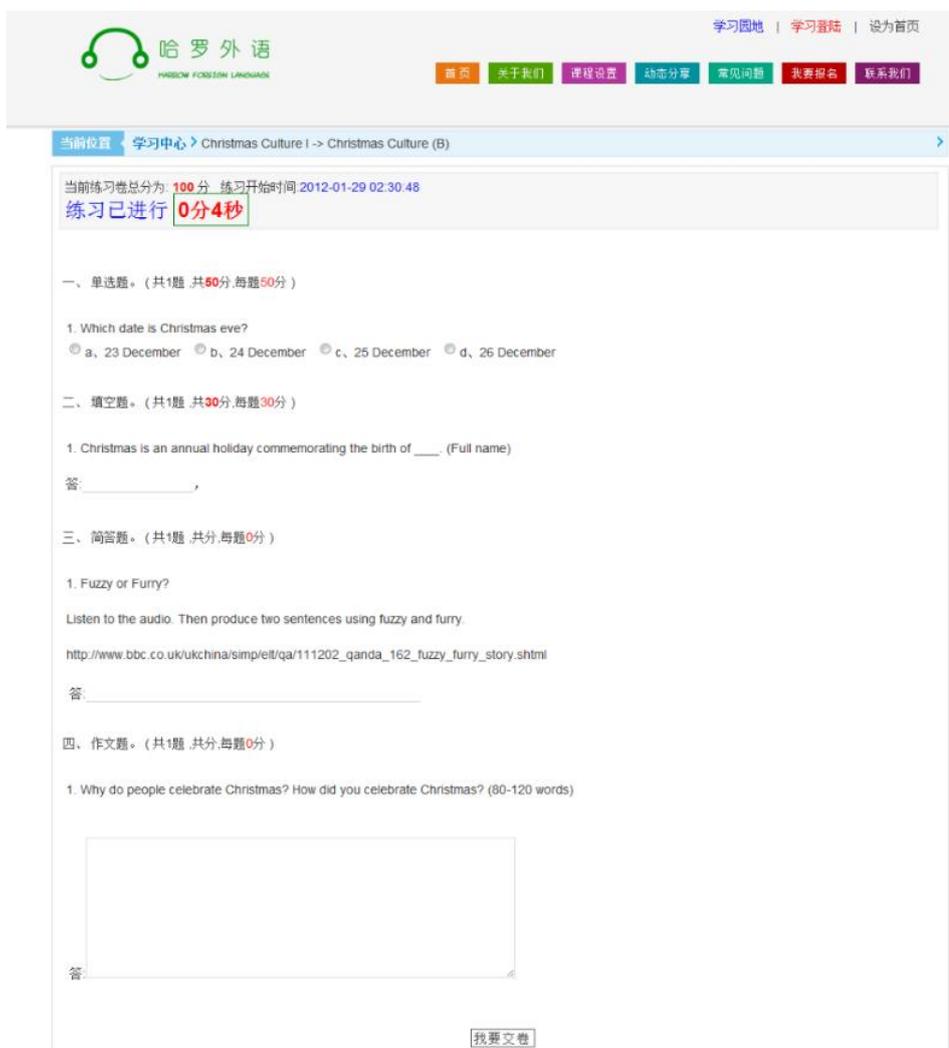


Figure 9.8: Self-designed website (study zone – exercises for reviewing the lesson)

However, the students also pointed out the following issues:

It took too long to open the website. The content was not fully complete. So I had no interest in it. (Air)

It was slow to open the webpage of the study zone. (Moonlight)

Some icons looked childish (Figure 9.10)...I do not know how to improve it. But the web pages without any pictures looked a bit dull. (YoYo)

When I opened the website using 360 explorer, the web pages were disordered (Figure 9.9). (Sky)



Figure 9.9: The disordered web page opened by some explorers such as 360



Figure 9.10: The web page that the students perceived to be childish

To improve the website, the students suggested the following:

Could add more pictures to make it more attractive. (YoYo)

*Could add a chatroom to enable us to chat with foreign teachers or other foreign people.
(Moonlight)*

It was very useful to hear the students' feedback on the website. However, reaching both the expectations of the students and my ideal website would require much more investment and time. It did not seem practical for me as an EdD student who had a full-time job to spend too much time and money designing the website. Of course, this could be a vast area to develop in the future. However, in this doctorate study, I chose other, more economical ways, such as Edmodo, to see whether the existing educational website could work well to support the asynchronous learning of the EEC course.

QQ, Email, Sina micro-blog

The students showed some preference for using QQ (mean 3.7, sd=1.496) but had neutral opinions on using emails (mean 3.4, sd=1.397). Males tended to like the idea of communicating via email (mean 4.33), while females gave it the lowest score (mean 2.75). The responses of students showed that attempts to engage learners in learning English outside lesson time, such as the Chinese Sina micro-blog (mean 3.0, sd=1.153), were not welcome. One interviewee remarked that they had little time to access the Internet during school time. Although many had mobile phones, they tended to use them for social communication rather than as a learning tool.

9.4 How RC1 informs RC2

This section discusses the implications of RC1 to inform the intervention plan for RC2. It addresses the four stages of the course design development model of the EEC course (Figure 7.8): who the course was for (Section 9.4.1), what to achieve (Section 9.4.2), how to assess learners' progress and evaluate the key features of the course (Section 9.4.3), how to design and deliver the course (Section 9.4.4), and what to improve (Section 9.4.5).

9.4.1 Who the course is for

The findings of RC1 highlighted that the EEC course did not suit secondary-school students because of the high pressure of university entrance exams, which to many Chinese students were life-changing exams (Li & Baldauf, 2011). Therefore, it was felt that it would be better to

look at other potentially more beneficial students. Therefore, Year 1 university students were chosen in RC2 to explore how university students would respond to the EEC course (Figure 9.11). The reasons for this choice are discussed in Section 10.1.

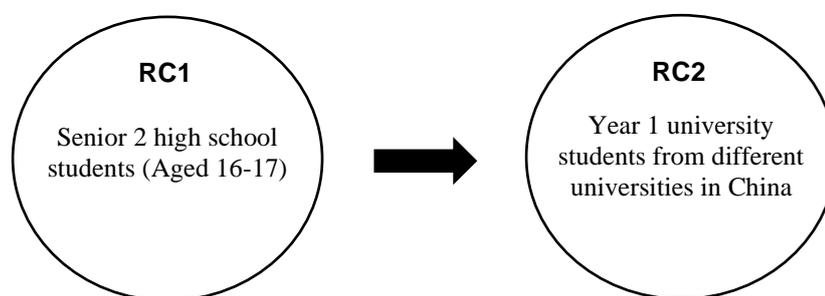


Figure 9.11: Change of participants from RC1 to RC2

9.4.2 What to achieve: introducing actional competence and strategic competence

The understanding of the concept of communicative competence determined the goals and objectives of the EEC course, which was also vital to inform the assessment tools, data-collection tools, and the design of the EEC course. In RC1, the understanding of the concept of communicative competence was based on linguistic competence. Although it had a goal of developing students' communicative competence, it was not clear at the beginning of RC1 which aspects of communicative competence the EEC course could help the students to develop. Therefore, the assessment tools were heavily based on IELTS exams. Through the study of RC1, it became clearer that the EEC course played a more influential role in developing students' cultural awareness, communication strategies and speaking. Cultural awareness reveals sociocultural competence, communicative strategies echoes strategic competence, and speaking represents actional competence. After reviewing relevant literature, *actional competence* (Celce-Murcia, 1995) was identified as an element of communicative competence, in addition to linguistic competence, which would be examined specifically in RC2 (Figure 9.12). As the features of *strategic competence* could also be represented by the “information” component of actional competence, this study combined strategic competence with actional competence to sharpen the focus and simplify the assessment. The reason I did not choose sociocultural competence was that it was not clear to me at the time how I could assess sociocultural competence.

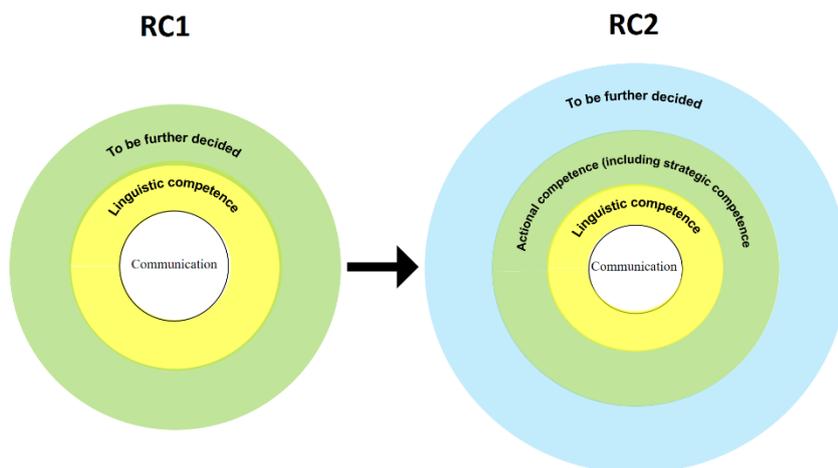


Figure 9.12: The development of the understanding of communicative competence from RC1 to RC2

9.4.3 How to assess learners' progress and evaluate the key features of the course

- **Assessment tools for students' progress in communicative competence**

The assessment tools used in RC1 failed to collect the data in the IELTS speaking and writing tests, as they were too lengthy to be practical, especially for the comparison group. The school English test was also not designed to assess communicative competence. Therefore, new assessment tools had to be explored to reflect more elements of communicative competence, especially actional competence and strategic competence. The existing tests had to be shortened and simplified (Figure 9.13).

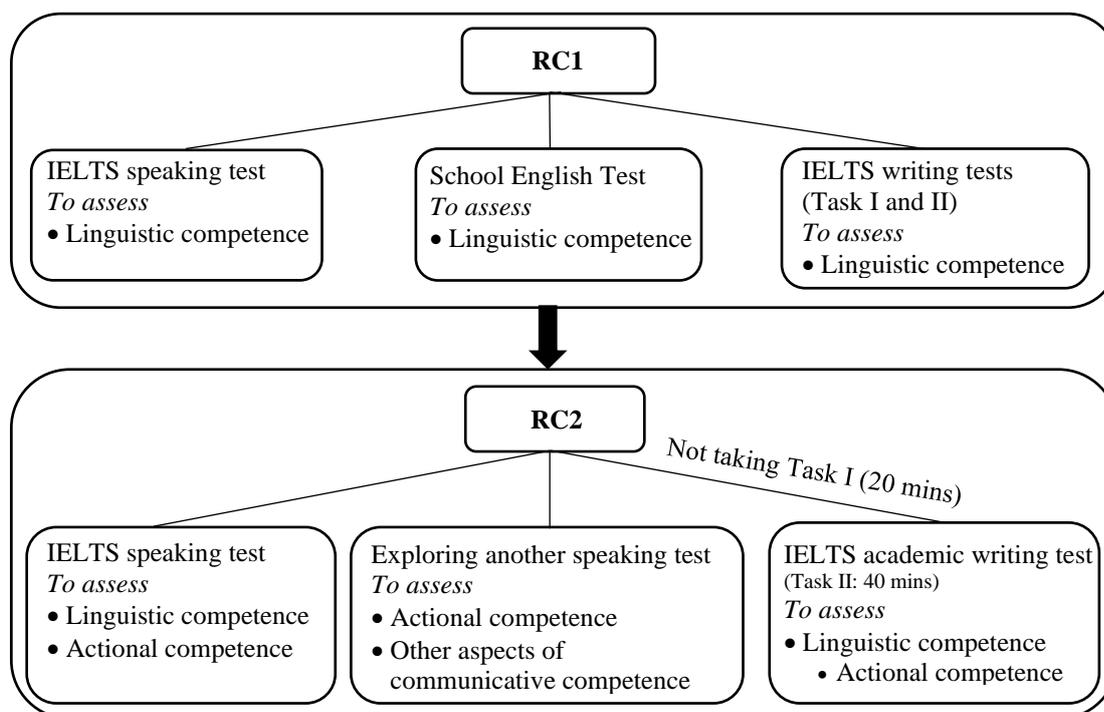


Figure 9.13: The change of pre-tests and post-tests from RC1 to RC2

- **Evaluation tools – questionnaires and interviews**

On the whole, these data-collection tools of the questionnaires and interviews were practical. It was interesting to observe how frank the students could be in the interviews. They also expressed that they did not mind being referred back to their questionnaires in the interviews. Therefore, it was felt that it would be valuable to ask the students to complete the questionnaires before taking the interviews. In this way, the interesting findings from the questionnaires could be further cultivated in the interview. Of course, it was necessary to obtain consent from the students regarding whether they were willing to make their questionnaires unanymous.

On the other hand, once the concept of communicative competence had been defined more clearly, the questions in the questionnaires and interviews also had to be changed accordingly. The questions regarding other issues such as topics and technologies also had to be changed accordingly.

9.4.4 How to design and deliver the course

The findings of RQ2 suggested a list of issues to be improved in terms of the features of the EEC course and the use of technologies.

- **Course structure**

The students confirmed that 30 minutes preparation time plus 1 hour for the main lesson was a good structure of time. However, the concerns that the students raised about not going overtime and the suggestion to add some time after the main lesson for the students to socialise with one another in a relaxed atmosphere were considered. Therefore, 30 minutes was added to RC2 after the main lesson, in addition to taking more control of the lesson time so as not to go beyond the scheduled time.

- **Course features**

The first 30-minute preparation lesson

It was found that the first 30 minutes of the lesson was often wasted because I, the only teacher present, had to sort out technical problems and do administration. The necessity was raised to have a course assistant to enable the teacher to focus on teaching.

The main lesson (60-minute real-time synchronous lesson)

The main lesson was the most interesting part for the students, especially to raise cultural awareness. While they enjoyed the lessons taught by the Chinese teacher of English, the

students also welcomed having invited English speakers (IES) to teach this part of the lesson. The next research cycle would therefore continue this pattern.

The topics of the EEC course

In general, the students were interested in the topics taught in RC1. However, they seemed more interested in topics that were spontaneous and interesting to them and less attracted to topics that were remote to them, such as *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. The study also showed that there were expectation gaps between what the IES thought the students might be interested in and what the students were actually interested in. Although it may not be totally avoidable to teach students topics that are remote to them, it is valuable to collect students' reactions to the delivered topics. For some topics that are remote to students, these can be avoided in the next cycle. For other topics, it may be worth developing different approaches, if the topics are meaningful to the students. Another lesson learnt was that the course designer should also give her opinion when discussing with the IES about which topics to teach. This was because the IES may not necessarily have knowledge of the students' culture and interests.

- **Technology features**

Technologies to support synchronous learning

On the whole, the students liked the Adobe Connect virtual classroom and found it useful to use Skype to support Adobe Connect. However, the luxurious functions of Adobe Connect were disrupted by the poor Internet connection. This means that the EEC course should not try to play videos in the lesson but rather send the students videos before the lesson. Other virtual classrooms could also be explored for the EEC course to see whether they could provide more stable functions under slow Internet connections.

Asynchronous learning

The students liked the self-designed learning website most. This has encouraged me to continue developing the learning website and mobile app for the EEC course when I have completed my doctorate study. However, as the students suggested that they would also like to have a platform to communicate with other English-speaking students, it was felt that Edmodo might be a better choice for RC2.

QQ was another popular asynchronous learning platform among the students, as everyone had an account with QQ. However, Sina micro-blog was less useful, as some students did not use the Sina micro-blog often. Therefore, in RC2, instead of the Sina micro-blog, other social media

technologies were explored.

9.4.5 What to improve – summary of the intervention plan of RC2 informed by RC1

The implications of RC1 for RC2 were only suggestions for trialling. Some changes might be practical but some might not. Table 9.7 summarises the course design development details, which include the implications for RC2 and the intervention plan of RC2 for the convenience of the reader.

Table 9.7: Summary of the course design development from RC1 to RC2

		Delivery of RC1	Implications for RC2	Intervention plan for RC2
Why and who to take the course	Identifying the gap in needs	The lack of initiative and ability to communicate with English speakers from other cultures effectively in-depth.		
	Identifying participants	Students: Intervention group: Senior 2 high-school students Comparison group: Senior 2 high-school students Teachers: Chinese English teacher (I, the researcher) One invited specialist English speaker	Change the participants from high-school students to university students as a trial	Students: Intervention group: Year 1 university students from different universities in China Comparison group: The classmates of Year 1 university students paired with the intervention group Teachers: Chinese English teacher (I, the researcher) One or two invited specialist English speaker(s)
What to achieve	Defining and developing the key concepts	Communicative competence: Linguistic competence	Further reviewing of literature and linking to the findings of RC1	Communicative competence: Linguistic competence Actional competence
	Formulating goals and objectives	Goals: Improve Chinese English learners' communicative competence Objectives: Improve Chinese English learners' communication ability in speaking		Goals: Unchanged Objectives: Improve Chinese English learners' communication ability in speaking and writing
How to assess the progress and evaluate the course	Designing an assessment plan for learner's progress	IELTS academic writing test (Task I and Task II) IELTS speaking test School English exam	Continue reviewing the literature and exploring ways to assess actional competence and strategic competence	IELTS academic writing test (Task II) IELTS speaking test
	Data-collection plan for evaluation of the course	From students only: Questionnaire and interview are conducted in no particular order	May order questionnaire and interview to have more in-depth data from the interview	From students only: 1. Conduct questionnaires before the interview 2. Use questionnaire data to inform questions in the interview
	Delivering time of the course	5:30pm–7pm China time	Start the lesson one hour earlier to avoid peak-time internet traffic	4:30pm–6pm China time
	Course structure	Asynchronous learning: 1. Pre-lesson preparation Synchronous learning: 2. Preparation (30 minutes) 3. Main lesson (60+ minutes)	1. Difficult to access the pre-lesson preparation tasks, as it was challenging to open the self-learning website. Explore alternative way to upload learning resources. 2. Restrict the time length of the main lesson.	Asynchronous learning: Pre-lesson preparation (through Edmodo) Synchronous learning: Presentation (30 minutes): students do the presentation with a focus on Q&A; solving the technology problem

How to design and deliver the course		(For more details, please see Figure 7.13.)	Not go over time. Add plenary session for students to have a more relaxed chat for socialising.	Main lesson (60 minutes): the same as RC1
		Preparation time (the first 30 minutes): 1. Enter the virtual classroom 2. Read articles to prepare for the lesson 3. Informal chat 4. Sorting out technical problems to get ready for the main lesson	1. Use preparation time more efficiently. Change preparation time to “presentation with a focus on Q&A” time 2. Have a course assistant to enable the teacher to focus on teaching rather than dealing with technology issues	Preparation time (the first 30 minutes): 1. Enter the virtual classroom 2. Two students do the presentation in turn and answer the audience's questions 3. Have a student assistant to help to sort out technical problems to get ready for the main lesson
		Main lesson (60 minutes): 1. Discussion about the topics led by Chinese English teacher 2. Invited native specialist English teacher to lead the main lesson (3 lessons)	May increase the time of invited native specialist English speaker when finance allows	Main lesson (60 minutes): The same as RC1
		N/A	Introduce a plenary time (15–30mins) for students to socialise with one another or to ask teachers some questions that may not necessarily link to the topics	Plenary time (30 minutes): Students are free to chat with one another or draw on the whiteboard. Alternatively, students may chat with the Chinese English teacher.
		N/A	Introduce a task-based project to stretch the students' independent learning, exploration ability, communication and cooperation skills in pairs beyond the lesson	Post-lesson task: The students are required to write a 500- to a 1,000-word article and do a presentation in pairs
		Topics: 1. The topics that students like more: The latest topics that they are interested in The topics related to the invited English speaker The topics related to their life 2. The topics that students like less: The topics that are remote to them The revision lesson	1. Keep teaching topics that are spontaneous and interesting to the students 2. Reduce the number of topics that are remote or irrelevant to the students 3. Not teaching revision lesson	Topics: Follow the same principle of RC1 Reduce the number of topics that are remote or irrelevant to the students

	Technology features	<p>Technologies to support synchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Main synchronous learning platform: Adobe Connect (the students especially liked its functions to display PPT, play video and audio music in the classroom)</p> <p>2. Back-up synchronous learning platform: Skype (mainly used to support the audio function of Adobe Connect)</p>	<p>1. Poor connection to Adobe Connect virtual conference room. Need to search and try a less demanding virtual conference classroom app.</p>	<p>Technologies to support synchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Main synchronous learning platform: WiZIQ (the students especially liked its functions to display PPT and interactive whiteboard)</p> <p>2. Back-up synchronous learning platform: Skype (mainly used to support the audio function of Adobe Connect)</p>
		<p>Technologies to support asynchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Technologies the students liked more: Self-designed learning website (ehaluo) QQ (group)</p> <p>2. Technologies the students liked less: Sina micro-blog Email</p> <p>3. Technologies the students wanted to have: Social platform with international English speakers</p>	<p>1. It was very slow to open the self-designed learning website even though its server was in China</p> <p>2. It was costly and time-consuming to design a self-designed learning website. So may leave it until funding and time allow.</p> <p>3. May try Edmodo to increase the opportunity for learners to socialise with international English speakers and learners</p> <p>4. May stop using Sina micro-blog</p>	<p>Technologies to support asynchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Main asynchronous learning platform: Edmodo</p> <p>2. QQ and email</p>

The following chapter explores how the above listed interventions were implemented in research cycle 2 (RC2) and presents its findings.

10. Findings from Research Cycle 2

10.1 Sampling strategies of RC2

As a result of the high pressure of university entrance exams ahead of Senior 2 students and the intensive English teaching of senior high school, there was little flexibility to conduct the pre-tests and post-tests required by the EEC course. In the process of deciding whether to continue the EEC course with senior high-school students, a Year 1 university student, Atlantis, who attended one lesson of the EEC course but could not continue it when he was studying in the senior high school, approached me and showed a strong interest in taking part in this course. I accepted this idea. However, as I had no previous experience in teaching university students, RC2 was more about exploring the possibility of teaching university students than examining the efficacy of the intervention. Therefore, the participants in RC2 were a group of Year 1 students from six universities in China who were introduced by Atlantis and the recommended students themselves. Soon after the start of the EEC course, two students said that they could not attend the course because of other commitments. Therefore, only six students attended the EEC course in RC2 (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1: The profile of the intervention group students in RC2

Student number	Participants	Gender	University	Major	Year group
1	Yuan	Female	Chongqing Jiaotong University	International Economy and Trading	2
2	Mark	Male	Tianjin University	Chemical Engineering and Technology	1
3	Lily	Female	Southwestern University of Finance and Economics	E-commerce	1
4	Windmill	Male	Southwestern University of Finance and Economics	E-commerce	1
5	Helen	Female	Southwestern University of Finance and Economics	E-commerce	1
6	Atlantis	Male	Southwestern University of Finance and Economics	E-commerce	1

As these university students were scattered among different universities, it was not possible to use one group of students to form the comparison group. Therefore, all the intervention-group students were asked to find a classmate who was at a similar English level to them to form the comparison group. However, it was proved that this was not a practical strategy to form the

comparison group. This might be because the intervention-group students did not have any power or authority to ensure that their classmates would attend the pre- and post-tests. The failure to collect the test data from the comparison group illustrated that there must be a significant change in the sampling strategies of RC3.

10.2 Data-collection process of RC2

With further clarification of the concept of communicative competence, the tests in RC2 were designed based on linguistic competence and actional competence. It retained the IELTS speaking test and the simplified academic IELTS writing tests and removed the school-based English test. Although presentation with a focus on interaction with the audience was not initially designed to be one of the tests in RC2, after problems were discovered in the IELTS speaking pre-test, it was added to the post-test to check its practicality.

All three tests could assess test-takers' linguistic competence using the IELTS speaking and writing assessment criteria in grammatical range and accuracy. The assessment criteria for fluency and coherence, lexical resource and pronunciation were used as part of the assessment criteria for actional competence because they reflect the competence of students to express themselves, which are among the features of actional competence. More criteria were also added to assess actional competence. The criteria were produced based on the detailed description of each sub-communicative competence (Appendix XV) identified by Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995). The assessment criteria for actional competence followed the same approach and chose the elements of clarification and appropriateness to express oneself, strategies and appropriateness to state or defend one's opinions, and attitude interacting with interlocutors. Some were chosen to make it easier to evaluate, such as appealing for help, meaning negotiation and comprehension checks.

The IELTS writing tests were shortened from Tasks I and II to Task II only. IELTS academic writing test Task I mostly asked students to describe a chart or diagram, which was done more to describe a fact and less to express an opinion. Task II was a debating task asking the test-taker to write down the arguments relating to his/her opinion on a statement within 40 minutes (Figure 10.1). The debating task reflected students' opinions on a social or cultural statement. A student's pre-test and post-test for IELTS Academic Writing test II are presented in Appendix XXVIII. More of the communication potential of the students could be assessed through Task II rather than Task I. Therefore, only Task II was kept in RC2. To avoid the students recalling what they had written in the pre-test, the questions in Task II were different in the pre-test and

post-test.

IELTS Writing Task II (Pre-test):

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Is freedom of speech necessary in a free society?

Give reasons for your answer.

Write at least 250 words.

IELTS Writing Task II (Post-test):

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Nowadays many students have the opportunity to study for part or all of their courses in foreign countries.

While studying abroad brings many benefits to individual students, it also has a number of disadvantages.

Do you agree or disagree?

Write at least 250 words.

Figure 10.1: Pre-test and post-test of IELTS academic writing test Task II used in the EEC course in RC2

It was expected that this task would evaluate not only students' linguistic competence but also actional competence in terms of clarification, appropriateness expressing oneself, and strategies and appropriateness stating or defending one's opinions. This task was not designed to assess students' strategic competence with the above range of definition.

In the presentation tests, students had to present a general topic that they were interested in within five minutes, and then the audience asked the presenter questions for approximately ten minutes. The presentation was mainly used to assess students' linguistic competence and some elements of actional competence. The Q&A offered an opportunity for learners to show not only linguistic competence but also actional competence, including the elements of strategic competence that are part of actional competence. The students were asked to give one another scores in addition to the teacher's marking. The rationale behind this was that communication could be judged best by the interlocutors themselves, as they would know whether it was a meaningful or effective communication to them. The students were given time before the tests to read the assessment criteria and given scores for fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, pronunciation, and assessment criteria for actional

competence.

10.3 Findings of Research Question 1

RQ1: *Do learners perform differently in the English communicative competence assessment before and after the EEC course? If so, in what ways?*

All participants were asked to complete all three tests, as mentioned in Section 10.2. However, only three students in the intervention group completed all the tests in both the pre- and post-tests. Remarkably, when one student in the comparison group was taking the IELTS speaking test in the pre-test, he asked to stop the test as he was finding it too hard. Other students also stated that the tests were too long. The IELTS writing test lasted around 40 minutes and the IELTS speaking test lasted at least half an hour if time was added to sort out technical problems. The reactions of the students suggested that there was a need to further simplify the tests to make them practical for both intervention- and comparison-group students. When deciding about such tests, consideration also had to be given to how the comparison group students would benefit from the tests rather than simply supporting the study.

10.3.1 IELTS writing test

Base on the three students' performances in the IELTS writing test, Table 10.2 shows that, on average, the three students made 0.83 level progress in the IELTS writing tests. Table 10.3 further shows that the students made more progress in actional competence (0.89) than linguistic competence (0.67).

In fact, the decision to ask students to do two different IELTS writing tasks made it more challenging to mark the tests and compare progress. The pre- and post-tests could be clearly identified, which made it easier to give the score without any sub-conscious bias. Therefore, it was felt that it would be better to keep the pre-test and post-test the same in the next cycle.

In addition, IELTS academic writing Task II took the students 40 minutes, which seemed too long for the comparison-group students. When comparing this with IELTS general writing Task I, which only required 20 minutes and was more related to daily life communication, it was felt it might be better to adopt IELTS general writing test Task I as the writing assessment tool.

Table 10.2: Pre-test and post-test results of IELTS academic writing Task II

Name	Test	Task achievement	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Mean score	Progress
Song	Pre	5	5.5	5	5	5.13	0.88
	Post	6	6	6	6	6.00	
	Progress	1	0.5	1	1		
Lily	Pre	6	5.5	6	6	5.88	0.88
	Post	7	6.5	6.5	7	6.75	
	Progress	1	1	0.5	1		
Yuan	Pre	6	5.5	5.5	6	5.75	0.75
	Post	7	6.5	6.5	6	6.50	
	Progress	1	1	1	0		
Mean	Pre	5.67	5.50	5.50	5.67	5.58	0.83
	Post	6.67	6.33	6.33	6.33	6.42	
	Progress	1.00	0.83	0.83	0.67		

Table 10.3: Mean progress of communicative competence in the IELTS writing test

	Linguistic competence	Actional competence		
		Task achievement	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource
Mean progress	0.67	1.00	0.00	0.33
		0.000	0.289	0.289
		0.89		
S.D.	0.577	0.220		

10.3.2 IELTS speaking test

Similar to RC1, the IELTS speaking test was taken online via Skype. Because of financial limitations, invited English speakers (IES) were not invited to conduct the speaking test in RC2. In order that the questions could be read in the same standard and sounding like native English speakers, I played the audio-recording of the IELTS speaking test, which was a sample speaking test read by a native English speaker. The students seemed to understand simple questions fairly well but they struggled when the questions became complicated. Although it could be the case that the students were sincerely struggling to understand the questions, it was also possible that it was because it was played on an iPad and transferred via Skype. Some audio information could be lost on the way. Therefore, if the IELTS speaking tests were to continue to be used in the next cycle, they would have to be conducted by a native English speaker to reduce this problematic technical factor, financial resources permitting. Nevertheless, it would still be a

problem for the comparison-group students, as they still might not want to attend the speaking tests based on their difficulty.

Table 10.4 shows that the students made 0.67 (sd=0.615) progress, on average, in the IELTS speaking test. Similar to the IELTS writing test, Table 10.5 illustrates that the students made more progress in actional competence (0.78, sd=0.675) than linguistic competence (0.33, sd=0.289).

Table 10.4: Pre-test and post-test results of the IELTS speaking test

	Test	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation	Mean score	Progress
Song	Pre	6	6	6	6	6	0.625
	Post	7	7	6.5	6	6.625	
	Progress	1	1	0.5	0		
Lily	Pre	5	6	6	6	5.75	0.375
	Post	6	6	6.5	6	6.125	
	Progress	1	0	0.5	0		
Yuan	Pre	4	5	5.5	5	4.875	1
	Post	6	6	5.5	6	5.875	
	Progress	2	1	0	1		
Mean	Pre	5.00	5.67	5.83	5.67	5.54	0.67
	Post	6.33	6.33	6.17	6.00	6.21	
	Progress	1.33	0.67	0.33	0.33		

Table 10.5: Mean progress of communicative competence in the IELTS speaking test

	Linguistic competence	Actional competence		
	Grammatical range and accuracy	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Pronunciation
Mean progress	0.33	1.33	0.67	0.33
		0.577	0.580	0.577
		0.78		
Standard deviation	0.289	0.675		

In actional competence the greatest progress the learners made was in fluency and coherence (1.33, sd=0.577), followed by lexical resource (0.67, sd=0.580) and then pronunciation (0.33, sd=0.577). Nevertheless, the IELTS speaking tests could hardly reflect the real interaction between interlocutors. Therefore, they could not assess learners' strategic competence. To solve this problem, presentation with a focus on Q&A was added to the assessment.

Presentation with a focus on Q&A (PQA)

As the IELTS speaking test took a long time and the comparison group students were reluctant to attend such a lengthy and difficult test, it proved to be an impractical test for this study. Therefore, I started to explore other ways to assess students' verbal communicative competence. After consulting the students and a few university teachers, I decided to trial the PQA test. The first consideration was that presentations were something that many university English courses required students to do. Hence, it would be easier to organise it in the university English lessons so that the comparison-group students could also complete the test without giving extra time to this study. However, I noticed that many Chinese students could deliver very fluent presentations while struggling to answer the audience's questions. Therefore, it was crucial to add the Q&A part to assess students' genuine real-time communicative competence. In addition, more sub-communicative competencies, such as strategic competence, could be assessed in this part.

As the decision was made after the pre-test, I only managed to collect the post-test results of the presentation with a focus on Q&A in RC2. At the end of each presenter's test, the students were asked to give one another scores immediately under the criteria of "fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, pronunciation, and actional competence". To avoid my score bias with the students' scores, I did not play the role of examiner in this assessment.

Table 10.6: Post-test results of the presentation with a focus on Q&A

(FC-Fluency and coherence; LR-Lexical resource; GA-Grammatical range and accuracy; PN-Pronunciation; AC-Actional competence)

Test-taker	Marker	FC	LR	GA	PN	AC	Total	Mean score
Song	Song	7	5	5	6		23	5.75
	Lily	5	4	4	4	5	22	4.4
	Yuan	8	7	7	7	4	33	6.6
	Mean	6.67	5.33	5.33	5.67	4.50		5.32
Lily	Song	6	5	6	6	4	23	4.6
	Lily	3	3	3	4		13	3.25
	Yuan	7	6	7	8	4	32	6.4
	Mean	5.33	4.67	5.33	6.00	4.00		4.75
Yuan	Song	6	5	5	6	3	25	5
	Lily	4	4	4	3	4	19	3.8
	Yuan	6	5	5	5		21	5.25
	Mean	5.33	4.67	4.67	4.67	3.50		4.68
Mean		5.78	4.89	5.11	5.44	4.00	23.00	4.92
S.D.		1.563	1.167	1.364	1.590	0.632	5.500	1.011

Table 10.6 shows the scores the students gave to one another in the PQA tests. When comparing the scores given by each student, it could be seen that the students had fairly different standards. On the whole, Song and Yuan gave higher scores than Lily. Yuan and Lily gave themselves the lowest scores but gave much higher scores to the others. This highlighted a major problem regarding this type of assessment, as if the same students were unable to attend the pre- and post-tests, the mean scores could be affected significantly, which would bias the results of the assessment. Therefore, it was not practical to ask the students to mark this test; this was assigned instead to the teachers. Furthermore, it was found that the students performed fairly differently in the PQA. It was felt that it would be helpful to give the scores separately to the PQA to enable more thorough and accurate analysis.

Overall, although in RC2 we were unable to collect the pre-tests of PQA, it showed a possible better way to assess students' verbal communicative competence to replace the IELTS speaking test. As discussed before, because of the one-to-one nature of the IELTS speaking test, it was not practical to ask the comparison group to take the IELTS speaking test one by one. In addition, the PQA test provided an opportunity for the presenter to interact with the audience, while there was almost no real interaction between the test-taker and the examiner in the IELTS speaking test. Therefore, based on time and practicality, the next cycle of the study would only employ the PQA test to evaluate students' progress in verbal communicative competence.

10.4 Findings of Research Question 2

With further clarification of the concept of communicative competence, RQ2 was defined as follows:

RQ2: *How do learners perceive the influence of the EEC course on their progress in linguistic, actional and strategic communicative competence in English?*

10.4.1 Students' overall impressions of the EEC course

In the questionnaire (Appendix III and IV), all three participants stated that they enjoyed the EEC course at the mean range of 4 (sd=0.000), which increased their interest in learning English at the mean range of 4 (sd=1.000).

Table 10.7 further shows that learners perceived that the EEC course helped them to improve more in actional competence (mean 3.7, sd=0.578) and strategic competence (mean 3.7, sd=0.578) than linguistic competence (mean 2.7, sd=0.578). This was in line with the findings

of the IELTS writing tests and speaking test, except there were no results for strategic competence in the two tests.

Table 10.7: The extent to which students consider that the EEC course helped them to improve their communicative competence (1-least helpful, 2-not so helpful, 3-neutral, 4-helpful, 5-most helpful)

	Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
Linguistic competence	2.7	0.578	2	3
Actional competence	3.7	0.578	3	4

The findings reflected the strengths and weaknesses of the EEC course design in RC2. The EEC course emphasised interaction in the lesson, which could be helpful to improve students’ fluency and coherence. The learning of different topics with large amounts of new vocabulary could help the students to expand their vocabulary and improve lexical resource. On the other hand, as the intention of the EEC course was to encourage students to be more open when speaking out, it did not attempt to correct students’ pronunciation. This does not mean that the EEC course could not help students improve their pronunciation, but perhaps that it could be left until a later stage when they were able to be more open when speaking out, with the provision of technical training for their pronunciation. This training could also be provided through asynchronous learning, time and finance permitting.

The students perceived that the EEC course had no impact on the improvement of their writing skills (mean 3, sd=1.000). This was in conflict with the findings of the IELTS writing tests and different from their enjoyment of the topic on written feedback (mean 4.3, sd=0.578). This suggests that, although the students enjoyed getting feedback on their writing, they did not feel the impact of this single lesson or task on their writing skills, even though there possibly was some, as the tests indicated. This also suggests that, to help the students improve their writing skills, more lessons or tasks should be added to the course content. However, it was considered that this could affect the focus of the EEC course at this stage, which was to help students improve their verbal communicative competence. Therefore, it was felt that it would be worth considering whether to include a specific lesson on writing skills in the synchronous lessons of the EEC course.

10.4.2 Students' perceptions of the design of the EEC course

Figure 10.2 shows the course structure, course features and technology features of the EEC course in RC2. The students suggested further improvement for the next cycle of the study. All students were clear about the structure of the EEC course and they liked its structure. This section discusses the findings regarding students' perceptions of the three parts of the EEC course in RC2.

- **Students' perceptions of the first 30 minutes of the EEC course**

In the first 30 minutes of the lesson, one or two students were asked to do a short presentation followed by Q&A time. The rest of the students were encouraged to ask the presenter questions. Both the teacher and the student audience gave verbal feedback to the presenter at the end of each presentation. The students really enjoyed this part of the lesson (mean 4.7, sd=0.578).

The students normally prepared a PowerPoint and sent it to the teacher to upload to the virtual classroom. They were allowed to choose any topic that they found interesting. The reason for not setting a specific topic was to help the students take more initiative and become more comfortable talking about topics they were familiar with. However, regardless of which topics they were talking about, the audience could always ask challenging questions to take them out of their comfort zone. The students started to talk about their hometown or their own stories (Figure 10.3); gradually, they moved on to talking about other interests, such as movies (Figure 10.4); and then topics that were relevant at the time (Figure 10.5).

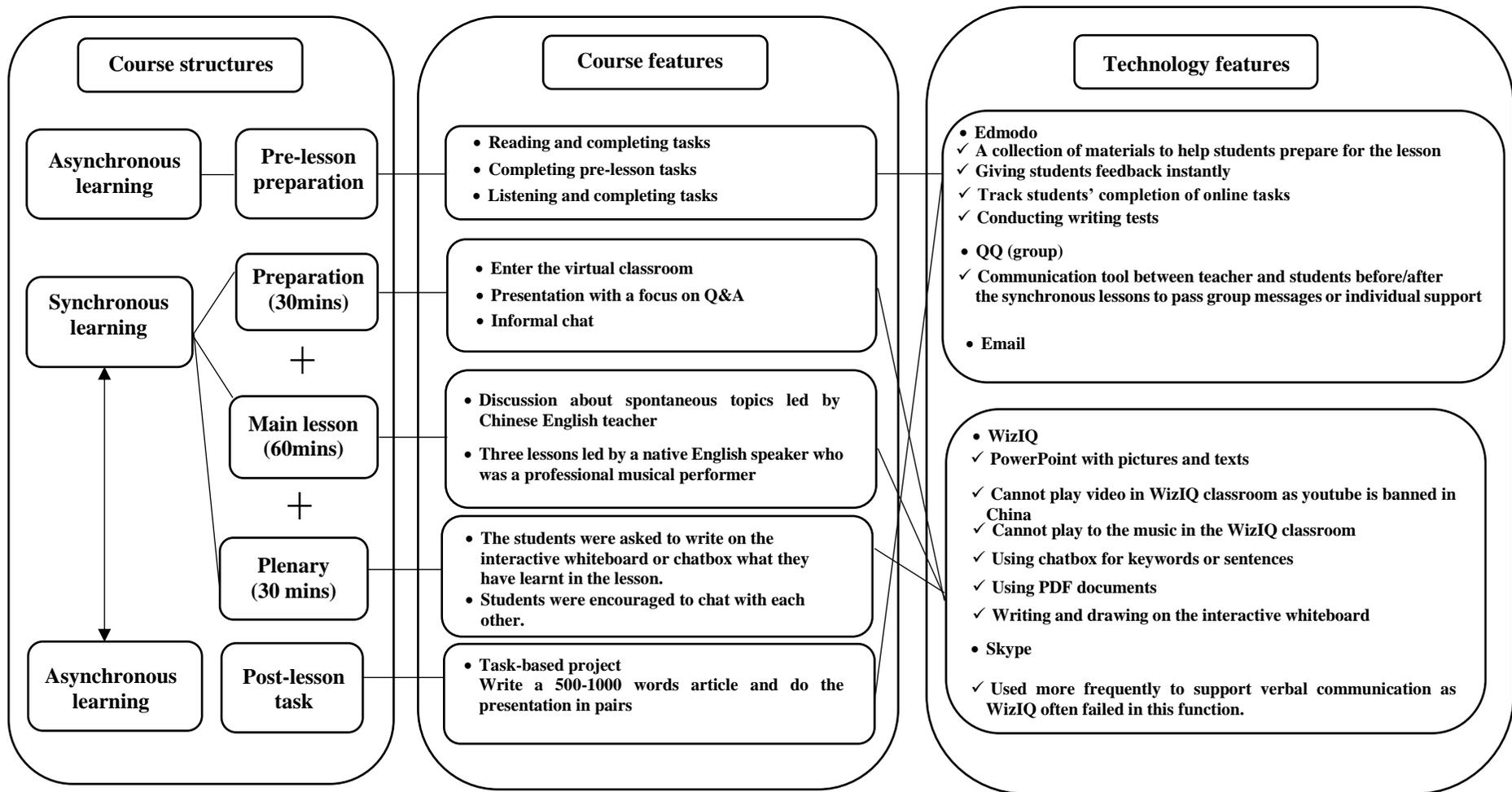


Figure 10.2: Course structure, course features and technology features of the EEC course in RC2

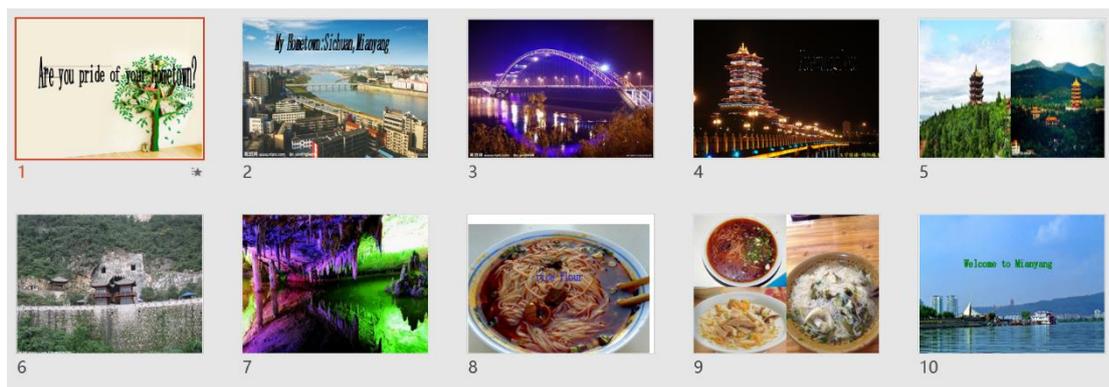


Figure 10.3: Yuan's presentation about her hometown

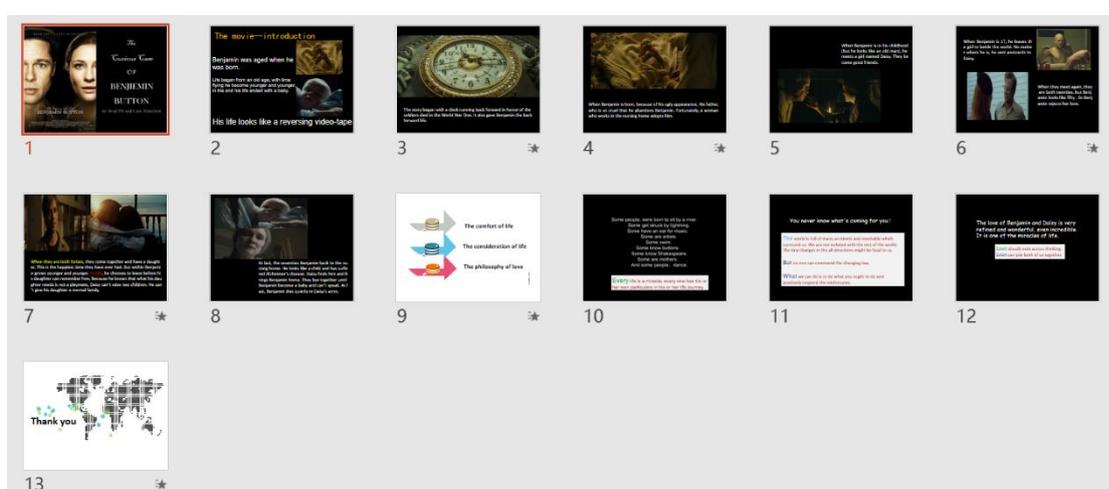


Figure 10.4: Helen's presentation about her favourite movie

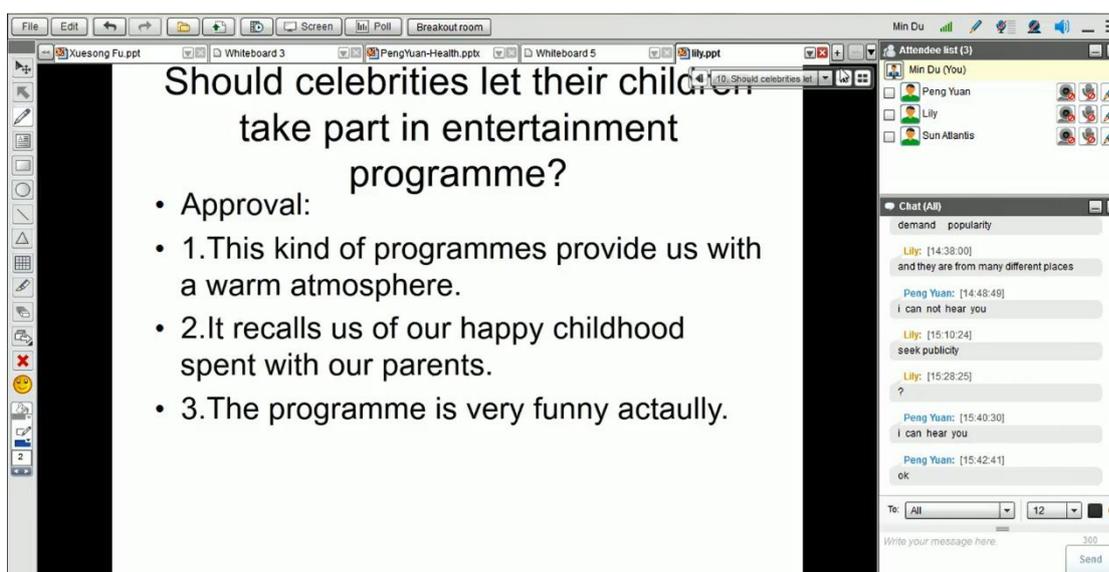


Figure 10.5: Lily's presentation about a debatable topic, "Should celebrities let their children take part in entertainment programmes?"

After some weeks, the students were also asked to do a project in pairs or small groups, and to present their investigation through presentation and writing. For instance, they were assigned a task to explore the stories behind their chosen British luxury brands (Figure 10.6).

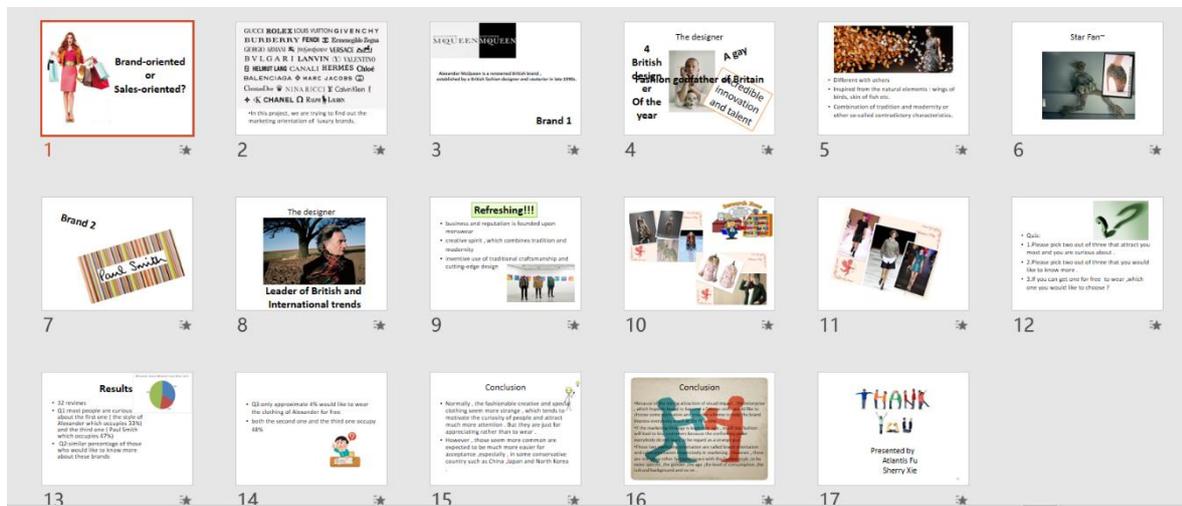


Figure 10.6: Project presentation by Song and Sherry about Paul Smith

The students commented that:

Although we do presentations at the university, we were given the topics by the teachers. But in the EEC course, we were allowed to choose our own topics. So I was keener on preparing for the presentations. In addition, we must interact with the audience in the EEC course. It was very hard for me. But I found it helpful. We hardly had any interaction with the audience in the English lessons at the university. (Song)

The interactions between the students were really good. ... I was not confident answering or asking any questions at the beginning of the course. But with the encouragement of the teacher and other students, I was more confident speaking out about my own ideas and not worrying about whether they were right or wrong. (Yuan)

The students also suggested that it would be even better if the invited English speaker (IES) could join this part of the lesson to interact with them. This was certainly a consideration for the next cycle.

- **Students' perceptions of the 60-minute main lesson**

Like the high-school students, the students also liked this part of the lesson. Similar to RC1, I delivered most of this part of the lesson to reduce the cost of the study, although I was aware

that foreign English teachers should be invited to deliver all the lessons for RC3. Nevertheless, two native English teachers were invited to teach this part of the lessons for three topics. More details are discussed in the later section titled *The topics of the EEC course*.

- **Students' perceptions of the plenary and social time (30 minutes)**

As suggested by the students in RC1, this part of the lesson was intended to summarise the lesson and give students time to socialise. The students were asked to write on the interactive whiteboard or chatbox what they had learnt in the lesson. It was interesting to see that the students did not socialise verbally but were busy typing texts in the chatbox or writing on the interactive whiteboard. The students were also encouraged to ask any questions that they did not understand in the main lesson. The students commented:

I liked this part of the lesson. Any questions that I did not understand in the main lesson could be clarified here. (Yuan)

However, the students also expressed their concerns:

I do not like it to be extended for more than half an hour. In fact, it would be better if this part of the lesson were less than half an hour. (Lily)

It was understandable that a two-hour lesson was too long for a young student, and in fact even for adults. Therefore, this part of the lesson was reduced to around 15 minutes and no more than 20 minutes in the next cycle.

- **The topics of the EEC course**

Table 10.8 shows the extent to which the topics of the EEC course were interesting to the learners.

Table 10.8: The extent to which the topics of the EEC course were interesting to the learners

Ranking		Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
1	Life at the University of Cambridge	4.7	0.578	4	5
2	Setting up a dinner table	4.3	0.578	4	5
2	Writing feedback	4.3	0.578	4	5
3	The different styles of writing for theatre	4.3	1.156	3	5
3	Christmas culture	4.3	1.156	3	5
3	Easter	4.3	1.156	3	5
4	Dinner etiquette	4.0	1.000	3	5
5	British luxury brands	3.7	0.578	3	4
5	John Lennon and Yoko Ono	3.7	0.578	3	4
5	Wine glasses	3.7	0.578	3	4
6	Royal wedding	3.7	1.156	3	5
7	Being a theatre director	3.7	2.309	1	5

Life at the University of Cambridge

The topic of life at the University of Cambridge was taught by an EdD doctorate student at Cambridge University. Despite the fact that he had a breakdown in his home Internet and had to go to his parents' house to access the Internet, the learners showed the most interest in learning about "life at the University of Cambridge" (4.7, sd=0.578). A student explained that:

Cambridge University is one of the best universities in the world. We would love to learn about student life at Cambridge University to see how it is different from ours.
(Song)

Setting up a dinner table and dinner etiquette

The students also expressed that the topic of how to set up a dinner table was practical and they could apply what they had learnt in the lesson with their friends or family. Regarding the topic of dinner etiquette, the native English teacher did not just talk about British dinner etiquette, but also compared dinner etiquette in France and engaged students in talking about Chinese etiquette.

The different styles of writing for theatre and being a theatre director

As the native English teacher in RC1, who was a musical actor, was performing on cruise ships around the world, he could not teach any more lessons to the EEC students. Consequently, I invited another native English teacher who was a BBC director and a famous mime actor, based on his interesting background and speciality. Although Table 11.8 shows that the students were least interested in the topic of being a theatre director, the distribution of the data showed the

least favourite of 1 in comparison to the other 5s. The student who marked it as 1 explained that she had been absent in that lesson; therefore, she gave the score according to her understanding of the topic itself. She said that she was not interested in being a theatre director and that was why she scored it as 1. This reveals that the questionnaire had to make it clear that it was the topic that was relevant and not whether students would like to enact any part of it. If we exclude this score of 1, the other two students both showed the greatest interest in this topic at 5. This suggests that the students were interested in the personal stories of the native English teacher.

British luxurious brands and writing feedback

As mentioned earlier, the students were required to write 500- to 1,000-word paragraphs about their research on British luxurious brands, and their articles were marked by a professional native English teacher (Appendix XXVII). Although I invited the English teacher to give the students feedback, it was agreed that she would not come in the end because her mother was ill. Therefore, I had to feed back on the writing myself (Figure 10.7). The students liked the project, as it enabled them to work together. However, they also expressed their concern, as the task was set during the spring festival holiday. Nonetheless, they found the feedback very helpful, as they rarely wrote such long paragraphs. Even for their short pieces of writing, they did not get such detailed feedback from their English teachers at university, as most of their writing was marked by the computer software automatically. Regarding the topic of British luxurious brands, the students commented that there was almost no chance for them to buy any of these luxurious brands, as they were still students. Therefore, they were not particularly interested in this topic. However, it was interesting to explore the designer stories behind the brands.

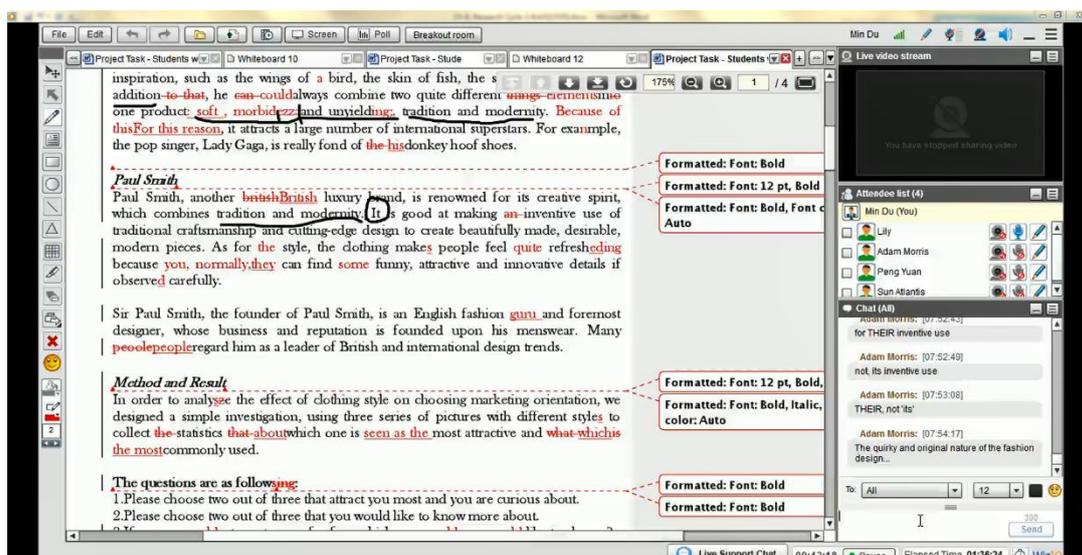


Figure 10.7: Giving students feedback for their writing on British luxurious brands

John Lennon and Yoko Ono

This was a very hard topic to teach, as it required a lot of reading and researching before I could deliver the lesson. In fact, I spent over a month learning about John Lennon and Yoko Ono (Figure 10.8). The reason that I chose this topic was that I noticed that my British friends liked to talk about the Beatles, but they had very different views about John Lennon and Yoko Ono. I found that their love story actually reflected reactions to western culture meeting eastern culture at the time. I felt that it was important for the students to learn about the Beatles, as it was one of the most popular British rock bands and famous worldwide, also representing the rock era in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the students found this topic less interesting than the other topics. They commented that:

*The Beatles is a very old British band. We were not really interested in old bands.
I had never heard about Yoko Ono. So it took me a while to get into this story.*

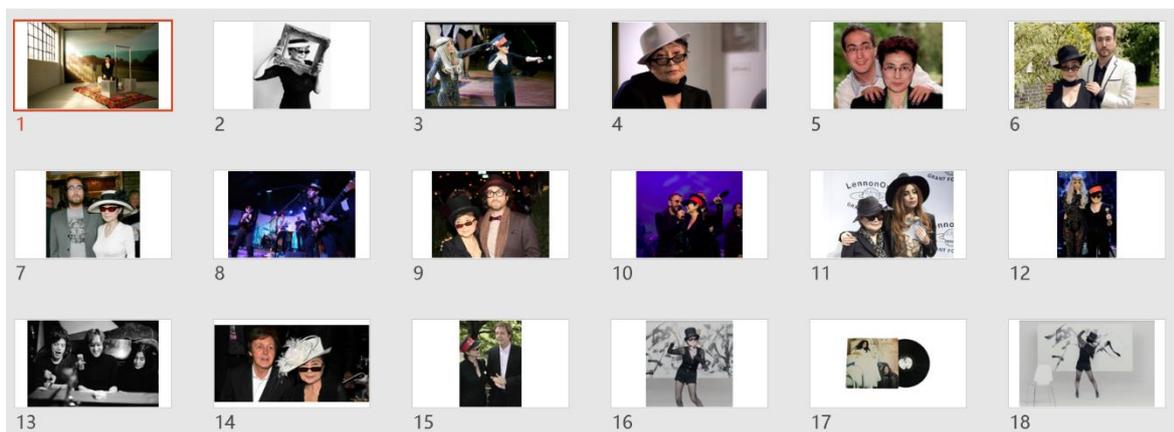


Figure 10.8: The PowerPoint delivering the topic of John Lennon and Yoko Ono

I respect what the students said, as the Beatles were very removed from the younger generation. However, I still believe that their story can inspire eastern people to understand better how to live in the western world. Yet, given that the students were not interested in such topics, it was my responsibility to explore better ways to deliver them in a more lively and interesting way.

Other topics

The students showed consistently high interest in the topics of Christmas (4.3, $sd=1.156$) and Easter traditions (4.3, $sd=1.156$). They also showed consistently lower interest in the topic of the royal wedding (3.7, $sd=1.156$). Overall, similar to the findings of RC1, the students were more interested in topics that were closer to their life and time and less interested in the topics that were removed from their current life. However, the students explained that even though

they were not interested in the “old” topics initially, they did search for more information about the topics after the lesson, realising that those topics were closely related to their understanding of British culture. Therefore, they suggested that it would still be good for the EEC course to introduce topics that might appear unattractive to learners initially but which are important for deepening an understanding of western culture. This is in line with the findings of Richterich (1983) that students may not know their own needs. There should be a balance between the perceived needs of the students and the teachers.

10.4.3 Students’ perceptions of the technology features of the EEC course

- **Synchronous learning**

Table 10.9 shows students’ preferences regarding WizIQ and Skype in RC2. Skype was perceived as being much more helpful to the synchronous learning environment than WizIQ.

Table 10.9: The extent to which students perceived the synchronous learning technologies (WizIQ and Skype) were helpful to their learning in the EEC course

	Mean	Std. deviation	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
Skype	4.7	0.578	4	5
WizIQ	3.3	0.578	3	4

In RC2 WizIQ replaced Adobe Connect as the virtual classroom based on the instability of Adobe Connect in China. However, the students still did not show a greater preference for the WizIQ virtual classroom (mean 3.3, sd=0.578) than Adobe Connect (mean 4.1, sd=0.690). They still found it frustrating, as it took too long, sometimes more than 10 minutes, to log into the WizIQ classroom. Furthermore, they often lost connection to the WizIQ classroom during the lesson. Therefore, as a back-up strategy, both teachers and students logged into Skype to talk and at the same time stayed in WizIQ for the other functions, such as the interactive whiteboard and PowerPoint display (Figure 10.9; Figure 10.10). With the assistance of Skype (mean 4.7, sd=0.578), students who lost connection to WizIQ could remain with the group in Skype (Figure 10.10). However, this made it more difficult to use chatbox to support the discussion.

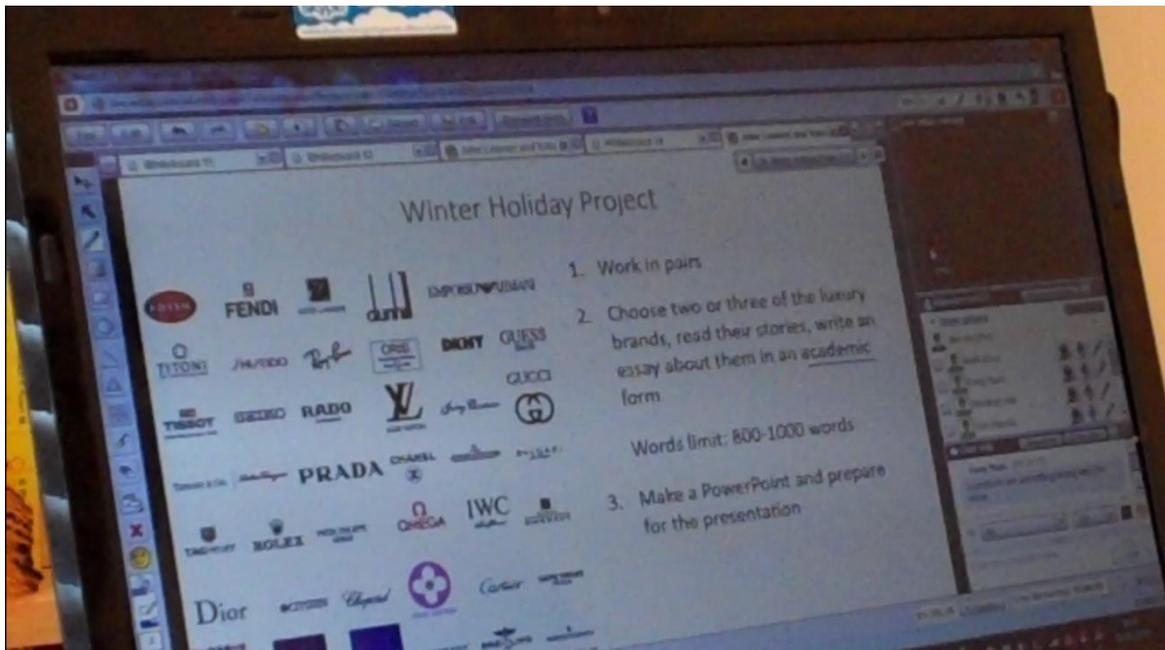


Figure 10.9: Using the PowerPoint function of the WizIQ classroom

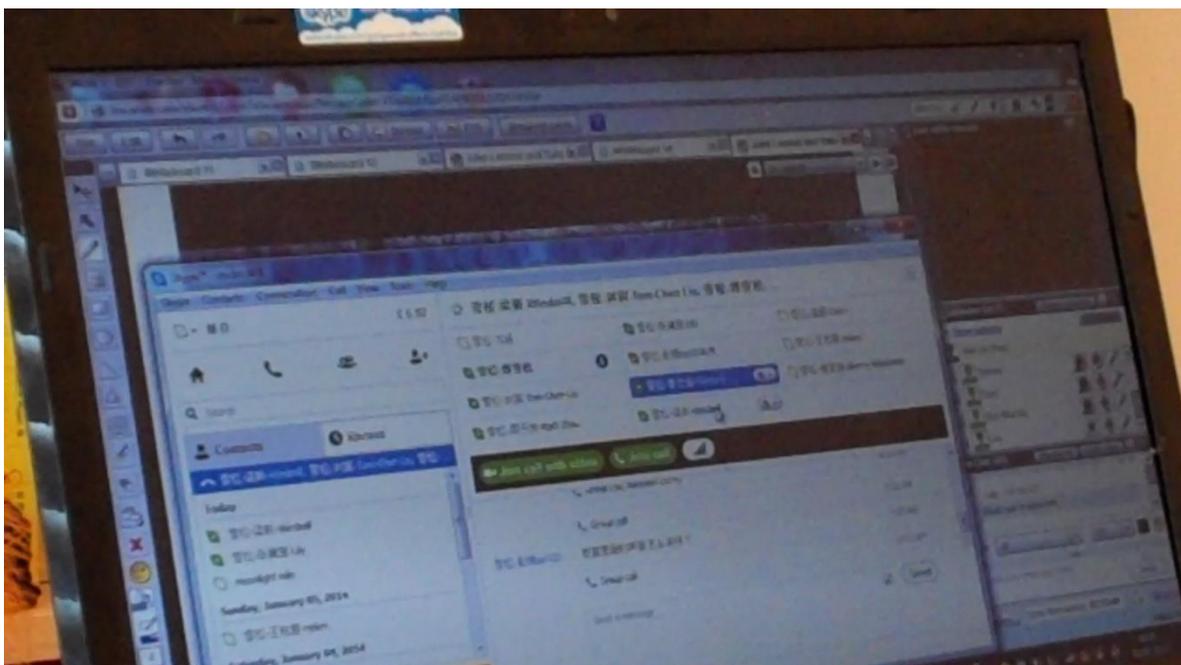


Figure 10.10: Using both WizIQ and Skype in the EEC lesson

As the teacher who used both Adobe Connect and WizIQ, I preferred Adobe Connect, as it could upload and play video and audio files in the virtual classroom. Although the WizIQ classroom could also play video, it was played through a designated external website, such as YouTube (Figure 10.11). However, YouTube was banned in China. WizIQ could also not play music in the classroom. Although I tried to play music through my microphone (Figure 10.9), the quality of the music could not be compared to direct play. It was a shame that WizIQ could

not provide a themed atmosphere of the lesson to support the topic as Adobe Connect could do.

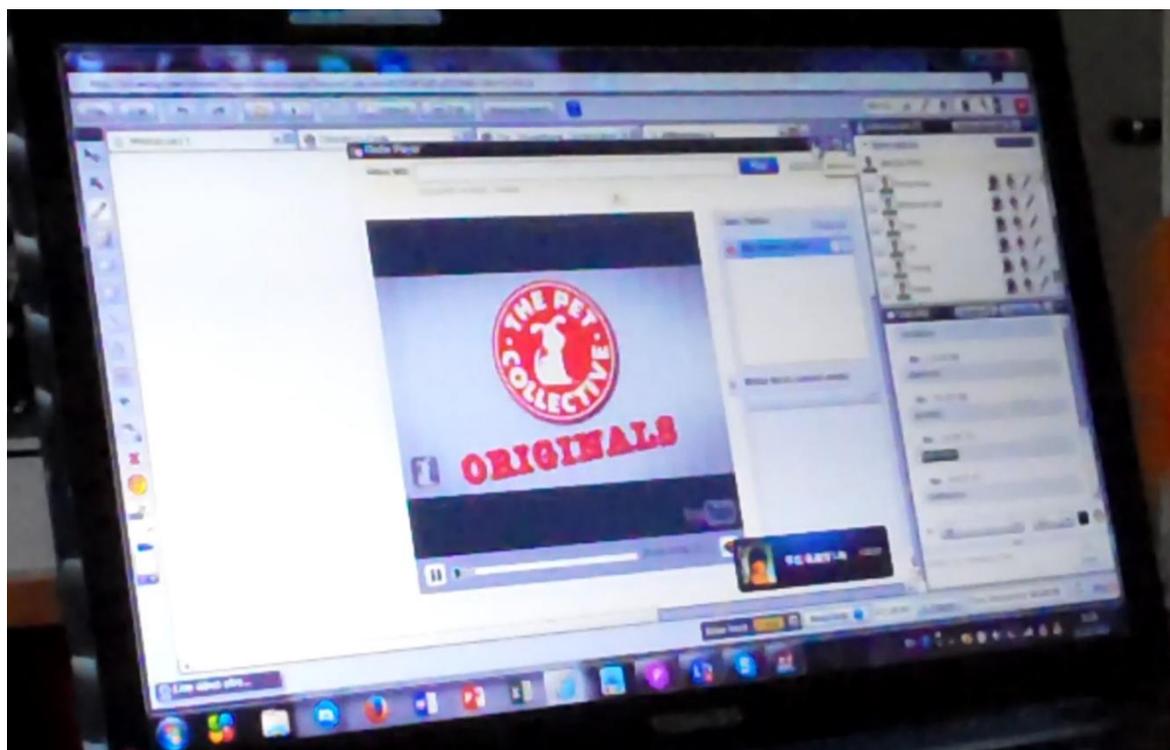


Figure 10.11: Playing video through my microphone in the WizIQ classroom supported by Skype

After consulting Adobe Connect and WizIQ technicians, they could not resolve the issues, as both Adobe Connect and WizIQ worked well if there were only two or three people in the virtual classroom. However, once there was a certain number of people, it functioned unstably. A few Chinese technicians advised that it might be because of the protection wall of the Chinese Internet, particularly when it was connected overseas. The students suggested that a Chinese-based virtual classroom YY could be used as a virtual classroom. However, it did not function smoothly during testing when I tried to access it from overseas.

It seems that this was not only because of the high demand for the virtual classroom, but also because it was in line with the study of the Internet protection wall created by the Chinese government (Li, 2008, 2009). It was felt that it might be better if the lesson were not conducted at peak time. However, it was very difficult to arrange such a time because of the teachers' and students' schedules. Therefore, it was suggested that the EEC course might have to resort to Skype communication if the virtual classroom still did not work smoothly in the next cycle.

- **Asynchronous learning**

In RC2, QQ was still used to send messages to the students, and email was used for students to send their writing paragraphs to the teacher. Instead, the self-designed website, Edmodo, was chosen for two reasons (Figure 10.12). The first was that it was too costly to develop further the self-designed website used in RC1 to a high standard. Furthermore, the students expressed that they wanted to chat to other English-speaking learners. Edmodo, a worldwide educational social network, could provide students with a platform to communicate with other learners around the world.

However, Table 10.10 shows that the students perceived that QQ (4.0, $sd=0.756$) and email (4.0, $sd=1.397$) were much more helpful to their asynchronous learning in the EEC course than Edmodo (2.3, $sd=1.528$). The spread of the students' opinions was also much wider than QQ and email.

Table 10.10: The extent to which students perceived that the asynchronous learning technologies were helpful to their learning in the EEC course

Ranking		Mean	Std. deviation	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
1	QQ	4.0	0.756	4	4
2	Email	4.0	1.397	3	5
3	Edmodo	2.3	1.528	1	4

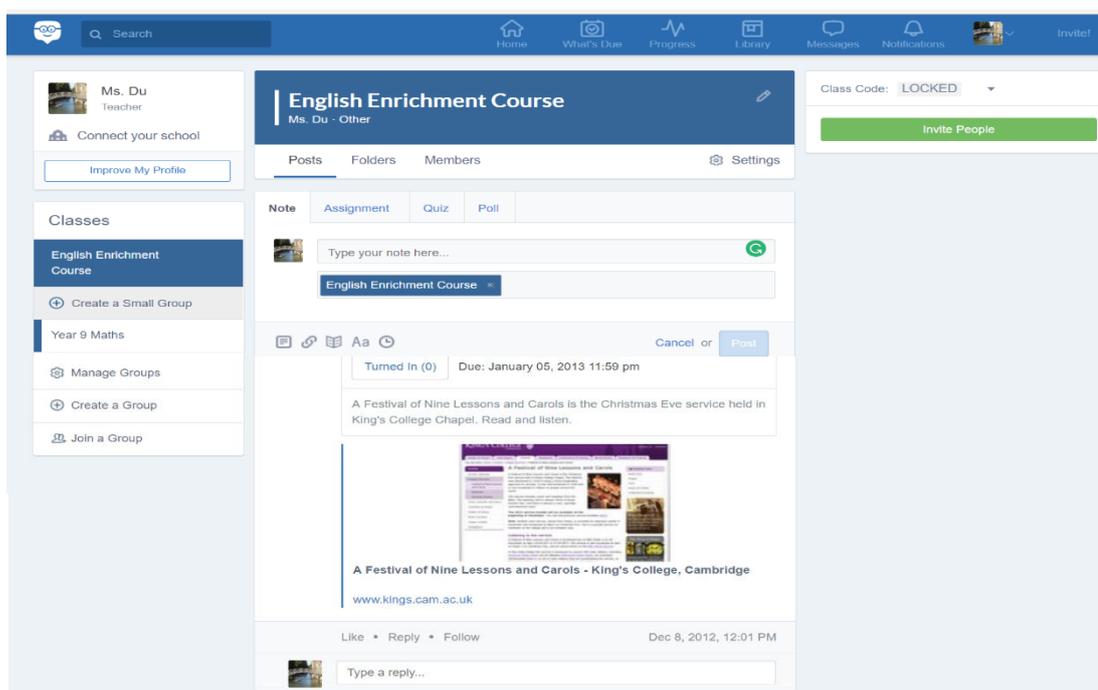


Figure 10.12: The EEC course on Edmodo

The students commented on Edmodo:

It was very difficult to access Edmodo. It was too slow to log in. And it was also slow to open the other pages. (Yuan)

We log in to QQ every day but it took extra effort to log into Edmodo. I tried in the first two weeks. But it was too slow to log in. So I gave up. (Lily)

The other student who gave a 4 to Edmodo explained:

I like Edmodo, as you could connect yourself with other learners and teachers around the world and you could also see what the other international learners were interested in and discussing. ... I had problems accessing Edmodo too. But I gave it 4, as I do like its function. (Song)

It is clear that it was not the functions of Edmodo but its accessibility in China that was the issue. Therefore, it was decided that the EEC course would use QQ and email more effectively to engage the students in asynchronous learning in the next cycle.

10.5 How RC2 informs RC3

10.5.1 Who the course is for

Through RC2, it became evident that university students were also interested in the EEC course. I also gained more confidence through teaching the EEC course to the university students. However, the lack of data from the comparison group and the poor attendance of the intervention-group students suggested that there was a critical issue that had to be resolved in the next cycle (RC3). All the intervention- and comparison-group students should be from the same university and taught by the same English teacher to ensure that the data could be collected through their university English teacher and reduce the variables that could bias the findings. Besides, it was felt that it might be better to select Year 2 students instead of Year 1 students to participate in the study, because the Year 1 students seemed over-confident about what they could commit to the EEC course, as they had little knowledge of the first university year that lay ahead of them. The Year 2 students tended to have a more realistic schedule. The EEC course and teachers had no authority over participants. Therefore, it had to be made clear to the students at the beginning of the course that, once they decided to attend, the EEC course required their full commitment. Other strategies also had to be adopted to attract students to stay on the course, for instance, an individualised learning track and formative feedback, and

facilitating teacher(s) and students to build good relationships.

The findings of RC2 suggested that it was not practical to ask students to find their paired comparison-group students. To form an appropriate comparison group, it was crucial to select participants from the same university and for them to be taught by the same English teacher to reduce variables (Figure 10.13).

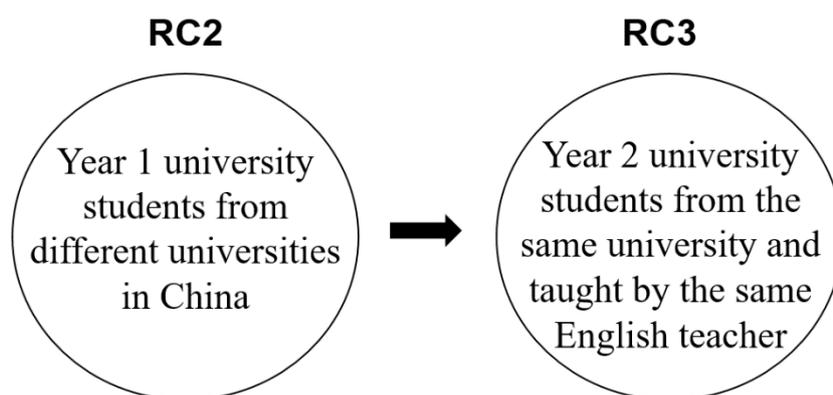


Figure 10.13: Change of participants from RC2 to RC3

10.5.2 What to achieve: introducing sociocultural competence

From the students' feedback in both RC1 and RC2, it was clear that the EEC course might play an important role in developing learners' sociocultural competence and interactional competence. As Celce-Murcia (2007) identified, interactional competence was developed from actional competence. I further classified strategic competence to be part of the elements of interactional competence to simplify the division of sub-competencies of communicative competence. Therefore, the concept and assessment tools of sociocultural competence (Matsumoto et al., 2001) and interactional competence (Celce-Murcia, 2007) were further developed and introduced in RC3 (Figure 10.14).

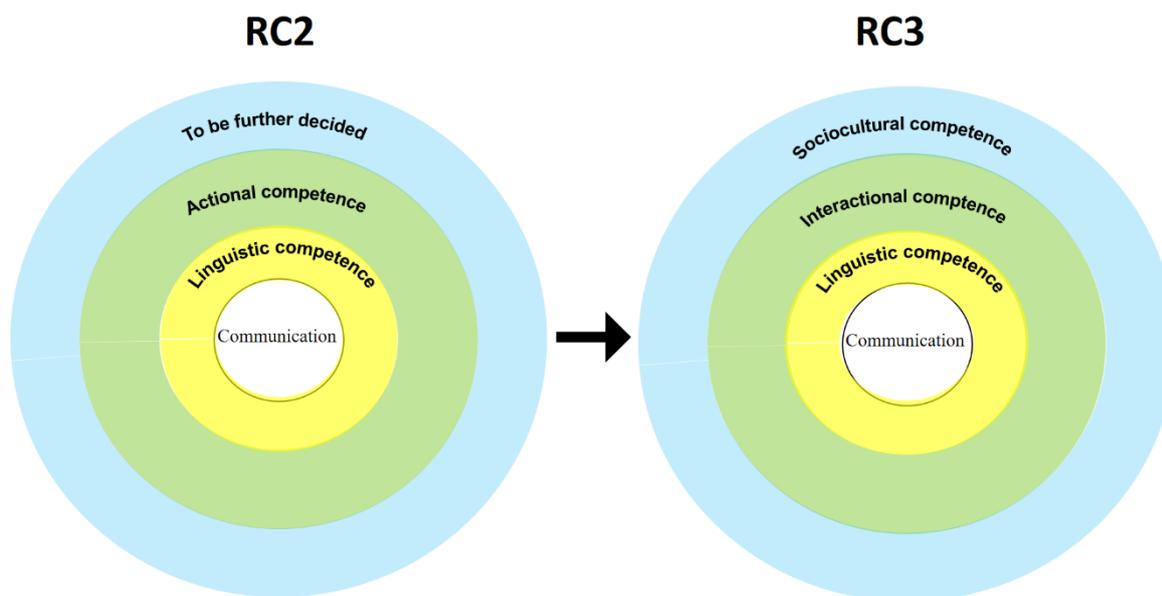


Figure 10.14: The development of the understanding of communicative competence from RC2 to RC3

10.5.3 How to assess learners' progress and evaluate the key features of the course

- **Assessment tools for students' progress in communicative competence**

The IELTS speaking test further proved not to be practical for assessing learners' verbal communicative competence, as it required one-to-one assessment, which the students, not only the comparison group but also the intervention group, found extremely difficult in terms of time commitments and the lack of benefit of taking the IELTS speaking test if they did not have the intention to go overseas in the near future. After the trial with the intervention group, the PQA seemed a more useful test for their university academic life (Figure 10.15).

To decide whether the PQA was a practical test, I consulted the English teachers at Chongqing University, who confirmed that it would be practical. The university English teachers usually ask students to do presentations in the lessons, albeit with no Q&A time, but this could be added after the presentation. In addition, the 40-minute IELTS writing tests had to be shortened and simplified, as an ordinary university lesson lasted around 45 minutes only. IELTS general writing test Task I only took the students 20 minutes to complete. One of the sample tasks was for the students to write a complaint letter to their university accommodation officer, which created a context that all university students were familiar with. It was a good context to see how students would deal with social conflicts and to test aspects of students' sociocultural competence. Furthermore, learning from the experience of RC2, both pre-test and post-test should remain as the same task to avoid unconscious bias in marking.

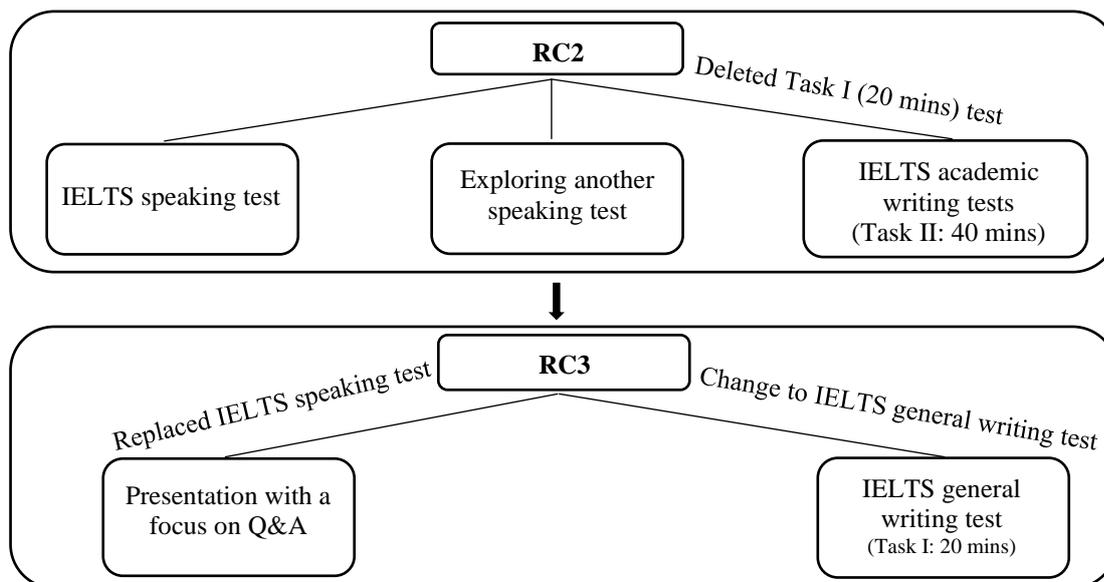


Figure 10.15: The change of pre-tests and post-tests from RC2 to RC3

- **Evaluation tools – questionnaires and interviews**

As suggested in RC1, asking the students to complete questionnaires before conducting interviews proved to be an effective way to collect more detailed data. However, the questions of the questionnaires and interviews also had to be edited according to further clarification of the concept of communicative competence and the change of the course structures, course features and technology features.

10.5.4 How to design and deliver the course

The findings in RC2 further implied several issues to be improved regarding course design features.

- **Course structure**

The students expressed that they liked the course structure in RC2. However, some of them expressed that the home task might be too heavy. Therefore, consideration had to be given to reducing the workload of home tasks. In comparison to RC1, it was identified that not only secondary-school students but also university students did not like the high amount of home tasks. This was particularly difficult for the EEC course, which was based on students volunteering to attend the course. The teachers of the EEC course had no power or authority to force the students to complete home tasks. Therefore, it was critical to reduce factors that might hinder students' attendance at EEC lessons. Therefore, it was decided that the home tasks would be optional for students, and the frequency and length would also be reduced in RC3. On the other hand, the pre-lesson preparation tasks should also consider the length of time it might take

the students to complete them.

- **Course features**

The first 30-minute preparation lesson

Although the students showed great interest in doing presentations and answering one another's questions in the first 30 minutes, they also wanted the teachers to participate more in this part of the lesson to give them more professional and critical feedback. This is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that learners tend to learn more from MKO.

The main lesson (60-minute real-time synchronous lesson)

The students continued to show interest in the 60-minute main lesson for its cultivation of deeper cultural awareness. However, it was decided that this part of the lesson would be taught by IES (invited English speakers) in RC3 to allow students to interact more closely with the foreign English speakers and talk to them about cultures directly.

The plenary lesson (30-minute synchronous lesson)

As the students did not show any initiative to interact with one another in RC2, I, as the Chinese English teacher, would play a more critical role in the last 30-minute plenary section, not just to summarise the lesson but also to answer students' questions if further clarifications were required.

The topics of the EEC course

Similar to RC1, the students were more interested in topics that were related to their life, such as student life at the university, and less interested in topics that they perceived as more remote, such as John Lennon and Yoko Ono and the royal wedding. There was a need to balance topics that the students perceived as interesting and which I perceived as useful to them. For topics that were less interesting to the students, as the course designer, I had to be more careful to design the lesson in a way that could help the students be more interested in the topic.

Project-based task

Although the project-based task provided the students with an opportunity to talk to peers and write more paragraphs, it seemed to create an extra workload for the students. Although they were university students who had a lighter workload than high-school and secondary-school students, they still had many subjects to learn and preferred less homework. Attending the EEC course every weekend was already taking a considerable amount of time from the students, so

it seemed impractical to ask them to do more projects after the lessons. To reduce the burden of the students attending the EEC course, a project-based task would be cancelled in the next cycle of the study.

- **Technology features**

Technologies to support synchronous learning

Similar to RC1, the students found Skype to be a more reliable form of audio software to enable them to attend the synchronous learning. Although they found the WizIQ virtual classroom useful, the poor connection to WizIQ frustrated them. It was decided that if WizIQ continued to have poor connections in RC3, Skype would replace it and play the leading role in the synchronous lesson of the course until a stable virtual classroom was found.

Technologies to support asynchronous learning

Although Edmodo provided a good asynchronous learning platform, it also had accessibility problems that stopped the students enjoying its functions. In terms of building our own learning website, it was felt that it might be useful to create the self-designed learning website using a website builder such as Weebly to keep costs down. QQ and email continued to be practical and effective asynchronous learning tools. Thus, it was decided that they would remain in the next cycle and more functions of QQ could be explored if WizIQ did not provide the function of the virtual classroom.

10.5.5 What to improve

Table 10.11 summarises what was implemented in RC2 and what intervention strategies and plans were taken forward to inform RC3.

Table 10.11: Summary of the course design development from RC2 to RC3

		Delivery of RC2	Implications for RC3	Intervention plan for RC3
Why and who to take the course	Identifying the gap in needs	The lack of initiative and ability to communicate with English speakers from other cultures effectively in-depth		
	Identifying participants	<p>Students: Intervention group: Year 1 university students from different universities in China Comparison group: The classmates of Year 1 university students paired with the intervention group Teachers: Chinese English teacher (I, the researcher) One or two invited specialist English speakers (IES)</p>	<p>Students: 1. The students must be from the same university and taught by the same English teacher to reduce the variables that might affect the research outcome 2. The comparison group must be from the same English class as the intervention group Teachers: Invite IESs to lead the main lessons</p>	<p>Students: Intervention group: Year 2 university students from the same university and taught by the same English teacher Comparison group: The rest of the classmates of the intervention group who are taught by the same English teacher at the same university Teachers: Primary teacher: IES Supporting co-teacher: Chinese English teacher (I, the researcher)</p>
What to achieve	Defining and developing the key concepts	<p>Communicative competence: Linguistic competence Actional competence Strategic competence</p>	Further reviewing literature and link to the findings of RC2	<p>Communicative competence: Linguistic competence Interactional competence Sociocultural competence</p>
	Formulating goals and objectives	<p>Goals: Unchanged Objectives: Improve Chinese English learners' communication ability in speaking and writing</p>	Develop objectives according to the new understanding of communicative competence	<p>Goals: Unchanged Objectives: Improve Chinese English learners' communicative competence, especially interactional competence and sociocultural competence</p>

How to assess the progress and evaluate the course	Designing an assessment plan for learner's progress	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IELTS academic writing test (Task II) IELTS speaking test Presentation with a focus on Q&A test (post-test only in RC2) 2. Asked students to mark one another's tests including their own. Use the mean scores as the final scores. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Task II (40 minutes) is too long. Needs to be shortened. 2. It proved to be impractical to ask students to do peer assessment, as the understanding of the students towards the assessment criteria varied a lot. 	IELTS general writing test (Task I) Presentation with a focus on Q&A
	Data-collection plan for evaluation of the course	From students only: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct questionnaires before the interview 2. Use questionnaire data to inform questions in the interview 	Add questions that are positive: Some questions need to be stated clearly. For example, instead of asking the students to rate their preferred topics, should ask the students to rate their preference for topics that they have learnt in the EEC course.	From students only
How to design and deliver the course	Delivering time of the course	4:30pm-6pm China time		
	Course structure	Asynchronous learning: Pre-lesson preparation (through Edmodo) Synchronous learning: Presentation (30 minutes): students do the presentation with a focus on Q&A; solving the technology problem Main lesson (60 minutes): the same as RC1		Asynchronous learning: Pre-lesson preparation (through CamEnglish created via Weebly web builder) Synchronous learning:
	Course features	Preparation time (the first 30 minutes): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One or two students did the presentation in turn and answered the audience's questions 2. A student assistant helped to sort out technical problems to get ready for the main lesson 	The students want a foreign English speaker to join this part of the lesson and give them feedback	Preparation time (the first 30 minutes): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The same as RC2 2. Invited the foreign English speaker to listen to the students' presentations, interact with them and give feedback to the students
		Main lesson (60 minutes): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The same as RC1 	Invite specialised foreign English speakers to deliver the main lesson	Main lesson (60 minutes): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main lesson is delivered by foreign English speakers to deliver the main lesson 2. I, as the Chinese English teacher, support the main lesson when necessary

		<p>The plenary and social time (30 minutes):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students were asked to write on the interactive whiteboard or chatbox what they had learnt in the lesson 2. Students were encouraged to chat with one another 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students did not really socialise with one another verbally but were busy typing in the chatbox. 2. The students considered that 30 minutes was too long for this part of the lesson. It needs to be reduced to 15–20 minutes. 	<p>Plenary time (15–20 minutes):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chinese English teacher answers the students' questions regarding the main lesson to help students catch up with the parts that they do not fully understand 2. Still, give students time to socialise with one another if they want to
		<p>Post-lesson task:</p> <p>The students were required to write a 500- to a 1,000-word article and do a presentation in pairs</p>	<p>Do not set post-lesson tasks in RC4 in order to reduce the workload of the students</p>	<p>Post-lesson task:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Post-lesson tasks will be optional 2. May provide students with learning materials but not writing tasks
		<p>Topics:</p> <p>Follow the principle of RC1.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students continued showing high interest in topics that were taught by the native English speaker (IES) who was specialised in the topics; 2. The students continued to show interest in seasonal topics, for example, Christmas, Easter <p>Explored more types of topic.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Written feedback/writing genres 2. The topics related to the world-famous universities (e.g. “Life at the University of Cambridge”) 3. The topics that could be practised in students’ real life (e.g. “Setting up a dinner table” and “Dinner etiquette”) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Although the students enjoyed the lesson giving them feedback about their writing, the students did not feel one lesson could help them improve their writing skills significantly. If we were to add more writing lessons, it would change the focus of the EEC course. Therefore, no individual writing lesson would be delivered in RC3. 2. Consider topics related to world-famous universities, such as Cambridge University 3. Consider topics that students can experience in their real life 4. Compare the target culture, and the students' mother culture engages students 5. Although the students were not so interested in the topic of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, it is a good topic for students to understand the conflicts between western and eastern culture, and it is worth trying alternative ways to increase students' interest 	<p>Topics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The decision of the topics follow the positive findings of RC1 and RC2 2. Continue exploring new topics

	Technology features	<p>Technologies to support synchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Main synchronous learning platform: WizIQ (the students especially liked its functions to display PPT and interactive whiteboard)</p> <p>2. Supporting the synchronous learning platform: Skype (supporting the audio function of WizIQ)</p>	<p>1. The connection to the WizIQ classroom still took a long time and was not stable</p> <p>2. May have to resort to Skype as the leading platform to deliver the EEC lesson</p>	<p>Technologies to support synchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Main synchronous learning platform: First attempt: WizIQ</p> <p>If not working, then replaced by Skype</p>
		<p>Technologies to support asynchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Edmodo was used as the leading asynchronous learning platform to upload learning resources and facilitate students' interaction with one another online</p> <p>2. QQ (group) was used as supporting asynchronous learning platform to send course reminders, notices and interact with students individually</p> <p>3. The email was used for students to submit their writing work</p>	<p>1. The connection to Edmodo was very slow from China, which hindered students' enjoyment and benefits on this platform. Therefore, Edmodo would not be used in RC3. An alternative asynchronous learning platform needs to be explored.</p>	<p>Technologies to support asynchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Use Weebly to design a learning website for students to access the learning resources</p> <p>2. Continue using QQ (group) and email to support communication</p>

11. Findings from Research Cycle 3

11.1 Sampling strategies of RC3

Based on the lessons learned from RC2, in order to secure the collection of data from the comparison group, the participants in RC3 were chosen from the same university, Chongqing University, and taught by the same university English teacher. Access to the university was through my former work network in Chongqing city, China. Mrs Li, one of the English teachers at Chongqing University, was introduced to support me with RC3. Mrs Li had two Year 2 English classes whose majors were neither English- nor language-related. Their majors were mainly science-based (Table 11.1). The EEC course was advertised to all the students in the two classes but also restricted the maximum admission number to 12 students; 3 males and 9 females applied for the course. After the matriculation interviews and pre-tests, only seven females managed to attend the EEC course regularly, with the others dropping off after the first or second lessons. The reason given by the students who dropped out was that they could not commit the time. Although I did not reject any student who applied for the course, the interview and pre-test processes played a part in the student selection. Therefore, only seven female students sourced from Mrs Lee were counted in the intervention group in this cycle of the study.

In the intervention group, apart from the seven female students, Atlantis, a Year 2 university student who came from another university in China and who had attended RC2, volunteered to continue attending the EEC course in RC3. One reason for accepting Atlantis in this cycle of the study was to observe how the course influenced learners' progress in English communicative competence over a longer period. Another reason was that Atlantis could play the role of student assistant and I needed a good assistant to reduce my workload so that I could focus on the more important substantive part of the EEC course. Arguably, Atlantis' previous experience classified him as an outlier in terms of progress. Indeed, one might expect him to have made more progress than the others. However, it was, in fact, more difficult for Atlantis to show progress, as it is more difficult to progress further when one is already at a high level; there is a threshold effect. Besides, the EEC course was assessing progress, not the starting level. Therefore, this study did not consider Atlantis an outlier in the analysis unless his progress was significantly above or below the others.

Table 11.1: The profile of the intervention group students in RC3

Student number	Participants	Gender	University	Major	Year group
1	Amy	Female	Chongqing University	Statistics	2
2	Sylvia	Female	Chongqing University	Applied Chemistry	2
3	Snowman	Female	Chongqing University	Drug Engineering	2
4	Zinc	Female	Chongqing University	Drug Engineering	2
5	Agnes	Female	Chongqing University	Drug Engineering	2
6	Billion	Female	Chongqing University	Drug Engineering	2
7	Toby	Female	Chongqing University	Applied Chemistry	2
8	Atlantis	Male	Southwestern University of Finance and Economics	E-commerce	2

The selection of the comparison group was from the rest of the students in the two groups that Mrs Lee taught. However, I did not have the choice to use a random sampling or stratified sampling method, only convenience sampling. This was because there was limited time to conduct a presentation with a focus on the Q&A (PQA) test. Although the writing tests were administered to all the students, as it only took 20 minutes and all the students in a class could do it at the same time, the PQA test required it to be conducted individually. Mrs Li could only spare one lesson for the pre-test and one lesson for the post-test. I could only get the number of students that Mrs Lee could manage to do the PQA test with as my sample pool. Although there were more than eight students who did pre-tests, some of them did not do the post-test. As a result, only seven students formed the comparison group in RC3 (Table 11.2).

Table 11.2: The profile of the comparison group students in RC3

Student number	Participants	Gender	University	Major	Year group
1	Mao	Male	Chongqing University	Applied Chemistry	2
2	Guo	Male	Chongqing University	Finance	2
3	Dai	Male	Chongqing University	Information and Computer Science	2
4	Ting	Female	Chongqing University	Drug Engineering	2
5	Davy	Male	Chongqing University	Applied Chemistry	2
6	Zili	Female	Chongqing University	Mechanics and Electricity Engineering	2
7	Yao	Female	Chongqing University	Statistics	2

11.2 Research questions

With a further review of the literature regarding communicative competence, interactional

competence and sociocultural competence were identified as the sub-communicative competence to be evaluated instead of actional competence. It was initially thought that it would be better to evaluate only two sub-competencies, and it was easier to assess actional competence. However, through the RC2 interviews, most students mentioned that the EEC course had helped them to improve their cultural awareness and ability to interact with others. Actional competence could not reflect these two features. It was felt that it might be more valuable to evaluate sociocultural and interactional competence together with linguistic competence. According to Celce-Murcia (2007), interactional competence is a developed concept of actional competence. Similar to what was identified in RC2, strategic competence could also be classified as a feature of international competence (ibid.). Therefore, the research questions of the study were further developed as follows:

RQ1: *Does the EEC course improve learners' linguistic, interactional and sociocultural communicative competence in English, in comparison with learners undertaking the usual university course in English? If so, in what ways?*

RQ2: *How do learners perceive the course features of the EEC course, which influence their progress in linguistic, intercultural and sociocultural communicative competence in English?*

11.3 Data-collection process of RC3

- **Data-collection process for RQ1**

As discussed in RC2, to make the data-collection process practical to the comparison group, the tests were simplified to the IELTS general writing test (Task I) and PQA test. Both tests were to be collected with the support of the university English teacher and conducted in the university English lessons (Figure 11.1). However, further problems were encountered. As limited time was allocated to the PQA test, only seven students who volunteered from the comparison group completed the PQA tests. Nevertheless, this was close to the number of students in the intervention group. Another implication of this process was that students who were less confident at speaking English might not volunteer for the comparison group. Therefore, it was felt that it might also be useful to use the pre-test mean scores to compare the starting levels of the intervention group and the comparison group. Meanwhile, no time was allocated to conducting the writing test in the normal university lessons. Therefore, students from the comparison group were asked to do the writing test in their leisure time. All seven students did the pre-writing tests; however, only one did the post-writing test. As a result, the analysis of the assessment could not use the IELTS writing test but only the PQA test in RC3.

The implication was that, regardless of the test, data from the comparison group had to be collected in normal university lessons and not in their own time outside lessons.



Figure 11.1: The students in the presentation with a focus on Q&A test in RC3

As a result of financial constraints, I took the role of one of the examiners and invited another native English speaker to be the second. The final score was based on our mean score. Being both researcher and examiner can cause bias if the researcher knows whether a particular piece of the test is a pre-test or post-test. The researcher may attempt to mark the post-tests with higher scores than the pre-tests. To avoid this potential bias, pre-tests and post-tests were marked at the same time, and all tests were renamed with random numbers generated by a calculator. The test-takers' names were moved to the File Authors in the Word documents and Contributing Artists in the audio documents. To reduce the chance that the researcher might remember some of the numbers and match them to the test-takers' real names, the renumbering process was repeated a few times.

The assessment criteria (Appendix XVII) were used to mark the PQA test. The scores were transferred back to the test-takers' real names, with an indication of pre-test or post-test, after all the marking had been completed. To avoid any technical problems during this process, the original copies of the pre-tests and post-tests were also kept in a separate file. They were used to double check whether the marking scores matched the correct pre-test or post-test and the students' names.

- **Data-collection process for RQ2**

As planned, questionnaires followed by interviews were conducted with all students in the intervention group. Questionnaires (Appendix VII & Appendix VIII) were collected through either email or QQ. Interviews (Appendix XI) were undertaken online through Skype or QQ

after participants had returned the questionnaires. The interview questions were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to cover all questions for each individual student but also to have the flexibility to differentiate the questions according to individual student responses in the questionnaire and interview. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the interviewees and notes were taken. Data from the tests, questionnaires and interviews were entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.

11.4 Research Question 1: Findings

RQ1: *Does the EEC course improve learners' linguistic, interactional and sociocultural communicative competence in English, in comparison with learners undertaking the usual university course in English? If so, in what ways?*

As there was not enough writing test data from the comparison group in RC3, Table 11.3 shows how assessment criteria for the PQA test were used to evaluate linguistic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence. According to May (2011: 134–8), interactional competence includes the ability to “express ideas and opinions”. Fluency and coherence, lexical resource and pronunciation contribute to how well one expresses oneself. From RC2, it was also revealed that the students performed very differently in the presentation and Q&A sections. Their ability to use English fluently and coherently, to use their lexical resources, and to use pronunciation accurately affected their interactional competence. These elements of the presentation section reflected less about their real ability, as the students were allowed to prepare for the presentation.

In addition to the above three elements, the assessment criteria of interactional competence included other elements identified by May (2011: 134–8), such as understanding the interlocutor's message, producing speech that is intelligible to the assessor, contributing to the quality of the interaction, managing interaction, contributing to the authenticity of the interaction, demonstrating persuasiveness, using communicative strategies and asking for clarification. The assessment criteria for sociocultural competence were mostly based on the theory of Celce-Murcia et al. (1995, Appendix XV) and on two factors: stylistic and cultural appropriateness, and social communication outcome.

Table 11.3: Assessment criteria for linguistic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence

	Presentation (P) with a focus on Q&A (QA)					
	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation	Interactional competence	Sociocultural competence
Linguistic competence	√ (P)	√ (P)	√ (Both)	√ (P)		
Interactional competence	√ (QA)	√ (QA)		√ (QA)	√ (QA)	
Sociocultural competence						√ (Both)

11.4.1 Presentation with a focus on Q&A test

In this section I present the findings from the PQA test. I present the scores for each sub-category for each student, compare the mean scores and the progress of the intervention group and the comparison group, and then I analyse how this progress illustrated learners' performance improvement in linguistic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence. Table 11.4 shows the scores and progress of individual students' PQA tests.

Table 11.4: Presentation with a focus on Q&A (pre-test and post-test)

Intervention group

	Test	Presentation/Q&A	Mean score	Mean score of both presentation and Q&A	Progress
Amy	Pre-test	Presentation	5.00	5.08	1.70
		Q&A	5.17		
	Post-test	Presentation	6.40	6.78	
		Q&A	7.17		
Sylvia	Pre-test	Presentation	5.00	5.00	0.92
		Q&A	5.00		
	Post-test	Presentation	6.00	5.92	
		Q&A	5.83		
Tobey	Pre-test	Presentation	5.00	4.75	1.13
		Q&A	4.50		
	Post-test	Presentation	6.10	5.88	
		Q&A	5.67		
Snowman	Pre-test	Presentation	5.0	4.79	0.25
		Q&A	4.58		
	Post-test	Presentation	5.50	5.04	
		Q&A	4.58		
Agnes	Pre-test	Presentation	4.60	4.30	1.29
		Q&A	4.00		
	Post-test	Presentation	5.60	5.59	
		Q&A	4.67		
Atlantis	Pre-test	Presentation	6.00	6.00	0.97
		Q&A	6.00		
	Post-test	Presentation	6.60	6.97	
		Q&A	7.33		
Zinc	Pre-test	Presentation	5.00	5.00	0.96
		Q&A	5.00		
	Post-test	Presentation	6.00	5.96	
		Q&A	5.92		
Billion	Pre-test	Presentation	4.80	4.73	0.00
		Q&A	4.67		
	Post-test	Presentation	5.30	4.73	
		Q&A	4.17		

Comparison group

	Test	Presentation/Q&A	Mean score	Mean score of both presentation and Q&A	Progress
Mao	Pre-test	Presentation	4.30	4.57	0.10
		Q&A	4.83		
	Post-test	Presentation	5.00	4.67	
		Q&A	4.33		
Guo	Pre-test	Presentation	4.80	4.82	0.00
		Q&A	4.83		
	Post-test	Presentation	4.80	4.82	
		Q&A	4.83		
Dai	Pre-test	Presentation	4.40	4.12	0.40
		Q&A	3.83		
	Post-test	Presentation	5.20	4.52	
		Q&A	3.83		
Ting	Pre-test	Presentation	3.90	3.99	0.28
		Q&A	4.08		
	Post-test	Presentation	4.80	4.28	
		Q&A	3.75		
Davy	Pre-test	Presentation	5.80	5.48	-0.47
		Q&A	5.17		
	Post-test	Presentation	5.20	5.02	
		Q&A	4.83		
ZiLi	Pre-test	Presentation	5.30	5.48	-0.18
		Q&A	5.67		
	Post-test	Presentation	5.70	5.31	
		Q&A	4.92		
Yao	Pre-test	Presentation	5.50	5.33	0.57
		Q&A	5.17		
	Post-test	Presentation	6.30	5.90	
		Q&A	5.50		

Table 11.5 shows that the intervention group had slightly higher overall mean scores than the comparison group in the pre-tests. This applied to all sub-categories, except sociocultural competence, in which the intervention group had slightly lower scores than the comparison group. Nevertheless, there was no significant pre-test differences between the groups in their overall mean scores or the sub-categories. This suggests that the groups performed similarly in the PQA tests at the beginning of the EEC course.

Table 11.5: Comparison of the mean scores of the pre-test between the intervention group (IG) and the comparison group (CG)

Pre-test							
		Presentation			Q&A		
		Mean	S.D.	p-value	Mean	S.D.	p-value
Fluency & coherence	IG	5.25	0.707	0.186	4.69	0.704	0.905
	CG	4.71	0.809		4.64	1.107	
Lexical resource	IG	5.13	0.354	0.948	4.81	0.651	0.628
	CG	5.07	0.673		4.64	0.556	
Grammatical range and accuracy	IG	5.13	0.354	0.679	5.00	0.535	0.322
	CG	4.93	0.732		4.71	0.567	
Pronunciation	IG	5.13	0.354	0.496	4.94	0.563	0.505
	CG	4.71	1.254		4.79	0.906	
Interactional competence	IG				4.94	0.563	1.000
	CG				4.71	0.906	
Sociocultural competence	IG	4.63	0.744	0.384	4.81	0.651	0.158
	CG	4.86	0.476		5.29	0.567	
Overall	IG	5.05	0.411	0.516	4.87	0.588	0.907
	CG	4.86	0.700		4.80	0.644	

Tables 11.6 and 11.7 compare the mean progress of each sub-category and the overall performance of both groups. As the challenge of Q&A is higher than that of the presentation, their progress was examined separately to gain a more in-depth analysis of the tests. In the presentation test, both the intervention group and the comparison group made progress, except in sociocultural competence and pronunciation, where the comparison group made slightly more progress at -0.29 (sd=0.699). However, progress was not significant in all sub-categories, except sociocultural competence (p=0.006).

The difference in progress in Q&A between the intervention group and the comparison group was even more substantial. In the Q&A test, while the intervention group made progress, the comparison group scores decreased in all sub-categories, except lexical resource (0.07, sd=0.627) and pronunciation (0.14, sd=0.748). Such differences were also significant in all sub-categories and overall performance, except lexical resource (p=0.052) and pronunciation (p=0.086).

Table 11.6: Comparison of the progress between the intervention group and the comparison group in the presentation

		Intervention group	Comparison group	Sig. (2-tailed)
Number of students		8	7	
Fluency and coherence	Mean	0.94	0.64	p = 0.512
	S.D.	0.904	0.476	
Lexical resource	Mean	0.94	0.43	p = 0.231
	S.D.	0.729	0.838	
Grammatical range and accuracy	Mean	0.75	0.43	p = 0.511
	S.D.	0.378	0.787	
Pronunciation	Mean	0.63	0.86	p = 0.279
	S.D.	0.443	1.029	
Sociocultural competence	Mean	1.19	-0.21	p = 0.006
	S.D.	0.704	0.699	
Overall presentation progress	Mean	0.89	0.43	p = 0.063
	S.D.	0.323	0.550	

Table 11.7: Comparison of the progress between the intervention group and the comparison group in Q&A

		Intervention group	Comparison group	Sig. (2-tailed)
Number of students		8	7	
Fluency and coherence	Mean	0.94	-0.29	p = 0.026
	S.D.	0.729	0.906	
Lexical resource	Mean	0.88	0.07	p = 0.052
	S.D.	0.744	0.672	
Grammatical range and accuracy	Mean	1.00	-0.36	p = 0.003
	S.D.	0.655	0.556	
Pronunciation	Mean	0.88	0.14	p = 0.086
	S.D.	0.744	0.748	
Interactional competence	Mean	1.00	-0.36	p = 0.027
	S.D.	1.134	0.802	
Sociocultural competence	Mean	0.94	-0.57	p = 0.003
	S.D.	0.821	0.607	
Overall Q&A progress	Mean	0.99	-0.23	p = 0.005
	S.D.	0.719	0.361	

The findings evidenced that it is essential to separate analysis of the assessment of presentation and Q&A. It also supported the phenomenon of the very different performances of Chinese university students in presentation and Q&A. It is not difficult to understand that students could perform better in the pre-prepared presentation with practice beforehand. Therefore, real communicative competence could be exposed more in the Q&A section and choice of this measure was vindicated.

11.4.2 Evaluation of the progress in three sub-communicative competencies in RC3

As a result of the lack of writing test in RC3, this study only used PQA test scores to evaluate the above three sub-competencies. Table 11.9 shows the progress on the sub-categories of the PQA test contributing to each competence.

Table 11.8 shows that the intervention group made significant progress in sociocultural competence ($p=0.000$) and interactional competence ($p=0.000$). The progress made in linguistic competence was less but also significant ($p=0.024$). The components of sociocultural competence in presentation ($p=0.006$) and Q&A ($p=0.003$) both demonstrated significant progress. This also applies to all the components of interactional competence. In contrast, all the components of linguistic competence in the presentation test showed no significance. It was only grammatical range and accuracy in the Q&A that demonstrated significant progress ($p=0.007$). This suggests that the EEC course had more impact on students' sociocultural and interactional competences than linguistic competence. RQ2 explored in more detail how students perceived this progress in the three competencies.

Overall, the PQA test seemed a practical and useful test to assess students' communicative competence. However, RC3 also revealed that it was not practical to ask the comparison group to do any tests beyond their normal university English lessons. Therefore, the IELTS writing test had to be undertaken during their lessons in order to include it in the assessment. The benefit of the IELTS writing test was that it could assess students' sociocultural communicative competence in the same daily-life context, which could be easily compared. On the other hand, it could also assess students' communicative strategies in dealing with daily-life conflicts, which might not be reflected in the PQA test. Therefore, in RC4 students were asked to do the writing test in their university English lessons.

Table 11.8: Comparison of the progress between the intervention group and the comparison group in linguistic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence

		Linguistic competence		Interactional competence		Sociocultural competence	
		Intervention group	Comparison group	Intervention group	Comparison group	Intervention group	Comparison group
Presentation	FC	0.94	0.50				
		p = 0.336					
	LR	0.94	0.21				
		p = 0.110					
	GA	0.75	0.21				
		p = 0.185					
PR	0.63	0.64					
	p = 0.809						
SC					1.19	-0.29	
					p = 0.006		
Q&A	FC			0.94	-0.21		
				p = 0.029			
	LR			0.88	-0.07		
				p = 0.029			
	GA	1.00	-0.21				
		p = 0.007					
	PR			0.88	-0.07		
				p = 0.029			
	IA			1.00	-0.29		
				p = 0.031			
	SC					0.94	-0.57
						p=0.003	
Mean progress		0.85	0.40	0.92	0.05	1.06	-0.39
S.D.		0.632	0.830	0.814	1.300	0.750	0.656
Sig. (2-tailed)		p = 0.027		p = 0.000		p = 0.000	

11.5 Research Question 2: Findings

RQ2: *How do learners perceive the course features of the EEC course, which influence their progress in linguistic, intercultural and sociocultural communicative competence in English?*

RQ1 data showed that the intervention group made significant progress in all three

communicative competencies compared to the comparison group. This section determines the effective elements of the EEC course on the students' progress in the three communicative competencies in English by investigating students' perceptions regarding the following aspects:

- Influence of the EEC course on their communicative competence in English;
- Overall impressions of the EEC course;
- Course structure;
- Course topics;
- Synchronous and asynchronous learning technology features.

The students' perceptions were investigated through the questionnaires and interviews. All eight students in the intervention group completed the questionnaire (Appendix V and VI), which employed a 5-point Likertscale ranging from "strong disagreement" (5) to "strong agreement" (1).

11.5.1 Students' perceptions of the influence of the EEC course on their communicative competence in English

To triangulate the findings in RQ1, the intervention group students were asked if and how they felt the EEC course had helped them to improve their communicative competence. Table 11.9 shows that the students recognised that the most progress they made through the EEC course was in sociocultural competence, followed closely by interactional competence. They perceived that the EEC course did not help them to improve their linguistic competence. This order is in line with the findings for RQ1 (Table 11.8).

Table 11.9: The extent to which students perceived that the EEC course helped them to improve their linguistic competence

	Mean	Std. deviation
Linguistic competence	2.75	0.463
Interactional competence	3.20	0.839
Sociocultural competence	3.31	0.873

When analysing the above findings, it was noticed that there was no follow-up question in the interview to explore further why the students had such perceptions. This suggests that the interview schedule should be further improved to address this omission. The data for the above three sub-competencies are detailed below.

- **Linguistic competence**

As fluency and coherence, lexical resource and pronunciation were used to measure interactional competence in the Q&A test, to avoid confusion the students were only asked about their perception of how the EEC course helped them to improve grammatical range and accuracy. None of the students perceived that the EEC course helped them to improve their linguistic competence (mean 2.75, sd=0.463).

- **Interactional competence**

Four sets of questions were used to determine students' perceptions of the progress of their interactional competence through the EEC course: understanding of the interlocutor's messages, expressing oneself, responding to the interlocutor, and using alternative communication strategies. Table 11.10 shows the sub-questions which explored the students' perceptions of interactional competence.

In descending order, the students perceived that the EEC course helped them to “ask the interlocutor meaningful questions”, to “ask the interlocutor questions clearly” and to “ask questions appropriately when needing to clarify others' meanings”. Interestingly, these three prominent impacts all referred to students' ability to ask the interlocutor questions. On the other hand, one of the lowest impacts that the students perceived was “to answer the interlocutor's questions clearly”. This suggests that the students perceived that the EEC course helped them to be more confident in asking appropriate and meaningful questions. However, the students were still not confident to answer the interlocutor's questions, even though they had shown improvement in the PQA tests. This might be because the students were also not confident that they could “understand others' true intentions or implications behind the words”. Consequently, even though they could answer the questions more openly or fluently, they were not sure whether they had responded to the questions in line with the interlocutors' expectations.

It was not difficult to understand why the students perceived that the EEC course did not help them organise their writing sensibly in order to convey their ideas clearly to others because the course did not talk about writing at all in RC3.

Table 11.10: The extent to which students agreed that the EEC course helped them to improve their interactional competence

		Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
Understand the interlocutor's messages	Be able to understand the interlocutor's true intentions or implications behind the words.	3.00	0.535	2	4
Express oneself	Be able to organise my speaking sensibly in order to convey my ideas clearly to the others.	3.25	0.707	2	4
	Be able to organise my writing sensibly in order to convey my ideas clearly to the others.	2.88	0.354	2	3
	Be able to ask the interlocutor questions clearly.	3.50	0.756	2	4
Respond to the interlocutor	Be able to answer the interlocutor's questions clearly.	2.88	0.991	1	4
	Be able to ask the interlocutor meaningful questions.	3.63	1.061	2	5
Use alternative communicative strategies	Be able to ask questions appropriately when needing to clarify others' meanings.	3.50	1.069	2	5
	Be able to use alternative ways to express myself fluently.	3.00	0.926	2	4

There was a split between more positive and negative student perceptions regarding whether the EEC course helped them to “use alternative ways to express” themselves fluently. It was interesting to see that the students who chose 2 (agree: n=3) or 3 (neutral: n=2) were actually showing their ability to use alternative ways to express themselves in the lessons, as well as the tests. The other 3 students chose 4 (disagree).

In comparison with the findings of RQ1, in general the students seemed more modest about their competence and progress than their test results demonstrated. Nevertheless, students' perceptions should still be considered to improve the EEC course further. The finding of interactional competence suggests that the EEC course was stronger at developing students' ability. However, the course should also be strengthened to give students more opportunities to develop the ability to answer questions.

- **Sociocultural competence**

The understanding of sociocultural competence in RC3 was mostly based on the theory of Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) and my own knowledge of what contributes to sociocultural competence. The first question in Table 11.12 was based on the suggested components of

sociocultural competence (Celce-Murcia et al.). The second was based on my understanding of sociocultural competence at the time. I perceived that to achieve whatever the communicator intends to complete, the communicator must consider social strategies, which affects the outcome of their communication.

Table 11.11: The extent to which students agreed that the EEC course helped them to improve their sociocultural competence

		Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
Stylistic appropriateness; cultural appropriateness	Be able to communicate with others in a sensitive and appropriate manner with consideration for cultural differences.	3.38	0.744	2	5
Social communication outcome	Be able to achieve own expected outcome through communication in English.	3.25	1.035	1	4

Table 11.11 shows that four out of eight students perceived that the EEC course helped them to communicate with others in a sensitive and appropriate manner with consideration for cultural differences. However, one student perceived no impact from the EEC course. Similarly, four students perceived that the EEC course helped them to achieve their own expected outcome through communication in English (mean 3.25, sd=1.035). Yet, one student strongly disagreed with this statement, explaining:

I was disappointed at not being able to answer questions as well as the others in the EEC lessons. I need to spend more time practising speaking English. (Agnes)

Agnes was ranked lowest in the pre-tests of presentation (4.60) and Q&A (4.00) in the intervention group. Although she made good progress in the post-tests, she was still the third lowest in the presentation test (5.60) and the second lowest in the Q&A test (4.67). In fact, Agnes was one of the few students who completed the homework task of recording a short video of herself talking in English about her day out in the park. Thus, it was not about her effort but how she perceived her progress in comparison to the other students.

In a reflection of the participation performance of the intervention group in the EEC lessons, it was noticed that more opportunities were given to the more competent students, as they were

more proactive at participating in the discussion. With limited time, those who were not confident at speaking English, such as Agnes, were left with fewer opportunities to speak out. This suggests that the EEC course should contain strategies to maximise every student's chance to improve in a mixed-level group. The strategy could be grouping students according to their language levels, training more competent students to be more considerate and helpful to their peers, cultivating more opportunities for students to interact with others, or organising smaller group discussions if Internet speed allows.

11.5.2 Students' perceptions of their highest three achievements through the EEC course

From the questionnaire, all the students expressed that they enjoyed the EEC course (mean 4.13, sd=0.354). They were further asked about the top three achievements that they perceived had improved through the course (Table 11.12).

Table 11.12: Students' perceptions of their most significant achievements through the EEC course

Ranking	Achievements	Related communicative competence	Number of students (N=8)
1	Improved the ability to express and speak out oneself	Interactional competence	6
2	Improved the ability to respond simultaneously to the interlocutors in real time	Interactional competence	5
2	Improved the ability to appreciate different cultures	Sociocultural competence	5
3	Has impact on daily life	Sociocultural competence	3

Six out of eight students perceived that they had improved their ability to speak out and express themselves. Five out of eight students perceived that they had improved the ability to respond to the interlocutors simultaneously.

My first presentation practice in the EEC course was a failure. I did not know how to respond to the questions from the audience. But now I am more able to answer their questions instantly. (Snowman)

My responses to the audience used to be dry and dull. But now mine are more enriched. (Snowman)

I used to think only those who speak good English have the courage to speak, but now I know speaking English is a way of communication and I should use it no matter whether I am good at it or not. I have more confidence in speaking English now. Although I might make mistakes, as long as I am able to express myself, it will set a better ground for the communication. (Atlantis)

Even though I may not really know what to say, I have the guts to speak out now. (Zinc)

The EEC course provided a good communication platform for us. (Zinc). I can use different strategies to express myself. (Amy)

These two highest achievements represented interactional competence. On the other hand, five out of eight students also conceived that they had improved their ability to appreciate different cultures.

I have broadened my knowledge of the culture. (Agnes)

I have learnt more interesting topics. So I will be more comfortable talking about them when people are talking about these topics. (Amy)

Other noticeable comments were made by Zinc and Billion.

I came to know Miss Du. (Zinc)

I came to know people like Atlantis, who can speak English so well. He is certainly at a much higher level than the rest of us. (Billion)

I came to know Miss Du, and I have learnt a lot from you. I have also learnt a lot from Adrian (the main British English teacher in RC3). (Billion)

Interestingly, both students mentioned that meeting these people through the EEC course was an achievement – not just the course teachers but also the classmates. This implies that the teachers and students themselves were a valuable social source on the EEC course.

In addition to cultural knowledge and social features, the students also mentioned that the EEC

course had an impact on their daily life.

I am more comfortable communicating with native speakers, and I know more rules to talk to them. (Amy)

Although I may forget the knowledge that I have learnt in the lesson in a short time, I feel that the habits I have developed through the EEC course are benefiting me in some way. (Atlantis)

Atlantis further explained:

The habits include independent learning ability through tasks such as a preview of the lessons, using alternative ways to describe something that might be very difficult for me to explain. (Atlantis)

There is also some knowledge that I learnt on the EEC course but have not had the opportunity to apply yet, such as western dinner etiquette and knowledge of wine tasting, but there should be a day when I will need to use them. (Atlantis)

The students seemed to perceive that the EEC course had an impact on their daily life. Although it was difficult to examine this impact immediately after the EEC course, it was felt that it would be worth studying its impact on students after some time, and also students who were able to attend the EEC course over a more extended period of time.

Overall, all the findings through the progress in tests, questionnaires and interviews demonstrated that the EEC course helped the students to feel more confident in expressing themselves in English and more able to use alternative ways to communicate with others. The students were also more aware of diverse cultures and topics and met people who they liked on the course. The three top achievements further supported the improvement of the students in interactional competence and sociocultural competence.

11.5.3 The students' perception of the difference between the EEC course and the other English courses they had attended

What are the key features of the EEC course contributing to the above progress in communicative competence? The students identified two main differences.

- **The interaction feature**

Six out of eight students identified the quality of interaction on the EEC course. They said that their normal university English lessons were more exam-based and offered few opportunities to speak in English.

*Our university English course was focused on exam knowledge and skills. We had little chance to speak. The EEC course helped me to **learn more about British culture**.*
(Agnes)

*Other English courses were taught with textbooks and practised on paper. The EEC course required us to **be very spontaneous in speaking English**. Although we had a Speaking English course taught by foreign English teachers in the university, we were only there to answer one or two questions in a lesson.* (Billion)

*The atmosphere of the EEC course was very relaxed. I was **not afraid of making mistakes**. ... Sometimes I was not able to take care of my grammar, as **I needed to respond immediately without any preparation time**. However, I have been more able to express myself through the EEC course.* (Snowman)

Although we talked about some of the topics in normal university English lessons, such as dinner culture, weddings, cultural differences, it was the teacher who talked most of the time. (Tobey)

Tobey further identified that:

Although we also practise presentations as daily reports, there wasn't any emphasis on Q&A. (Tobey)

This might have explained why the students in the comparison group made positive progress in presentation but not in Q&A. However, Zinc had a different perception:

*The EEC course was not that much different from our university Speaking English course delivered by foreign teachers. I think the university Speaking English course was better, as you could see the foreign teacher directly. I tended to be less focused in the EEC lessons, as I could not see the teachers and other students online. **Still, the teachers***

on the EEC course were better in general. (Zinc)

This is a very interesting point, as it highlights one of the weakest aspects of an online lesson: The fact that the teachers and students could not see one another in the EEC lessons made it difficult for students to concentrate, particularly when they did not understand the teachers or other students. In order to demonstrate the necessity for online courses, as opposed to traditional courses based in the same physical location, the unique strengths of the former should be highlighted.

- **The aim of the course**

The students perceived that the EEC course had a different aim to the other English courses they had attended and four highlighted this as a success factor. Despite the university English course, in comparison to some external English courses, Atlantis remarked:

*I attended the IELTS course last year. It was designed for the IELTS exam. I was mostly taught exam skills and practised past exam questions. The EEC course was more focused on our interests. It was not exam-oriented but **interest-oriented**. (Atlantis)*

Amy, who had previously attended the iShow English course, which was specifically designed for university students, stated that:

*iShow was focused on improving our pronunciation and fluency in English. However, the topics of the EEC course **cultivated our thoughts in more depth**. There were also lots of words or phrases to learn when we read the articles or watched the videos before or after the lessons. (Amy)*

The students expressed that they did not regard the EEC course as being geared towards exams but rather interests. They perceived that it was more open, and cultivated their understanding of the target cultures in more depth.

The above findings, together with the findings from the previous question, suggest that in comparison with their normal university English courses and a few other commercial English courses, the EEC course was not an exam-based, teacher-centred, or speaking-skills-based English course. Rather, it was enriched and featured for its orientation towards interests, spontaneous interaction and thought cultivation.

11.5.4 Students' perceptions of the structure of the EEC course

The structure of the EEC course in RC3 is illustrated in Figure 11.2. Prior to the EEC lesson, students were given the topic and recommended learning resources to prepare for the lesson. Learning resources were mostly provided through the website of camenglish.weebly.com.

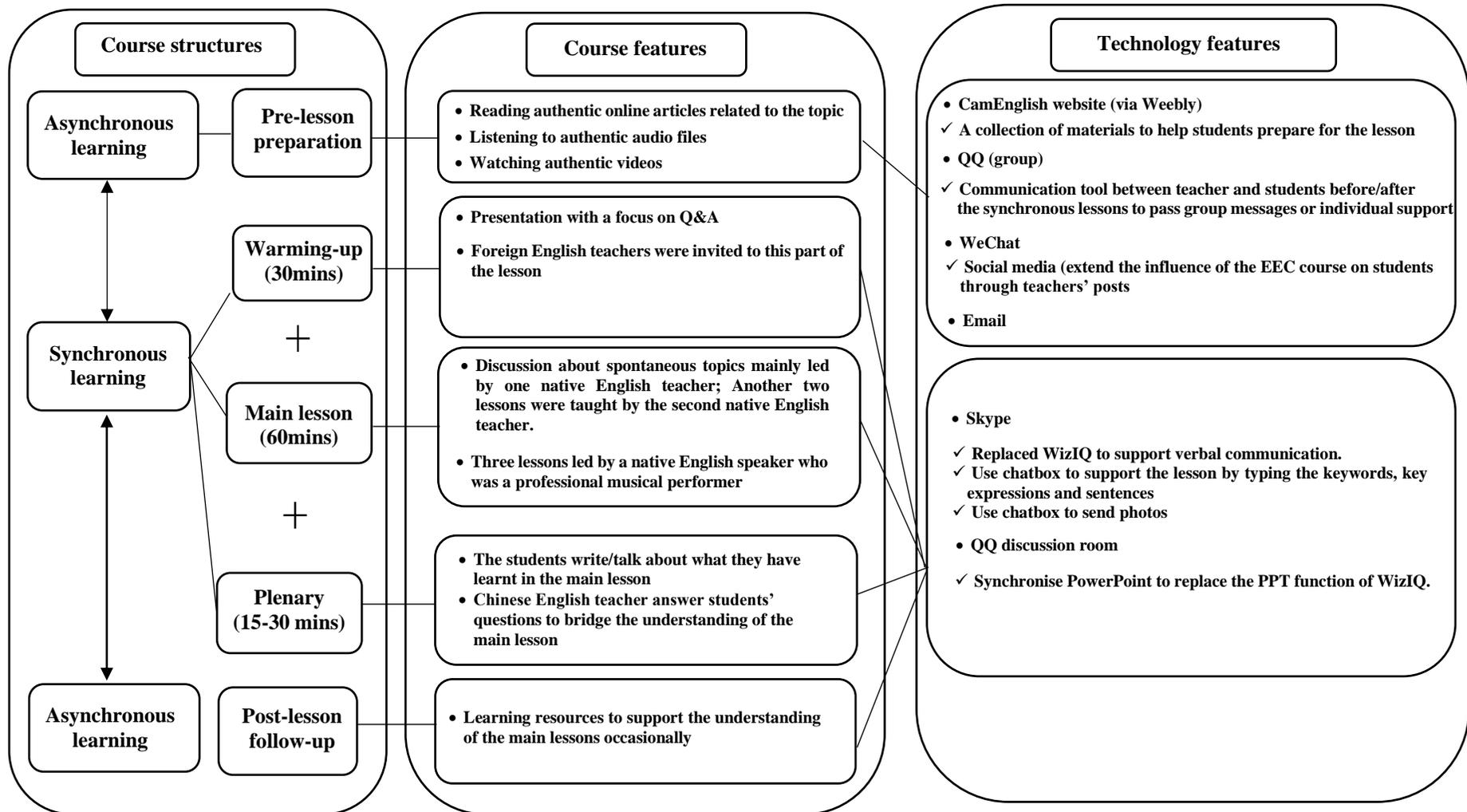


Figure 11.2: Course structure, course features and technology features of the EEC course in RC3

For the real-time synchronous learning EEC lesson, the first part was half an hour of students' presentations with Q&A practice. The second part was a one-hour topic-based main lesson led by an invited English speaker (IES). The last part was a 30-minute plenary led by the researcher playing the role of a Chinese teacher as facilitator. In the interview, all the students generally acknowledged that the structure of the session and the timing were right for them.

a. Students' perceptions of preparation for the EEC lessons

Students were generally not willing to prepare for the lesson (mean 3.25, $sd=0.463$). Although they saw the necessity of preparing for the lesson, there were two main reasons that restricted the value of this part of the course. The first was the available time. The students were mostly occupied with their own lessons and weekend activities, so they wanted the preparation learning resources to be available to them at least one week earlier. However, for several lessons they only received the preparation learning resources fewer than three days earlier. Partly, this was because of the nature of the EEC course, which taught some topics spontaneously in response to occurrences in the world. For instance, there was limited time to prepare for topics such as the Nepal earthquake, as it was most efficient to teach the students soon after the earthquake had happened and involve them in active discussion. Furthermore, preparing a topic, especially making a good-quality PowerPoint, takes a considerable amount of time. As a full-time worker and part-time student, it was quite challenging for me to get all the resources prepared in such a short time. However, this would be improved if the course designer were in a position to perform the role full-time. The plan was to teach students less spontaneous topics until such a role were possible. Another reason was that it was difficult to access the pre-lesson materials. This is discussed in more detail in Section 11.5.6 regarding the CamEnglish Weebly website.

b. Students' perceptions of the presentation with a focus on Q&A (30 minutes)

Following the results of RC2, foreign English speakers were invited to attend this section of the EEC course to enrich Q&A and to give students comments for improvement. Overall, the students liked the presentation and Q&A section of the EEC course, which helped them to develop their English communicative competence (mean 3.63, $sd=0.744$).

In the interviews, students expressed further thoughts about this part of the course.

Q&A was very good. It was the best part and also the most challenging part for me. It would be better if there were a PowerPoint for the presentation, as some presenters (students) were speaking too fast. I could only catch a brief idea. So I could not ask

meaningful questions. Sometimes there was no one asking questions, but the teachers were able to guide us to ask questions. (Snowman)

The idea of using PowerPoint in the presentation was also supported by Zinc. Agnes further pointed out the difficulty of the Q&A:

It was a bit too long for people like me, who found it very difficult to answer the questions. However, when I did the presentation, there were only a few questions, whereas there were more for the other students. Maybe it was because I did not understand what they were talking about.

Tobey agreed with Agnes that sometimes the presenter talked too little but more opportunities were given to the others. Apart from this problem, Amy expressed her concern about the overrunning of the presentation with Q&A time. She suggested moving the presentation to the part after the 60-minute topic-based main lesson. Billion disagreed, arguing that it could put too much pressure on the presenter in terms of worrying about the presentation throughout the main lesson. Tobey suggested that the format of the first 30 minutes of the EEC lesson could be more diverse, for example, a discussion about the news or sharing hobbies.

The feedback of the students on this part suggests that presenters should be able to prepare PowerPoint or resources that the others can read or see so that they can catch up more easily. Most of the questions should be given to the presenter rather than the rest of the audience, even though the presenter might find it difficult to respond to the questions. Alternative questions might be followed up if the presenter was having difficulty. Given that all students had enough chances to do a presentation, a discussion of the news or sharing a common topic might be an alternative way to make this part more diverse and engage all students. There were some good recommendations for the EEC course to be further developed in RC4.

Agnes further pointed out that:

If we were given more specific suggestions on our communication skills, that would be better. I need to do more self-practice. I might feel disappointed when I could not answer the questions in the lesson. However, I would spend more time learning English. For instance, I am watching an English TV series at the moment. I watched it because my classmates recommended it. I am also watching an American movie – The Vampire Diaries.

This suggests that students preferred to receive teachers' constructive feedback on their performance in presentation and Q&A. This might motivate them more to practise.

c. Students' perception of the main lesson (60 minutes)

All students on the EEC course liked the topic-based main lesson (mean 4.13, sd=0.354). The students commented:

I like this way of teaching. The British teachers introduced the topics first. We could ask questions during the lesson. (Amy)

The lesson was very relaxed. I could talk a lot when it was a topic that I was interested in. (Tobey)

I liked it most when there was lots of interaction. (Atlantis)

Regarding what aspects of this part of the course could be improved, the students suggested two aspects. The first was about the invited English speakers (IES).

Sometimes the British teacher was talking too much. They should speak less. (Zinc)

It could be even better if the topics were taught through interactive discussions. We would be more engaged and focused on the lessons. (Atlantis)

The students raised two areas where the IES could improve. The first was that the teachers talked more than they expected, which is something that would not be noticed easily from a teacher's perspective. As IES, they would want to tell students as much as possible about the topic in a limited time. However, this might reflect my inexperience as a facilitator who did not intervene enough to make the lesson more interactive. On the other hand, this might also reflect the fact that the students were not trained to be proactive to ask the teachers questions. This is a fairly common phenomenon in Chinese learning culture, where students are trained to be respectful and not interrupt teachers or speakers.

Three strategies could be used to improve this situation. The first is to make the foreign teachers more aware of the need to give sufficient time for engaging the students rather than focusing on delivering their knowledge about the topic. The second is that the Chinese teacher as facilitator should take more control of the pace of interaction in the lesson. Third, students

should be encouraged to ask questions proactively when they think the questions are important, and they should not leave it too long to ask the question before the teacher moves in another direction.

The second weakness that the students identified was that sometimes the foreign English teachers talked about something that was not related to the topic.

Sometimes the teacher was off topic too far. It could be expanded but it should still be around the topic. (Agnes)

We should have clear lesson objectives. It was good that we could talk about something spontaneous and off-topic. However, we should not let it go too far. (Amy)

This weakness might not have been caused by the teaching style of the individual foreign English teacher, but rather by the design of the EEC course. It is noticeable that when a foreign English teacher was asked to teach a variety of topics, the teacher was obviously struggling to deliver some topics more than others. For instance, the teacher who was specialised in acting and TV programmes was comfortable talking about dinner etiquette, but he obviously struggled to deliver the lesson on the earthquake of Nepal. This could be avoided by inviting the specialist foreign English teachers to deliver topics related to their specialist area or topics they were comfortable with.

When the students were asked any other suggestions, Tobey suggested:

It would be better to have foreign teachers of different ages. For instance, it would be good to talk to British students of our age, as we may have more similar topics to talk about.

This is a valuable suggestion. The EEC course was designed to invite different English speakers to share their stories with students. However, RC3 took the approach of only asking one principal British English teacher and one other British English teacher because of the researcher's time limitations. It seems that the students were more interested in meeting a wider variety of English teachers on the EEC course, and this point was developed in RC4.

Apart from the foreign English teachers, some students also mentioned the lack of opportunity

to participate in the main lesson of the EEC course.

Students like Atlantis were very active in the lesson, and they spoke English very well. I did not know how to insert myself into their conversation. (Billion)

It could be better to give everyone an equal chance to speak. (Tobey)

If I have not been able to speak for a while, I would not want to speak anymore. ...The teacher could pick up one of us to speak. It would be better not to let one person speak too long, as sometimes it was boring to hear one person speak. (Snowman)

The students who had lower English language ability expressed their desire to be able to speak more in the lesson. It is understandable that they might have more barriers to speaking English, especially when the other students were showing a stronger ability to speak fluently while they might be struggling to express themselves. Teachers should therefore give them more opportunities to participate in the lesson. Second, it is important for the Chinese teacher who is the facilitator to take some control of the pace and focus of the lesson. Moreover, the learning resources should be given to the students earlier so that they have more time to prepare for the lesson and feel more confident in contributing to the lesson.

d. Students' perception of the plenary at the end of the lesson

All students agreed that the plenary at the end of the lesson was necessary.

It is essential to do the plenary. Otherwise, it could make us feel like having a start without an end. (Billion)

What I have learnt most from a lesson was from the plenary. When you (Miss Du) spoke more in the plenary, I learnt more. I wasn't interested in British politics, as I was not interested in any politics and I rarely talked about it. However, through the lesson and the plenary, I had more understanding of it and knew more about what influence it had on the British people. (Amy)

The example that Amy gave here was interesting. I remember that when I was in China, I was interested in neither politics nor political news. To me, and many other mainland Chinese, our opinions did not seem to matter. We were trained to follow the leaders and ignore our own

thoughts. When I came to the UK, I gradually increased my interest in politics, as my colleagues engaged me in the teachers' union and I realised that we should fight for our own rights and our opinions mattered. The general election further opened my eyes to how people exercise their rights to decide who should lead the country. However, I was not fully aware of the importance of every citizen's influence on politics until the day that the results of Brexit were announced. Although I did not have the right to vote, I knew that many of my acquaintances, especially Chinese friends who had the right to vote, did not go to vote. Passing this experience and understanding onto Chinese students also requires sensible and cautious language. Although China has opened up to the world much more, the Chinese government still has great control over how people talk about politics. Therefore, the role of the Chinese teacher was critical to bridging the gap between learners' culture and the target culture.

In terms of what could be included in the plenary, students gave the following suggestions.

It could be used to summarise the lesson and give us an opportunity to share what we have learnt. But it could be a pressure if we were asked to type what we have learnt on Skype. (Tobey)

Atlantis supported this:

It would be better to ask us to talk about what we have learnt rather than writing. The plenary is also an opportunity to catch up the missing parts of the lesson.

Snowman added that:

It does not mean that every student has to tell what he/she has learnt in the lesson. It depends on the time and the topic. It would also be helpful to use the plenary to give the students who did the presentation in the lesson feedback.

It is evident that the students regarded the plenary as an essential part of the lesson to help them catch up or reinforce their learning in the lesson. The format of the plenary could be for students to summarise what they have learnt in the lesson, catch up on things they might not have fully understood, or talk further with the Chinese English teacher to deepen their understanding. In this respect, the knowledge of the Chinese English teacher on the topic is essential. In RC3 this role was undertaken by the course designer, who possibly understood the topics much better

than the other Chinese English teachers, especially those who had not studied or lived abroad. The communication of topics with the Chinese English teachers in this role is crucial.

11.5.5 Students' perceptions of the topics on the EEC course

Thirteen topics were delivered in RC3. Table 11.13 shows the ranking of topics from the students' perceptions. This section reviews some of the topics that particularly attracted the attention of the students.

Table 11.13: Ranking of the topics of the students' preferences in RC3

	Topics	Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
1	Travelling around the world	4.63	0.518	4	5
2	Christmas culture	4.13	0.641	3	5
2	Dinner etiquette	4.13	1.126	2	5
2	Presentation skills	4.13	0.835	3	5
2	Role play	4.13	0.835	3	5
3	Meeting with mime actor	4.00	0.756	3	5
3	Royal wedding	4.00	0.756	3	5
3	Relationships	4.00	0.756	3	5
4	Nepal earthquake	3.75	0.707	3	5
5	Pantomime	3.63	0.744	2	4
5	General election of the UK	3.63	0.916	2	5
6	The Beatles	3.38	1.598	1	5
7	John Lennon and Yoko Ono	3.00	1.069	1	4

a. Travelling around the world

Atlantis commented on the topic of travelling around the world (mean 4.63, sd=0.518):

Travelling around the world was one of my favourite lessons. It has always made me want to go camping, hiking, climbing, though I still need to find an organisation to join.

In fact, Atlantis started climbing and hiking two or three months after the EEC course and the interview, which shows the impact of the course on the students' real life and their openness to

the world.

b. Christmas culture

Although Christmas culture (mean 4.13, sd=0.641) was a common topic for many English courses, Agnes described a different experience:

Christmas culture has been a very impressive lesson to me. One student did a presentation about Christmas culture right before the main lesson. Jim's family also joined the lesson. They were singing Christmas songs for us. I was quite touched.

An interesting point that Agnes made here was that it was not just a lesson about Christmas culture but also interacting with a British family and feeling their joy in celebrating their culture. This suggests that even for a common topic such as Christmas culture, the EEC course could cultivate it from different angles and take advantage of being able to invite a local British family to give students a different experience and understanding of the topic.

c. Presentation skills

The decision to teach students presentation skills (mean 4.13, sd=0.835) was taken to support their presentation and Q&A skills in the first 30 minutes of the EEC lessons. Amy commented:

Presentation skills lesson was a useful lesson as it would be a useful skill in academic life and work life. (Amy)

However, Tobey disagreed:

It is quite a common topic. It's better to teach it in the first 30 minutes of students' presentation time of each lesson. The teacher could give us comments on our presentation and performance in Q&A. (Tobey)

It seems that the students were aware of the importance of presentations and the ability to interact with the audience. However, a single lesson of presentation skills did not seem to benefit the students greatly. There were two ways to improve this situation. First, the EEC course could extend a sub-course to focus on technical skills in communication. In this course, the students could learn not only presentation skills but also techniques of voice projection, body language, and so on. However, this would require the EEC course to be extended

considerably. This was not trialled in RC4 because of time limitations. The second way to develop this was to deliver this topic through an asynchronous learning platform, through reading articles or watching videos. Then the skills could be strengthened by the practice of the presentation and the comments of the teachers on the students' performance. Therefore, this topic was not included in RC4.

d. Role play

The topic of role play (mean 4.13, sd=0.835) was recommended by the British teacher, who had been a TV series director. The students were asked to play specific roles in a given context, such as an interview. They commented:

Role play was a very spontaneous lesson. Everyone was engaged. However, it was a bit boring when others were doing role play. (Snowman)

I was very nervous when I was doing role play. I was not satisfied with my own performance, and I reacted too slowly. I had too little life experience for it. (Snowman)

It might be better to let us do role play in a British play. In this way, we can also learn the culture of musicals or other plays. (Atlantis)

It is evident that the students were interested in this style of engagement. However, the context of the role play should be more carefully selected and organised. Otherwise, one student can be engaged while others are left with little opportunity for participation. The suggestion to do role play in a musical or drama play is a good idea to engage more students at the same time, although this might best be taught by an invited English speaker (IES) who specialises in drama performance.

e. Relationships and the royal wedding

The topic of relationships (mean 4.00, sd=0.756) was suggested by the students. In this lesson, the teacher led and the students discussed their relationships with parents and boyfriends and girlfriends. Amy commented:

I am interested in all sorts of relationships. It is a significant topic to me, as I was not good at dealing with relationships. I did not know how to communicate with my parents, but I wanted to improve my relationship with them. I am also interested in learning about how to deal with relationships in other situations, such as friends.

However, the students also commented that:

It was a bit embarrassing to talk about boyfriends and girlfriends as I do not have one yet. (Agnes)

The students also suggested that:

It might have been better to talk about this topic when we were more familiar and more comfortable with one another. (Snowman)

Interestingly, Amy, who was in favour of the topic of relationships, found the topic of the royal wedding (mean 4.00, sd=0.756; Figure 11.3) embarrassing.

This is a topic suited to gossip rather than teaching and learning, as it is embarrassing.

Agnes viewed it in a different way.

It was a beautiful topic. I would like to know about Western weddings.

The different views of Amy and Agnes might reflect the duality of Chinese culture: conservativeness and openness. Parents, particularly those who lived in or came from remote areas, might rarely talk to their children about relationships. I still remember, in a Chinese lesson, when we read the scene describing thousands of people standing by the side of ChangAn (Long Peace) street to share their tears and say farewell to Premier Enlai Zhou at his funeral; among them there was a couple, and my face turned red just reading the words 'a husband and a wife'. However, the embarrassment that Amy was feeling does not mean that we should not discuss this topic. Instead it suggests that we should leave this topic to a later stage when the students feel more comfortable with the teacher and other students. It might be good to make it clear to the students that we are aware of the embarrassment that such a topic may cause, but encourage them to use this opportunity to challenge their own views and thoughts.

In Chinese education, little attention is given to how to develop and maintain a good relationship with others, although there are high expectations to respect elders and care about younger. There is little education about other relationships, such as relationships with girlfriends and boyfriends, husbands and wives, parents and children, and colleagues. These relationships

actually play vital roles in our happiness. Success in developing and maintaining a good relationship is fundamentally supported by people's understanding and competence of communication. This topic could be expanded to become an individual course as a sister course to the EEC course. Nonetheless, it was not made a focus of the EEC course in RC4 because of the different focus and time limitation.

Week 7: Royal Wedding - to Read

Royal Wedding

theguardian

News | Sport | Comment | Culture | Business | Money | Life & style | Travel | Environment |

News > UK news > Royal wedding > Prince William | Monarchy | Video | In pictures

Royal wedding



From the dress to the kiss
The marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton

The view from the streets
Video: The wedding in two minutes

Wedding speaks volumes about our fascination with royalty
Jonathan Freedland: The monarchy sidesteps the awkwardness of patriotism and allows us to feel a rare British pride

- Stephen Bates: Sealed with a kiss
- Caroline Davies: A stylish marriage
- Marina Hyde: A very royal wedding

Figure 11.3: The reading material link page for the topic of royal wedding (RC3)

f. The Beatles, and John Lennon and Yoko Ono

For the topic of the Beatles (mean 3.38, sd=1.598), two students gave a score of one. Billion admitted that she did not know the Beatles and was not interested in them. Agnes commented that:

I didn't really understand this lesson. I knew it was an important culture of Britain, but

I still could not find the interest in this topic. But I will try to learn more about it.

Amy argued:

I was not familiar with this topic even though I have done some research before the lesson, so I talked little in that lesson. I only knew that it was a British band, but I was not familiar with the individuals of the band. However, I have learnt a lot through the lesson, even though most of the time I was only listening to the conversations of others.

For the least favorite topic of **John Lennon and Yoko Ono** (mean 3.00, sd=1.069; Figure 11.4 and 11.5):

I didn't read and watch the materials before the lesson. I just could not find any interest in this topic. (Billion)

Atlantis explained:

This is a topic that may not interest some students, as it was too far away from us. But it is a very unique topic for us to know the feelings of British people about the love story of John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

Amy added that:

I wasn't interested in this topic. However, after your summary of the lesson, I realised the value of this topic. I did more research after the lesson on the stories of John Lennon and Yoko Ono. And I found it was a fascinating topic afterwards.

It seems that this topic was challenging for most students. It also requires the Chinese teacher to play a vital role helping students to understand the meaning behind the topic. I spent weeks watching the videos and reading the stories of John Lennon and Yoko Ono before I had a better understanding of their relationship. It would be interesting to ask another Chinese English teacher to deliver such a topic. This topic was not included in RC4 but it could be a good topic for the relationship course when it is developed in future.

Week 5 and 6: The Beatles and John Lennon & Yoko Ono



- [1. To Watch](#)
- [2. To Read](#)
- [3. To Learn a Song](#)
- [4. Lesson PowerPoint](#)
- [5. Your Comments](#)

Figure 11.4: The self-designed learning web page for the topics of the Beatles, and John Lennon and Yoko Ono (RC3)

[John Lennon & Yoko Ono](#) [1. To Watch](#)



[Imagine - Documentary](#)



[John Lennon - Mini Biography](#)



[Yoko Ono - Bad Dancer](#)

Figure 11.5: The self-designed web page for the topics of the Beatles, and John Lennon and Yoko Ono (RC3)

On the whole, the students were more interested in topics related to their daily life. The more distant the topics from their life, the less interest they had in them. Some topics might be more sensitive to some than to others, which suggests that the EEC course should consider the order of topics more thoughtfully.

11.5.6 Students' perceptions of the technology features of the EEC course

In general, students liked the virtual learning environment of the EEC course (mean 3.63, sd=0.518): all ratings were positive or neutral. WIZIQ, Skype and QQ were employed to support synchronous learning. QQ, WeChat, the CamEnglish Weebly learning website and email were used to support asynchronous learning.

- **Students' perceptions of the synchronous learning technology features of the EEC course**

The plan was to use WizIQ as the leading synchronous learning platform to deliver the EEC course. However, students did not seem to be in favour of this virtual classroom although most were neutral (mean 3.13, sd=0.641).

Figure 11.6 shows a student's presentation with a chatbox in the WizIQ classroom. The students commented that:

It was really good that we could see the PowerPoint and teacher's marks on the PowerPoint in WizIQ. However, it was very slow to open WIZIQ, and it often took me more than 10 minutes to log in and then I was kicked out of the classroom from time to time.

It would be much better if WIZIQ were working well, as we could learn the new words from the PowerPoint. However, it was too problematic. Not only did it take a long time to log in but also the change of the slides was not showing spontaneously. (Snowman)
The functions of WIZIQ were very rich and diverse. However, we could rarely log into WizIQ to use them without any problems during the lesson. (Atlantis)



Figure 11.6: The use of PowerPoint and Chatbox functions of WizIQ classroom in the EEC course (RC3)

The problems identified by the students were similar to those in RC2. To solve the problem of not being able to see the PowerPoint when they could not log into the virtual classroom WizIQ, the students suggested:

It might be better to upload the PowerPoint to the QQ group so that everyone can download in advance and it will not be disrupted by the slow Internet speed.

This was a good suggestion for RC4. As a result of the poor access to WizIQ, RC3 only used WizIQ for a few lessons. Instead, Skype was used as the primary communication platform for the rest of the course. The students perceived Skype (mean 4.13, sd=0.835) to be more useful than WizIQ.

Skype was useful for group chatting when we could not hear one another in the virtual classroom (WizIQ).

Skype was good, as we could make group calls to connect us for the lesson and we could also type in the texts in the chatbox, which was very important for me to catch up in the conversation and learn the keywords. (Tobey)

Although the audio function of Skype was more stable than that of WizIQ, there were still

problems keeping all the students in the group chatting at all times. Nevertheless, it was much quicker for the students to return to the group chat than in WizIQ. As a result, in RC4, it was decided that Skype would be the main synchronous learning platform unless a more stable virtual classroom were found.

- **Students' perceptions of the asynchronous learning technology features of the EEC course: QQ, WeChat, learning website and email**

Table 11.14 shows the extent to which the students liked QQ, the CamEnglish weebly website, email and mobile to support the asynchronous learning of the EEC course. It is evident that QQ was the favourite asynchronous learning platform for the students (mean 4.25, sd=0.886).

Table 11.14: The extent to which the students liked using asynchronous learning platforms in the EEC course

	Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
QQ	4.25	0.886	3	5
WeChat	2.75	1.035	1	4
CamEnglish (Weebly)	2.50	0.535	2	3
Email	2.63	0.744	2	4
Mobile	2.50	0.926	1	4

- **QQ**

The students commented on QQ:

QQ was very useful to send notice messages and information to everyone. (Snowman)

I use QQ every day to keep in contact with my friends, so it was quite convenient for me to check the messages sent by the EEC course. (Tobey)

However, Agnes had a different perception:

I started to use QQ after I became a freshman at the university. I am not used to and not interested in any chatting app. Maybe it was because where I came from was quite remote and far behind in technology. So it would take me some effort to log into QQ to check the messages.

This was an important comment, as we tend to assume that almost everyone has a mobile phone and everyone should be used to social chatting apps. Yet, there might be some people like Agnes who live in remote areas, and they might need more support in getting used to the app used by the EEC course. For students experiencing similar problems to Agnes, the EEC course might employ other means to support them to get the course messages and then use links to guide them in accessing the QQ app.

- **WeChat**

Apart from QQ, WeChat was also used to support the asynchronous learning of the students. WeChat is increasingly popular in social communication technology in China. The function of WeChat is similar to that of QQ or Facebook, giving friends a platform to communicate. However, it gives more privacy to the account owner and the information published can only be seen by friends. Different from Facebook, other non-mutual friends are not able to see one another's names and comments. As there is increased use of WeChat over QQ in social communication, the EEC course set up a WeChat group and added students who had WeChat accounts to the group. From time to time, I sent relevant article links on WeChat. However, Atlantis was the only active member to interact in the group chat. The students explained that:

WeChat was similar to QQ; there was no need for me to use it. (Billion)

WeChat could only be opened on mobile devices. It was more difficult for me to read long paragraphs on a small mobile screen than on a computer. (Tobey)

However, when I posted some of the photos of my outdoor activities in the friends' zone, more students responded to my posts. This suggests that, even though WeChat may not be a good platform to share learning web links with students, it might be a good platform to share teachers' hobbies and interests and thus influence the students implicitly.

- **CamEnglish Weebly website**

To put all the learning resources in one place and to give students the convenience to preview and revise the EEC lessons, a learning website (camenglish.weebly.com) was created. However, the students did not perceive it as particularly useful to their learning (mean 2.50, sd=0.535) because it took a long time to open the website and it was extremely slow to open a video document, although slightly better for an audio document (Figure 11.9). More often than not videos could not be played smoothly. Interestingly, the problems that the students experienced

in China were not a problem in the UK. This confirmed the Great Firewall theory (Li, 2009; Mei et al, 2018) and suggested that it is better to build a website where the server is based in mainland China. The students suggested that it might be better to upload resources to QQ so that they could download videos more quickly. This should be taken into consideration in the future development of the website.

Despite these problems, the students expressed their positive experiences with the CamEnglish learning website.

It was straightforward and clear in its outlook. (Snowman)

The structure was very good. All the topics each week were listed on the front page, which was very easy to follow (Figure 11.7). (Amy)

It was easy to find where to open the links. Once a web page was open, the reading links were fairly quick to open (Figure 11.8). (Tobey)

In a comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the CamEnglish website, it seems that it is not that the website was not useful in supporting their learning, but rather that it was the slow Internet speed that limited all of its strengths. As the self-designed website whose server was in China in RC1 also had a speed problem, it seems that the EEC course might need a much more significant investment with more technical support for the website to ensure it can be accessed instantly. As a result of financial limitations, the EEC course did not try any self-designed learning website but rather sent learning materials to students through the QQ group to avoid the bad experiences of the students when opening the web pages. This does not mean that the EEC course abandoned the idea of a self-designed learning website. Rather, it was felt that this would have to wait until there was sufficient financial and technical support.



Week 8: Dinner Etiquette



Week 7: Royal Wedding



Week 5 and 6: Beatles and John Lennon & Yoko Ono



Week 4: Presentation Skills



Week 3: Adrian Hedley



Week 2: Pantomime



Week 1: Christmas Culture

Figure 11.7: The CamEnglish website for a collection of some of the topics taught in RC3

Pantomime - To Read

The History of Pantomime



10 Pantomime and Christmas Theatre Shows 2014



Figure 11.8: The reading materials link to the topic of Christmas culture on the CamEnglish Weebly website (RC3)

Cam English Enrichment Course

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Week 1: Christmas Culture - To learn Christmas songs (two songs)

A. Winter Wonderland - Vanessa Hudgens



B. All I Want For Christmas Is You - Mariah Carey



Figure 11.9: The audio files to play the songs for the topic of Christmas culture in RC3

- **Email**

Email was also used to send documents between students and teachers, although it was not

regarded by students as a particularly useful technique for their learning (mean 2.63, sd=0.744). Email was reportedly only used to fill out application forms or questionnaires. The weekly documents were mainly sent through QQ. Therefore, emails were not a significant feature of the EEC course.

- **Mobile phone**

The EEC course did not require students to use mobiles to access the course. However, Skype, QQ, WeChat, email and even the CamEnglish website could be accessed through mobiles. The students were asked about the extent to which they perceived mobile phones to be useful to their EEC learning, and they revealed mobile phones to be among their favourites (mean 2.50, sd=0.926).

On the whole, synchronous and asynchronous learning technologies provided the EEC course with exciting potential. However, there were also many problems. In fact, it continued to be one of the main challenges of the EEC course. Although WizIQ has several great functions to make the learning experience like a physical classroom, the slow Internet speed did not allow WizIQ to show its strengths. Hence, Skype was used as a primary platform to deliver the synchronous lessons. However, the quality of the audio on Skype was still not stable. It was felt that QQ, the most convenient communication tool for the students, could play a greater role in the EEC course and should be further explored in RC4. WeChat, which was still a fairly new communication tool for some of the students, played a less important role in RC3. However, its Friends' Zone function showing teachers' activities might be influential for students. The CamEnglish learning website was a well-designed and structured website. Nonetheless, its slow opening speed counteracted all of its usefulness. As most communications could be conveyed through QQ, email did not play a significant role in supporting students' learning.

11.6 How RC3 informs RC4

This section discusses how the findings of RC3 informed RC4.

11.6.1 Who to take the course

The findings of RC3 showed that the EEC course benefits Chinese university students in improving their communicative competence and it is practical to collect the pre-tests and post-tests of both the intervention group and the comparison group in their regular university English lessons through their university English teacher. Therefore, RC4 would continue this form of data-collection method. However, strategies should be taken to improve the completion of pre-

tests and post-tests of the comparison group.

11.6.2 What to achieve

The development of the communicative competence concept to include sociocultural competence and interactional competence gave clearer direction to the development of the EEC course (Figure 11.10). Therefore, this structure remained the same in RC4.

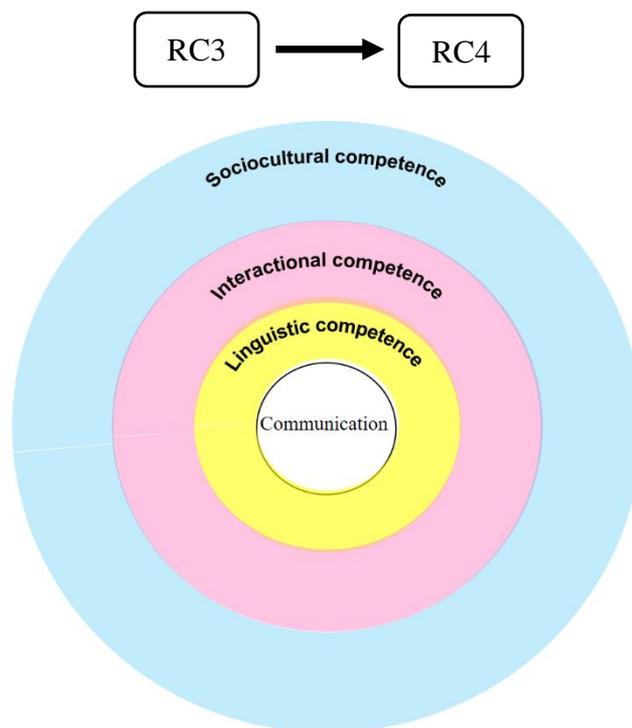


Figure 11.10: The development of the understanding of communicative competence from RC2 to RC3

Sociocultural competence

The students were most positive that the EEC course had helped them improve sociocultural competence, especially being able to appreciate a different culture and communicate more sensitively and appropriately. However, the full range of students' opinions suggested that not all students benefited from this progress. RC4 would include some strategies to improve this situation. For instance, short constructive feedback should be given to each student after each lesson to help the teacher be more aware of each student's performance, and the students should also know that the teachers were paying attention to their performance. The ranking of the three highest achievements through the EEC course further indicated that the course should further develop the feature to link students' real life with the course so that the students could apply what they had learnt in the lesson to improve the quality of their daily life communication. This

could be done by teaching students some topics that they could link with their daily life.

Interactional competence

The students identified that they had improved their ability to express themselves but comparatively less so in answering the interlocutor's questions. They were also not confident in understanding the interlocutor's true intentions or the implications behind the words, and in using alternative ways to express themselves fluently. One of the problems was that the more competent students had more opportunities to speak in the lesson, which resulted in fewer chances for the less competent students. This suggested that the teachers should make more effort to give every student an approximately equal opportunity to interact in the lesson. On the other hand, the students, especially the more competent students, should also be made more aware of turn-taking rules and encouraged to respect their peers during group discussion. The EEC course should also seek more opportunities to enable students to interact in the lesson. For instance, students should host the presentation with a Q&A time in turn instead of having a Chinese English teacher. More competent students could even host the main lesson if they felt comfortable taking the challenge.

Linguistic competence

The students perceived that they had made progress in areas of sociocultural competence and interactional competence but not linguistic competence. This was similar to the findings of RC1 and RC2. Although the test results showed that the students made positive progress in linguistic competence, it was ranked lowest of the three sub-competencies. This suggests that implicit teaching has limitations in terms of linguistic competence. If it were decided to emphasise developing learners' linguistic competence in the EEC course, explicit learning should be introduced. However, to avoid explicit learning of linguistic competence disrupting the focus and fluency of the synchronous lessons, it could be structured as asynchronous learning through learning apps. As linguistic competence is not the focus of this study, RC4 would still not undertake any explicit strategy to develop learners' linguistic competence.

11.6.3 How to assess learners' progress and evaluate the key features of the course

- **Assessment tools for students' progress in communicative competence**

The further developed understanding of interactional competence seemed to be in line with the assessment criteria. However, the criteria for assessing sociocultural competence seemed limited. Although stylistic and cultural appropriateness and social communication elements could reflect some features of sociocultural competence, the latter covers many more aspects

of competence. With a further literature review, the four elements of intercultural competence, emotional regulation, openness, flexibility and critical thinking, identified by Matsumoto and Hwang (2013), were added to the assessment criteria of sociocultural competence in RC4. Although it was challenging to assess emotional regulation in the PQA test, it could be assessed in the IELTS writing test, in which the student would be asked to write a complaint letter about his/her roommate. How the students presented their complaints could, to some extent, show their emotional regulation in a conflict. The other three elements could also be reflected in either the IELTS writing test or the PQA test.

The PQA test was shown to be a practical test tool to assess students' linguistic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence. However, it was not practical within the EEC course to conduct any test beyond the students' university English lessons. This was because the comparison group would have had no motivation to complete the test, especially the post-test, unless it were integrated into their normal university English assessment. Therefore, to use the IELTS writing test in RC4 (Figure 11.11), a request had to be made to conduct it in normal university English lessons as part of students' university English practice or assessment. If this were not possible, the EEC course would have to drop the IELTS writing test as part of the assessment tools for communicative competence.

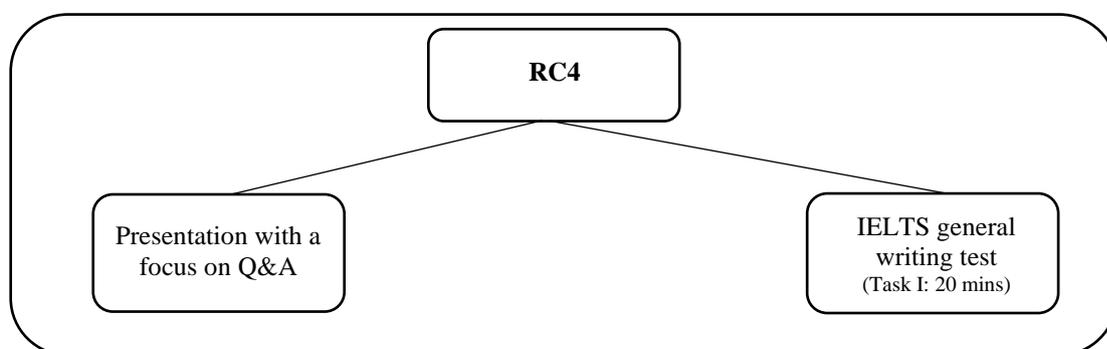


Figure 11.11: The pre-tests and post-tests in RC4 remained the same as in RC3

- **Evaluation tools – questionnaires and interviews**

The data-collection methods proved to be practical in RC3. However, some questions in the questionnaire and interview could be further developed to cultivate more detailed perceptions of the students, especially the questions related to sociocultural and interactional competence.

11.6.4 How to design and deliver the course

The findings relating to RQ2 detailed above yielded several suggested design modifications

that informed RC4. In summary, these were the development of:

- **Course features**

The key course features contributing to the improvements of communicative competence

The students perceived that the key course features that differentiated the EEC course from the other English courses they had attended were the interaction feature and the aim of the EEC course to develop communicative competence. However, some students also identified the problem of having fewer chances than others to speak in the lesson. The more competent students tended to get more opportunities to speak in the lesson. There were two strategies to address this issue: first, making teachers and students aware that the aim of the EEC course was to give equal opportunities to everyone to speak in the lessons. The more competent students should also develop their ability at turn-taking and engaging other participants. The second strategy was to produce more opportunities for students to interact with one another. For example, while one student was presenting and answering the audience's questions, another student could chair the presentation. The more competent students could also be given the opportunity to host the main lesson in turn. In this way, three to four students would benefit from each lesson, and every student would have such an opportunity fortnightly, based on eight students per class. These features would be strengthened in RC4. More distinguishing course features should be discovered through the questionnaires and interviews.

Preparation before the lesson

Although the students acknowledged that preparation for the lessons was helpful, they had limited time to go through all the preparation resources before the synchronous lessons. They also suggested that releasing the preparation learning resources at least one week before the lesson would give them more time to go through the preparation resources. This meant that the course designer should prepare a lesson at least two weeks before delivery, which also meant that the EEC course would be less spontaneous than it might be. Nevertheless, it was felt that in RC4 the preparation materials should be sent to the students within one or two days of finishing the previous lesson, if possible. As a result, the topics in RC4 might be less spontaneous.

Warming-up time (the first 30 minutes)

As mentioned in the above key course features, the students identified a few problems in this part of the lesson. First, some of the presenters, especially the lower-level students, felt they did not have enough chances to be asked questions in the Q&A part. This suggests that attention

should be given to making sure the presenter is the main person to answer the audience questions. Second, although the native English teachers were invited to take part in this part of the lesson, the students wanted the teachers to give them more critical feedback rather than gentle, positive feedback. This might be a cultural difference, as western teachers preferred to give more praise than criticism, as they did not want to demotivate the students. However, Chinese students were used to teachers' criticism. Therefore, there is a need to help the native English teachers understand the cultural difference and give more constructive feedback.

The main lesson (60-minute real-time synchronous lesson)

The main issues identified in RC3 were related to the IES (invited English speakers). First, the students wanted the IES to speak less and engage them more in the interactive discussion. This suggested that teachers should be made more aware of reducing their speaking time and put more effort into engaging students in their interactions and discussions.

Second, instead of having one prime IES, more IES could be invited to deliver the main lessons. The choice of IES would be based on their specialised areas or experience. For instance, a music teacher could be invited to deliver topics about music, and an on-campus student at Cambridge University could be invited to lead a discussion about student life at the University. Although there was no requirement to create a PowerPoint for the lesson, a simple lesson plan would either be discussed by the course designer and the IES or proposed by the designer and further developed by the IES.

Strategies for dealing with potential problems were also considered. To ensure good attendance of the IES, early contact was made to give them sufficient time to schedule in their calendar and prepare for the EEC lessons. For any emergency, they were also advised to contact the course designer as early as possible if there were any changes.

Third, as mentioned earlier, some students complained that they did not have as many chances as other, more competent, students to speak in the main lesson. As suggested earlier, apart from encouraging the more competent students to follow the turn-taking rule, the less competent students should also be encouraged to be more assertive to make their voice heard in the group discussion. This is particularly useful for lower-level students for study or work overseas.

The plenary lesson (15–30-minute synchronous lesson)

The students regarded the plenary section as essential to the EEC course. Instead of writing

down what they had learnt through the main lesson, the students preferred to talk to the CT (Chinese tutor) about the main lesson to clarify any questions that they did not fully understand in the main lesson. Playing this role of bridging the understanding of the students' mother culture and the target culture requires the CT to have a certain level of understanding of the topics, or at least an interest. Therefore, in RC4, there would be no requirement for the students to write down what they had learnt in the main lesson. Instead, the students would be encouraged to ask questions to catch up with the main lesson.

The post-lesson follow-up

Not giving students compulsory home tasks as in RC2, but only occasional reading material, seemed to be welcomed by the students in RC3. Personalised feedback could be given to each student after each lesson via QQ, which would be short but constructive. If a student missed a lesson, a message would be sent as a gentle reminder and encouragement to attend the next lesson. It was expected that this individualised contact with the students would help to maintain or improve students' attendance.

The topics of the EEC course

Similar to RC2, the students showed more interest in topics that were either spontaneous (e.g. teaching about Christmas at Christmas time by a British family), which they could apply in their real life (e.g. travelling around the world, dinner etiquette), or topics that the IES were specialised in (e.g. meeting with the mime actor). Similar to RC1 and RC2, the students were less interested in topics that were remote to them, including politics (the General Election of the UK) and the old music band (e.g. The Beatles, John Lennon and Yoko Ono). Regarding the topic of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, it was delivered by the IES. It was expected that the IES could bring more stories than I could. However, the findings showed that the IES was neither specialised in the music nor had much interest in the topic. Therefore, it is important to ask the IES to teach topics that they are either specialised or interested in. Otherwise it is very difficult to cultivate the thoughts of the students if the teachers are unsure about the topics.

Therefore, the matching of topics with teachers is very important and had to be considered in RC4. For another example, asking the IES who was a mime actor to talk about the Nepal earthquake was not ideal.

- **Technology features**

Technologies to support synchronous learning

Although WizIQ was planned as the main platform for the synchronous lesson in RC3, because of its continuous failure to allow the EEC lessons to be delivered without disruption, Skype replaced WizIQ and was used as the leading platform to facilitate synchronous communication in RC3. It was decided that Skype would be used as the primary platform for synchronous lessons. However, the QQ discussion room would be used as the back-up platform in RC4.

Technologies to support asynchronous learning

The students welcomed the self-designed website CamEnglish via Weebly in terms of its presentation, structure and resources. However, poor accessibility to this website made it much less valuable to the students' asynchronous learning. Therefore, as the students suggested, QQ was a better platform to send learning resources and video documents to students before lessons. Although students preferred to communicate through QQ, WeChat was still an option as an additional tool for the teacher and students to communicate informally in RC4 and to investigate how the students interacted with the teachers informally.

11.6.5 What to improve

Table 11.15 summarises the course design development process from RC3 to RC4, as discussed above.

Table 11.15: Summary of the course design development from RC3 to RC4

		Delivery of RC3	Implications for RC4	Intervention plan of RC4
Why and who to take the course	Identifying the gap in needs	The lack of initiative and ability to communicate with English speakers from other cultures effectively in-depth		
	Identifying participants	<p>Students: Intervention group: Year 2 university students from Chongqing University in China Comparison group: The classmates of the intervention group who have attended both pre-tests and post-tests Teachers: Primary teacher: two native English teachers Supporting co-teacher: Chinese English teacher (I, the researcher)</p>	<p>Students: 1. Take strategies to collect more data from the comparison group Teachers: Invite more specialised IESs to lead the main lessons</p>	<p>Students: Intervention group: Year 2 university students from the same university and taught by the same English teacher Comparison group: The rest of the classmates of the intervention group who are taught by the same English teacher at the same university Teachers: Primary teacher: invite more specialist English speakers to lead the main lesson Supporting co-teacher: Chinese English teacher (I, the researcher)</p>
What to achieve	Defining and developing the key concepts	<p>Communicative competence: Linguistic competence Interactional competence Sociocultural competence</p>	Further reviewing literature and link to the findings of RC2	<p>Communicative competence: Linguistic competence Interactional competence Sociocultural competence</p>
	Formulating goals and objectives	<p>Goals: Unchanged Objectives: Developing Sociocultural competence Interactional competence Linguistic competence</p>	<p>The less competent students in speaking English were not making progress in intercultural competence and sociocultural competence To develop sociocultural competence: 1. Short and instant feedback should be given to each student to address their good performance and further improvement To develop interaction competence: 1. Emphasise turn-taking rule to all students, especially more able students 2. Teachers should try harder to give each student an equal opportunity to speak in the lesson</p>	<p>Goals: Unchanged Objectives: To develop sociocultural competence: Give short but instant feedback to each student after each lesson To develop interactional competence: 1. Emphasise turn-taking rule especially to more able students Teachers give more effort to ensure every student has equal opportunity to speak in the lesson 2. Increase the opportunity for students to develop interactional competence a. Instead of the teacher, the students host the presentation with a focus on Q&A section b. Most able students may host the main lesson</p>

How to assess the progress and evaluate the course	Designing an assessment plan for learner's progress	<p>IELTS general writing test (Task I)</p> <p>1. Presentation with a focus on Q&A tests</p> <p>Pre-test and post-test collected from both the intervention group and the comparison group</p> <p>2. IELTS general writing test (Task I)</p> <p>Failed to collect the tests from the comparison group</p>	IELTS writing test needs to be conducted in the university English lesson to ensure the comparison group complete both pre-tests and post-tests	<p>1. IELTS general writing test (Task I)</p> <p>2. Presentation with a focus on Q&A</p> <p>Both tests need to be conducted in the university English lessons</p>
	Data-collection plan for evaluation of the course	<p>1. A questionnaire was adapted to match the change of RC3 in comparison to RC2</p> <p>2. Questionnaires were collected before conducting a semi-structured interview</p>	Further, develop questionnaire questions to reflect the change of RC4 and find out more about learners' perceptions of sociocultural competence and interactional competence	<p>1. The same procedure as RC3</p> <p>2. Adapt questionnaire questions to reflect the change of RC4</p>
How to design and deliver the course	Delivery time of the course			
	Course structure	<p>Asynchronous learning:</p> <p>Pre-lesson preparation (through CamEnglish created via Weebly web builder)</p> <p>Synchronous learning:</p>		<p>Asynchronous learning:</p> <p>Pre-lesson preparation (through CamEnglish created via Weebly web builder)</p> <p>Synchronous learning:</p>
	Course features	<p>Pre-lesson preparation</p> <p>1. Learning resources were presented through a self-designed learning website via Weebly</p>	<p>1. The students wanted the preparation resources to be released at least one week before delivery of the next lesson</p> <p>2. Be more selective in reducing the number of preparation resources</p>	<p>Pre-lesson preparation</p> <p>1. Be more selective in reducing the number of preparation materials</p> <p>2. Aim to release preparation resources soon after finishing the previous lesson</p>
		<p>Preparation time (the first 30 minutes):</p> <p>1. The same as RC2</p> <p>2. Invited the foreign English speaker to listen to the students' presentations, interact with them and give feedback to the students</p>	<p>1. Some of the presenter students wanted more questions to be asked of them rather than asking the rest of the audience</p> <p>2. The students wanted more constructive feedback from native English teachers</p>	<p>Preparation time (the first 30 minutes):</p> <p>1. Raise awareness of the presenter's needs. Questions should be mainly for the presenters to answer rather than the audience. Every presenter should be given sufficient opportunity to answer the questions.</p> <p>2. Raise the awareness of the native English teachers to give constructive feedback.</p>

		<p>Main lesson (60 minutes):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main lesson is delivered by two foreign English speakers 2. I, as the Chinese English teacher, support the main lesson when necessary 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invite more specialised foreign English speakers to deliver the main lessons 2. Addressing turn-taking rules and assertiveness to the students 3. Teachers should be made aware of giving students approximately equal opportunity to interact in the lesson. Chinese English teacher should assist foreign English speakers to balance this interaction. 	<p>Main lesson (60 minutes):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main lessons are delivered by several specialised foreign English speakers 2. I, as the Chinese English teacher, support the main lesson when necessary 3. May let more able students host the main lesson in turn to play the role of Chinese English teacher
		<p>Plenary time (15–30 minutes):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chinese English teacher answers the students' questions regarding the main lesson to help students catch up with the parts that they do not fully understand 2. Still, give students time to socialise with one another if they want to 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students prefer not to write down what they have learnt in the lesson 2. The students prefer to ask the Chinese English teacher questions to clarify their understanding of the main lesson 	<p>Plenary time (15 minutes):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Chinese English teacher answers the students' questions regarding the main lesson to help students catch up with the parts they do not fully understand 2. Do not ask students to write down what they have learnt in the lesson
		<p>Post-lesson task:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning resources to support the understanding of the main lesson 2. Learning materials were only sent when necessary 	<p>Some students identified that post-lesson exploration helped them to understand more of the main lesson</p>	<p>Post-lesson task:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The same as RC3
		<p>Topics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The topics follow the principle of RC2 2. Continue exploring new topics 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students continued showing more interest in the following topics: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The topics that relate to their real life b. The spontaneous topics that are happening at the delivery time c. The topics that the native English teachers are specialised in 2. The students showed less interest in the following topics: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Old British musical band 	<p>Topics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Matching the foreign English teachers with their specialised topics 2. Following the findings of RC3 3. Continue exploring new topics

			<p>b. Politics</p> <p>c. The topics that the native English teacher had little knowledge of</p> <p>3. Despite being taught by the IES, the students showed neutral interest in the topic of John Lennon and Yoko Ono</p>	
Technology features	<p>Technologies to support synchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Main synchronous learning platform: First attempt: WizIQ If not working, then replaced by Skype</p>	<p>1. The connection to the WizIQ classroom still took a long time and not stable</p> <p>2. Skype should be used as the leading platform to deliver the EEC lesson</p> <p>3. Consider another back-up synchronous learning platform</p>	<p>Technologies to support synchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Leading synchronous learning platform: Skype</p> <p>2. Back-up synchronous learning platform: QQ group</p>	
	<p>Technologies to support asynchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Use Weebly to design a learning website for students to access the learning resources</p> <p>2. Continue using QQ (group) and email to support communication</p>	<p>1. Use QQ group to replace the self-designed website to send learning resources to the students</p> <p>2. WeChat may be used as a social media platform to extend the influence of the EEC course on students implicitly through teacher's personal interests and hobbies</p>	<p>Technologies to support asynchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Use the QQ group to replace the self-designed learning website to send students learning resources</p> <p>2. Continue using WeChat and email to support social media communication</p>	

The following chapter explores how the above listed interventions were implemented in research cycle 4 (RC4) and presents its findings.

12. Findings of Research Cycle 4

From the insights gained from RC3, Research Cycle 4 (RC4) further reformed certain features of the EEC course. This chapter discusses the context, process and findings of RC4.

12.1 Sampling strategies of RC4

Based on the same principle as RC3, the students in both the intervention and comparison groups were from Chongqing University. As the teacher who supported RC3 was assigned to study abroad for one year as a visiting scholar, another English teacher, Mrs Yu, kindly offered to support RC4. The EEC course was advertised in Mrs Yu's Year 2 groups, where students majored in subjects related to science and finance. Seven males and three females applied to join the EEC course. Yet, only four males and three females attended the EEC course regularly, with the others dropping off at the beginning of, or during, the course. When a student dropped off the EEC course, he or she was asked to explain the reason for exiting. One student said that he had to do lab experiments required by his university supervisor and that he had only been informed of this requirement after the start of the EEC course. The other student explained that he had to attend the communist training course, which was launched after the EEC course. As a result, together with Atlantis, eight students participated in the EEC course as the intervention group (Table 12.1).

Atlantis continued the EEC course as a student for the reasons that he was continuously interested in attending the course, which incidentally required a teaching assistant to organise the intervention group to attend lessons, distribute learning materials and arrange pre-tests, post-tests and interviews. Atlantis' assistance was therefore extremely helpful in enabling me, the course designer, course organiser, as well as the Chinese English teacher, to focus on the course design and lesson delivery. There is undoubtedly a need for the EEC course to allocate course assistants to do administration in order to make the lessons run smoothly and ease the teachers' workload. However, it is necessary to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of having Atlantis in three research cycles. The disadvantage of having a student attending the EEC course for more than one research cycle was that it could change the dynamics of the EEC lessons because of the familiarity of the student with the course and therefore introducing a potential bias in the findings. However, there were three arguments. First, the topics, teachers and ways to deliver the EEC course changed with every research cycle. Therefore, the familiarity of Atlantis with the course was limited. Second, the participants of the EEC course all attended on a voluntary basis, and not based on their competence in English. Therefore, the

intervention group would be a mixed-ability group regardless of whether Atlantis attended the EEC course or not. For instant, Kang, a new student in RC4, was much more active than the other new students, as he had been to Australia for a few months. In fact, in the group discussion in real life, there were always people who were more active than others. The activeness of Atlantis, in fact, could provoke the other students to develop strategies to let their voices be heard. On the other hand, Atlantis was also given an opportunity to develop his awareness of caring about other group members and develop the strategies of using the turn-taking rule and engaging with other participants as part of leadership skills. If Atlantis had not attended the EEC course in RC3 and RC4, the Chinese English teacher would have played a more active role if the class were not sufficiently active. Therefore, the impact of Atlantis attending the EEC course on the findings of this study was limited. In contrast, because Atlantis attended the EEC course for more than one research cycle, he could compare the different features of the EEC course in different research cycles. In other words, Atlantis' perception could provide a view to compare the changes in the course features in different research cycles. Therefore, his attendance in RC4 was regarded as providing continuous perceptions of the learner regarding the development of the EEC course, which was valuable to its development.

Table 12.1: The profile of the intervention-group students in RC4

Student number	Participants	Gender	University	Major	Year group
1	Mya	Female	Chongqing University	Finance	2
2	Kaimobile	Male	Chongqing University	Mechanics and Electricity Engineering	2
3	Kang	Male	Chongqing University	Biomedicine Engineering	2
4	Hang	Male	Chongqing University	Construction Engineering	2
5	Shan	Female	Chongqing University	Biomedicine Engineering	2
6	Song	Male	Chongqing University	Information and Computer Technology	2
7	Tiny	Female	Chongqing University	Statistics	2
8	Atlantis	Male	Southwestern University of Finance and Economics	E-commerce	3

The comparison-group students in RC4 came from the rest of the students in Mrs Yu's two English groups. In this research cycle, the presentation was a required assessment according to the university English assessment plan. In other words, every student had to do the presentation. However, the PQA test was conducted in small groups instead of individually because of the change in assessment requirements at Chongqing University. At my request, Mrs Yu agreed to

add Q&A time after the group presentation. However, it was possible that this approach to tests would produce a few problems, such as some students not having a chance to answer questions, and students who were more competent or confident answering more questions than the less competent or confident ones. Mrs Yu was made aware of these potential problems, and she tried to encourage more students to answer questions. Despite her efforts, it was found that only seven students in the comparison group interacted in the Q&A section in both pre-tests and post-tests. The rest of the students either participated in one of the pre-tests and post-tests, or not at all. As a result, the pre-tests or post-tests of these seven students (Table 12.2) were used for comparison with the intervention group. This had to be taken into consideration during the analysis, as it was possible that these students represented a higher-level performance than the comparison group.

Fortunately, there was only one student less than there was in the intervention group. Otherwise, it could have failed regarding the data collection from the comparison group. This raised an alarm that the sampling strategies for the comparison group should also consider hidden issues that could obstruct the collection of data from the comparison group.

Table 12.2: The profile of the comparison-group students in RC4

Student number	Participants	Gender	University	Major	Year group
1	Ben	Male	Chongqing University	Construction Engineering	2
2	Charlie	Male	Chongqing University	Finance	2
3	Katie	Female	Chongqing University	Drug Engineering	2
4	Tim	Male	Chongqing University	Biomedicine Engineering	2
5	Henry	Male	Chongqing University	Construction Engineering	2
6	Jack	Male	Chongqing University	Finance	2
7	Anna	Female	Chongqing University	Mechanics and Electricity Engineering	2

12.2 The delivery of the EEC course in RC4

Provision of the EEC course was similar to RC3. However, there were a few changes. First, there was a further reduction in the time of each lesson from 2 hours to 1 hour, 45 minutes. Second, more IES, instead of one primary IES, were invited to deliver the main lessons in RC3. The choice of IES was based on their specialised areas or experience. For instance, a music teacher was invited to deliver the topic of music, and an on-campus student at Cambridge University was invited to lead the discussion on student life in Cambridge. Although there was

no requirement to create a PowerPoint for the lesson, a simple lesson plan was either discussed by the course designer and the IES or proposed by the designer and adapted by the IES. Similar to RC3, I acted as facilitator to support the IES to ensure the lesson ran smoothly and to create a bridge between them and the students.

12.3 Data-collection process of RC4

The data-collection process of RC4 was similar to RC3. To collect writing tests, Mrs Yu conducted all the writing tests in her lessons as part of their writing assessment. The pre-tests were taken before the EEC course at the end of September, and the post-tests were taken after the EEC course the following January.

Videos were taken to record the process of the PQA test in Mrs Yu's lessons. The videos were converted to audio files so the examiners would not make judgements based on students' appearance and would not identify pre-tests and post-tests from students' clothing (i.e. autumn or winter clothing). Both pre- and post-tests were renamed using numbers, mixed up and marked by the examiners after the course. The assessment criteria and coding framework for sociocultural competence were further developed and used in the form discussed in Section 8.7. The same external examiners as in RC3 marked the tests in RC4 to maintain the same marking standards.

The process of collecting questionnaires and interview data was similar to that used in RC3. However, the questionnaire (Appendices VII and VIII) and interview questions (Appendix XII) were further developed to collect more detailed data to analyse students' perceptions of how the EEC course impacted their communicative competence. The change was mainly in the questions regarding sub-communicative competencies, especially interactional and sociocultural competence.

12.4 Findings of Research Question 1

RQ1: *Does the EEC course improve learners' linguistic, interactional and sociocultural communicative competence in English, in comparison with learners undertaking the usual university course in English? If so, in what ways?*

Table 12.3 indicates the assessment criteria contributing to the overall assessment of linguistic, interactional and sociocultural competence. With the writing test data being collected in both groups in RC4, more elements in the writing tests were added to assess students' linguistic and

sociocultural competence. As the writing test did not involve significant interactional competence in the task given to the students, the consideration of assessing interactional competence was the same as in RC3.

Table 12.3: Assessment criteria for linguistic, interactional and sociocultural competence

		Linguistic competence	Interactional competence	Sociocultural competence
IELTS general writing test	Task achievement			√
	Fluency and coherence	√		
	Lexical resource	√		
	Grammatical range and accuracy	√		
Presentation (P) with a focus on Q&A (QA)	Fluency and coherence	√(P)	√(QA)	
	Lexical resource	√(P)	√(QA)	
	Grammatical range and accuracy	√(both)		
	Pronunciation	√(P)	√(QA)	
	Interactional competence		√(QA)	
	Sociocultural competence			√(both)

12.4.1 IELTS general writing test

Table 12.4 shows the overall mean scores of the pre-test of the intervention and comparison groups in the IELTS general writing test in RC4, as well as those of each sub-category.

Table 12.4: Comparison of the pre-test mean scores between the intervention group (IG) and the comparison group (CG) in the writing test

		Mean	Std. Deviation	p-value
Sociocultural competence	IG	4.0	1.309	0.481
	CG	3.6	1.134	
Fluency and coherence	IG	5.0	1.254	0.552
	CG	4.6	1.069	
Lexical resource	IG	5.1	1.050	0.379
	CG	4.5	1.080	
Grammatical range and accuracy	IG	4.9	0.863	0.195
	CG	4.4	0.838	
Overall	IG	4.8	1.079	
	CG	4.3	0.924	

It can be seen that, similar to RC3, the intervention group had slightly higher mean scores than the comparison group in each sub-category and overall mean score in the writing test. However,

none of the differences in the pre-tests were significant. With lower mean scores, the comparison group could achieve more progress than the intervention group. Table 12.5 compares the progress between the intervention group and the comparison group in the pre and post writing tests.

Table 12.5: Comparison of the progress between the intervention group (IG, n=8) and the comparison group (CG, n=7) in the pre and post writing tests

		Mean	S.D.	p-value
Sociocultural competence	IG	1.06	1.084	0.022
	CG	-0.143	0.556	
Fluency and coherence	IG	0.63	0.518	0.555
	CG	-0.14	1.600	
Lexical resource	IG	0.375	0.916	0.813
	CG	0.071	1.272	
Grammatical range and accuracy	IG	0.50	0.378	0.193
	CG	-0.21	1.254	
Overall	IG	0.63	0.586	0.181
	CG	-0.107	1.074	

It can be seen that the intervention group made positive progress, not only in the overall writing test but also in all the sub-categories. In contrast, the comparison group made negative progress overall and also in the sub-categories of task achievement, fluency and coherence and grammatical range and accuracy. The only slight progress that the comparison group made was in lexical resource (mean 0.071, sd=1.272). However, the Mann-Whitney test shows that there was no significant difference in the progress made between the two groups, except sociocultural competence (mean 1.06, -0.143, p=0.022).

12.4.2 Findings of presentation with a focus on Q&A test

Table 12.6 compares the mean scores of the intervention group and the comparison group in the pre-test of the PQA (presentation with a focus on Q&A test). Although the whole group of students attended the presentation test, only seven students participated in the Q&A section in both pre-tests and post-tests. This indicated a major problem regarding group presentation and Q&A. Although attempts were made to ensure that every student had an opportunity to answer the questions, it was not practical to engage all of the students if some were not willing to speak out. Active students tended to answer more than the less confident students. Therefore, the analysis could only use the data from the seven students for the comparison group.

It can be seen that, unlike in RC3, the overall mean score in the presentation test of the intervention group was slightly lower than that of the comparison group, which also applied to all sub-categories of the pre-test in the presentation. In the Q&A test, the overall mean scores of the intervention group were slightly higher than in the comparison group. However, the mean scores of fluency and coherence of the intervention group and interactional competence were slightly lower than in the comparison group. Nevertheless, none of these differences was significant between both groups. Therefore, pre-test scores were comparable for both groups.

Table 12.6: Comparison of pre-test mean scores between the intervention group (IG) and the comparison group (CG) in the presentation with a focus on Q&A test

Pre-test							
	Group	Presentation			Q&A		
		Mean	Std. Deviation	p-value	Mean	Std. Deviation	p-value
Fluency and coherence	IG	5.313	1.100	0.379	4.250	1.336	0.557
	CG	5.714	0.699		4.286	0.567	
Lexical resource	IG	5.125	0.791	0.812	4.750	1.165	0.677
	CG	5.214	0.756		4.429	0.607	
Grammatical range and accuracy	IG	5.438	0.623	0.953	5.000	0.926	0.250
	CG	5.500	0.913		4.500	0.408	
Pronunciation	IG	5.250	0.655	0.709	5.000	1.389	1.000
	CG	5.357	0.627		5.000	0.866	
Interactional competence	IG				4.375	1.576	0.598
	CG				4.429	0.607	
Sociocultural competence	IG	5.125	0.916	0.288	4.875	1.408	0.767
	CG	5.429	0.607		4.786	0.859	
Overall	IG	5.250	0.756	0.486	4.709	1.243	0.816
	CG	5.443	0.670		4.570	0.570	

Table 12.7: Comparison of progress in the presentation between the intervention and comparison groups

Presentation		Intervention group	Comparison group	p-value
Fluency and coherence	Mean	0.875	0.000	0.030
	S.D.	0.744	0.500	
Lexical resource	Mean	0.625	0.429	0.332
	S.D.	0.443	0.535	
Grammatical range and accuracy	Mean	0.313	0.429	0.332
	S.D.	0.458	0.673	
Pronunciation	Mean	0.438	0.143	0.241
	S.D.	0.417	0.748	
Sociocultural competence	Mean	0.500	0.463	0.115
	S.D.	0.000	0.646	
Overall	Mean	0.550	0.200	0.242
	S.D.	0.288	0.432	

Table 12.8: Comparison of progress in the Q&A between the intervention and comparison groups

Q&A		Intervention group	Comparison group	p-value
Fluency and coherence	Mean	1.188	0.000	0.005
	S.D.	0.594	0.577	
Lexical resource	Mean	0.750	-0.071	0.002
	S.D.	0.267	0.345	
Grammatical range and accuracy	Mean	0.188	0.071	0.763
	S.D.	0.651	0.673	
Pronunciation	Mean	0.375	-0.357	0.042
	S.D.	0.518	0.802	
Interactional competence	Mean	1.438	-0.714	0.005
	S.D.	0.623	0.838	
Sociocultural competence	Mean	0.688	-0.571	0.026
	S.D.	0.923	0.932	
Overall	Mean	0.791	-0.17	0.004
	S.D.	0.336	0.497	

Tables 12.7 and 12.8 show the mean progress of both groups. In the presentation test, the intervention group made positive overall progress, including all sub-categories. Although the comparison group also made positive progress overall and in most sub-categories, it did not show progress in fluency and coherence and sociocultural competence. Nevertheless, the

differences between the two groups were not significant, except the sub-category of fluency and coherence ($p=0.030$).

However, in the Q&A test, while the intervention group continued to make positive progress in all sub-categories in the Q&A, the comparison group made negative progress in most sub-categories, except slight positive progress in grammatical range and accuracy, and no progress in fluency and coherence. Such differences between the two groups were significant in overall progress ($p=0.004$) and in the majority of sub-categories, except grammatical range and accuracy.

12.4.3 Evaluation of the progress in three sub-communicative competencies in RC4

This section combines both the writing test and the PQA test to evaluate the impact of the EEC course on the intervention group's linguistic, interactional and sociocultural competence, based on the categories indicated in Table 12.3.

Table 12.9 shows that after attending the EEC course, the intervention group made significant progress in sociocultural competence ($p=0.004$) and interactional competence ($p=0.003$). However, the intervention group did not make significant progress in linguistic competence ($p=0.064$).

Regarding the components of sociocultural competence, the intervention group made significant progress in the writing test in sociocultural competence ($p=0.022$) and in the Q&A test in sociocultural competence ($p=0.026$), but not in the presentation ($p=0.115$). On the other hand, all of the components of interactional competence in the Q&A test demonstrated significant progress. In contrast, none of the components of linguistic competence in the writing, presentation and Q&A tests presented significant progress, except fluency and coherence ($p=0.030$) in the presentation test.

Overall, the findings suggest that the EEC course had a significantly positive impact on learners' interactional and sociocultural competence, but not on their linguistic competence. How the students in the intervention group perceived the role of the EEC course in their progress in the three sub-communicative competencies is further explored in the next section through questionnaire and interviews.

Table 12.9: Comparison of progress of the intervention group (IG) and the comparison group (CG) in both the writing test and the presentation with a focus on Q&A test in RC4 (SC: sociocultural competence; FC: fluency and coherence; LR: lexical resource; GA: grammatical range and accuracy; PR: pronunciation)

Test	Sub-competence	Linguistic competence		Interactional competence		Sociocultural competence	
		IG	CG	IG	CG	IG	CG
IELTS writing test	SC					1.06	-0.143
						p=0.022	
	FC	0.63	-0.14				
		p=0.555					
	LR	0.38	0.071				
		p=0.813					
GA	0.50	-0.21					
	p=0.193						
Presentation	FC	0.88	0.00				
		p=0.030					
	LR	0.63	0.43				
		p=0.332					
	GA	0.31	0.43				
		p=0.332					
PR	0.44	0.14					
	p=0.241						
SC					0.50	0.00	
					p=0.115		
Q&A	FC			1.19	0.00		
				p=0.005			
	LR			0.75	-0.07		
				p=0.002			
	GA	0.19	0.07				
		p=0.763					
PR			0.38	-0.36			
			p=0.042				
IA			1.44	-0.71			
			p=0.005				
SC					0.69	-0.57	
					p=0.026		
Mean progress		0.49	0.10	0.94	-0.13	0.75	-0.24
Standard deviation		0.235	0.615	0.320	0.479	0.496	0.418
Sig. (2-tailed)		p=0.064		p=0.003		p=0.004	

12.5 Findings of Research Question 2

RQ2: *How do learners perceive the course features of the EEC course, which influence their progress in linguistic, interactional and sociocultural communicative competence in English?*

This section explores similar issues to those seen in RC3. However, it also examines students' understanding of the concept of communicative competence. Again, the scale of the questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = Not at all to 5 = To a very great extent.

12.5.1 Students' perceptions of the influence of the EEC course on their communicative competence in English

The students were asked about their perceptions of how the EEC course helped them to improve their linguistic, interactional and sociocultural competence. The findings were compared to those of RQ1. Table 12.10 shows that overall the students perceived that the EEC course had the most impact on their sociocultural competence, followed by interactional competence, and the least was in linguistic competence. This echoed the findings of RQ1, with a slight difference: there the test results showed that the highest progress was in interactional competence, followed by sociocultural competence and linguistic competence.

Table 12.10: The extent to which students agreed that the EEC course helped them to improve their three communicative competencies

	Mean	S.D.
Linguistic competence	3.38	0.916
Interactional competence	3.52	0.772
Sociocultural competence	4.00	0.926

- **Linguistic competence**

Similar to RC3, linguistic competence was measured only by grammatical range and accuracy in the questionnaire. The students did not perceive that the EEC course had helped them to improve their ability to express themselves linguistically correctly. This was in line with the findings of RQ1, which showed that there was no significant impact of the EEC course on students' linguistic competence, including its sub-category of grammatical range and accuracy (Table 12.9).

When asked whether there was any need for the EEC course to teach grammar, one student commented:

There is no need to teach grammar (in the EEC course). All grammar knowledge has been taught by the senior high school (aged 16–18). The university English courses also taught grammar. (Kang)

Another added:

The only useful place for grammar is for writing. For speaking, as long as people understand what you want to say, it is sufficient. (Song)

As the course designer, I acknowledge that developing learners' grammatical correctness was not a focus of the EEC course in RC1 to RC4. Yet, as a doctorate student studying overseas, I notice my own weakness in grammatical range and accuracy and the need to develop it. However, this requires extension of the EEC course, more effort from students after lessons, and an increase in the cost of the EEC course. Apart from inviting native English teachers to give feedback on students' writing, another way to develop learners' linguistic competence is to develop an asynchronous learning platform, such as a mobile app, as well as the website, to support the synchronous learning lessons. To distinguish its functions from many other existing linguistic apps, this asynchronous learning app and website should be highly intellectual and individualised. The functions could include identifying students' grammar or vocabulary mistakes, producing a bank of students' grammar or vocabulary mistakes and classifying the mistakes, reminding students when similar problems occur again, offering students linguistic learning resources automatically according to the mistakes they have made, and so on. It is very challenging to achieve the above functions, which might also require considerable investment. Yet, it could help a significant number of students rather than a small group.

- **Interactional communicative competence**

Table 12.11 shows the questions regarding interactional competence. The students perceived that the EEC course helped them most in their ability to organise speaking sensibly in order to convey ideas clearly to others and the ability to organise their writing sensibly to convey their ideas clearly to readers. The students were also more confident in using alternative ways to express themselves fluently than in RC3. Close to being able to express themselves, students still perceived the ability to ask appropriate questions when needing to clarify the interlocutor's meanings, and the ability to ask the interlocutor questions clearly, as the next highest abilities.

The students were more positive about their ability to answer the interlocutor’s questions clearly than in RC3. However, similar to RC3, they still perceived their ability to answer the interlocutor’s questions clearly, and to understand the interlocutor’s true intentions or the implications behind the words, as two of the lowest among them all. This suggests that the EEC course still needs to adopt new strategies to develop students’ ability to react to the interlocutors more confidently.

Table 12.11: The extent to which students agreed that the EEC course helped them to improve their interactional competence

		Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
Understand the interlocutor’s messages	Be able to understand the interlocutor’s true intentions or the implications behind the words.	3.25	0.313	2	4
Express oneself	Be able to organise my speaking sensibly in order to convey my ideas clearly to the others.	3.75	0.164	3	4
	Be able to organise my writing sensibly in order to convey my ideas clearly to the readers.	3.63	0.183	3	4
	Be able to ask the interlocutor questions clearly.	3.50	0.535	3	4
Respond to the interlocutor	Be able to answer the interlocutor’s questions clearly.	3.38	1.061	2	5
Use alternative communicative strategies	Be able to ask appropriate questions when I need to clarify the interlocutor’s meanings.	3.63	0.263	2	4
	Be able to use alternative ways to express myself fluently.	3.50	0.327	2	4

The students commented on the reasons why they felt they were not improving much in terms of understanding the real meaning of the interlocutor:

There was not much teaching about phrases such as “let the cat out of the bag”. I felt that I would not be able to understand them in a native English environment. (Hang)

I could understand the meaning of the interlocutor. But the course is not deep enough. It would be good to discuss or debate a topic. But this might be very difficult. (Atlantis)

The above responses were from students who disagreed with the statement. They show that the

students were expecting the EEC course to teach them some phrases or jokes, which native English speakers often use. There was no emphasis on the EEC course teaching students phrases in an explicit way in RC4. However, adding this element in future courses for students to take away every lesson was a consideration for the course. Yet, this should still be delivered in a natural way, which means not teaching a lesson specifically for phrases or vocabulary.

The second student mentioned the depth of the lesson and suggested there should be more discussion about a topic or even debate, which was an excellent suggestion. It shows that the students, particularly those with a higher English level, expected more challenges to enable them to reach a higher level of communication. This idea is supported, as it is connected to the importance in real life of being able to defend oneself without being aggressive. For instance, university students need to justify their thesis to go through a viva; leaders need to make their opinions heard, understood and supported; and employers need to protect their rights at work. This is one of the weakest areas of communicative competence for many Chinese students because the Chinese culture does not encourage arguments but rather obeying leaders and seniors. However, it is important in western culture and increasingly crucial in an internationalised Chinese culture. Further strategies should be taken to develop this ability, such as debating a topic or role play. The choice of engaging topics to discuss or debate requires the course designer's sharp observation of real life.

- **Sociocultural communicative competence**

The measurement of sociocultural competence in RC4 was based on the theory of Matsumoto and Hwang (2013), emotional regulation, openness, flexibility and critical thinking. The students perceived that the EEC course had more impact on their sociocultural competence in order of openness, critical thinking, emotional regulation and flexibility. In more detail, Table 12.12 shows that the students perceived the highest elements of sociocultural competence to be the ability to appreciate different cultures and to welcome new experiences and thoughts. The students perceived that the EEC course helped them be to more open to different cultures and thoughts. The next highest was the ability to think in more critical ways, followed by the ability to deal with problems with a more positive attitude and the ability to communicate with others with a sensitive and appropriate manner and language. Although it was challenging to help students regulate their emotions through a short course, it seems possible to at least help the students to have a more positive attitude to deal with difficulties and conflicts. The least progress that the students perceived they had made was in the ability to transfer new thoughts and ideas into action.

Table 12.12: The extent to which students agreed that the EEC course helped them to improve their sociocultural competence in detail

		Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
Emotional regulation	Be able to communicate with others with a sensitive and appropriate manner and language.	3.63	0.460	2	5
	Be able to deal with problems with a more positive attitude.	3.75	0.313	3	5
Openness	Be able to appreciate different cultures more.	4.50	0.189	4	5
	Be able to welcome new experiences and thoughts.	4.25	0.250	3	5
Flexibility	Be able to transfer new thoughts and ideas to my own actions.	3.50	0.267	3	5
Critical thinking	Be able to think in a more critical ways.	3.75	0.412	2	5

One of the more interesting discoveries was that, although the students perceived that they embraced more openness through the EEC course, only three out of eight students stated that they were able to transfer new thoughts and ideas into action. A student who “strongly agreed” commented:

I went trekking in the snowy mountains in the summer. I was inspired by the lessons of the EEC course, where a teacher showed us how to tie the knot for climbing and another talked about his travels around the world. I was also inspired by your photos on WeChat to climb mountains. Thank you! (Atlantis)

A student who was rated as having a neutral opinion said:

I would like to do more outdoor activities. But the pressure of my study is too high. I have not managed to do it at the moment, but I may do in future. (Kaimobile)

It seems that the EEC course had more influence on some students than on others, even though they were willing to transfer those new thoughts and ideas into action. Further strategies need to be adopted to inspire and encourage students to transfer their new thoughts into action. As mentioned by the first student, who was inspired by the photos I shared on WeChat, the EEC course could extend its impact from the lessons to more widely accessed social media. The teachers could play an approachable role on social media to present a positive life attitude and

experience to inspire the students.

12.5.2 Students' perceptions of their three highest achievements on the EEC course

Overall, the students strongly enjoyed the EEC course (mean rating 4.25; sd=0.886). To triangulate the findings in section 12.5.1, students were also asked to state their three highest achievements from taking the EEC course.

Table 12.13: Students' perceptions of their three highest achievements from the EEC course

Ranking	Achievements	Related communicative competence	Number of students (N=8)
1	Learnt more about different cultures and able to appreciate other cultures.	Sociocultural competence	7
1	Improved verbal communicative competence.	Interactional competence	7
2	Improved the ability to respond simultaneously to the interlocutors in real time.	Interactional competence	4
3	Has impact on real life.	Sociocultural competence	2

Seven out of eight students perceived that they had learnt more about different cultures and been able to appreciate others' cultures (Table 12.13). This was in line with the finding about students' perceptions of their progress in the openness of sociocultural communicative competence. The students commented that this achievement was based on two factors. The first factor was the impact of specialised invited English speakers (IES), and the second was the impact of discussion of the topics.

The EEC course helped me to learn the western ways of thinking. Although it was not like living abroad to gain first-hand knowledge, I could feel it through talking to them in the lesson. (Kang)

I have gained more knowledge of overseas culture. I could see the western culture in more depth. (Atlantis)

I used to only chat with my friends about gossip, but now I have more topics to talk about. (Tiny)

Another top achievement was verbal interactional competence. Seven out of eight students said in the interview that they were more capable of expressing themselves. However, only four students perceived that they had improved their ability to respond spontaneously to the interlocutors, which supports the findings about progress in interactional competence. The students commented:

I am more able to express myself now. (KaiMobile)

The EEC course has helped me to have more courage to talk to others. And I could respond more spontaneously. (Mya)

The EEC course has helped me to overcome the fear of speaking out. And now I actually enjoy talking to a group of people in English. (Atlantis)

Apart from the above two achievements, three out of eight students stated that the EEC course had a positive impact on their daily life.

The EEC course has really helped me to be able to answer questions spontaneously. I applied for a Masters course at a university in Macao. The interview required me to respond to questions in English. I found myself more confident in answering questions in English, as we all had to answer a lot of questions in the EEC course. (Mya)

I was really inspired by the lesson when a Cambridge University student talked about climbing, and the lesson about travelling around the world. I am also inspired by your (Miss Du) photo stories on WeChat when you were travelling to the Everest Camp and SiGuLiang Mountain. I have booked trekking in a snow mountain. I am really looking forward to it. (Atlantis)

It seems that the impact was through not only synchronous learning lessons but also asynchronous social media. The student also demonstrated a vague awareness of an impact on daily life.

I could feel that the EEC course has an impact on my daily life. However, I could not tell how exactly it was affecting me. (Kaimobile)

One student also said that the EEC course had no impact on her daily life.

The EEC course was about foreign cultures. It does not apply to our everyday life in China because Chinese culture is very different from western culture. (Tiny)

It can be seen that the EEC course had more impact on some students’ daily life than on others. This is in line with the findings about the flexibility of the students in sociocultural competence. Overall, the students’ perceptions of the top three top achievements through the EEC course supported the findings of RQ1 and Section 12.5.1. However, what are the distinguishing features of the EEC course that contribute to the above three achievements? The next section discusses students’ perceptions of the distinguishing features of the EEC course.

12.5.3 Students’ perceptions of the difference between the EEC course and the other English courses they had attended

In the interview, the students were asked about their perceptions of the three main differences between the EEC course and the other English courses they had attended. They pointed out three main features, as shown in Table 12.14.

Table 12.14: The difference between the EEC course and the other English courses that the students had attended

Ranking	The difference between the EEC course and the other English courses that they had attended	Number of students (N=8)
1	The foreign teachers and the topics	6
1	The interaction	6
3	The aim of the course	3

- The difference made by the foreign teachers and the topics**

Seven out of eight students felt that the involvement of the IES in their delivery of topics made the difference between the EEC course and the other English courses.

I think the most significant difference was the foreign teachers being invited to teach the EEC course. They were very experienced and knowledgeable on the topics they were talking about. We could hardly see them in China and not even have them to teach us. (Kang)

I was very impressed with how knowledgeable the music teacher was. He played the saxophone for us too in the lesson. That was very cool. (Kaimobile)

The student teacher from Cambridge University showed us how to tie a rope for rock climbing. I have never done it before. It was really fascinating to me, which made me want to do more outdoor climbing too. (Atlantis)

The students also compared the depth of discussions favourably to their foreign English teachers at the university:

The topics of our [university] speaking lessons were mostly about food, festivals, basic culture and histories. There were similar topics to the EEC course, but they were taught [in the university course] in a more restricted and shallower way. For instance, we might be asked a question to answer, but there was not much follow-up discussion. (Mya)

We had one or two fixed foreign teachers in an academic year. So, for some topics, they would not be able to talk about it in as much depth as the EEC course foreign teachers. (Kang)

Nonetheless, the students also mentioned the positive aspects of the university's foreign teachers.

It was good to be able to see the foreign teachers face to face. In the EEC course, we could hardly see the face of the foreign teachers. But when we did see them, for example, when the student teacher from Cambridge University switched on his webcam, I found it was so engaging and exciting. (Kaimobile)

Sometimes we were asked by the university foreign English teachers to discuss in a small group. But it was hard to do so in the EEC lessons. (Hang)

The students' perceptions showed that the topics taught by the university foreign teachers were more limited and shallower than those of the EEC course. The individualised experience and knowledge of EEC invited English speakers (IES) gave students a more diverse and deeper understanding of the different cultures. However, the students also expressed their preference for being able to see the foreign teachers face-to-face. Despite the technical problem when using

a webcam in the EEC lessons, the findings suggest that the EEC course should continue looking at the possibility of enabling students to see the teachers in the synchronous lessons, as this would give students more visual contact with the teachers. More perceptions of the students on different IES teaching the EEC course are discussed in Section 12.5.4 c.

- **The difference between interactions**

Six out of eight students perceived the second difference as the EEC course being more interactive and placing more emphasis on interactive and spontaneous communication.

Even in the university speaking lessons, we were not talking too much. It was mostly the foreign teachers talking about the topics. Although we were asked to answer a few questions, we were given a few minutes to prepare the replies. In real life, there was no time for us to prepare the replies. (Mya)

The EEC course encouraged us to ask questions. But we hardly asked the university foreign teachers questions in the lessons. (Kaimobile)

The above comments showed that the students perceived the university speaking lessons to be more about one-way talking or answering without real two-way communication. Moreover, the students also mentioned the factors that encouraged them to be more engaged in the EEC course, including “not feeling embarrassed to make mistakes in front of others” and tolerance of diverse opinions.

The EEC course gave us a very inclusive and tolerant atmosphere. There was no restriction on the discussions. You might say something out of the blue, but the teachers on the EEC course would listen to you and respect your opinions. They might disagree with you, but they expressed their views in a way that made you feel you were equal to them and were respected. You would be less likely to feel such an atmosphere in the university English lessons. (Atlantis)

The comments revealed how the EEC course created a relaxed, inclusive and tolerant atmosphere, which the students perceived as the factor that encouraged them to be more interactive in lessons. In fact, it was intended through the EEC course to produce such a learning environment. I believe that only if students are not afraid to make mistakes will they feel free to explore the world and themselves and become more confident and positive individuals, who will not give up because of the fear of failure.

I also noticed that the students were comfortable talking in the EEC course but not in the university speaking lessons. This should be regarded not only as the difference between the two courses but also as a barrier that the EEC course should help students to overcome. As an EFL speaker, I also noticed a similar barrier in the UK. I was very comfortable and active expressing my opinions in a small community research group of the EdD course, which I had attended since I joined the course. However, it still took me a few months before I could speak out in my maths department meetings when I joined a new school. Why was I behaving so differently in a different environment? One answer was that I might have been wanting to observe the norm of the new department before expressing my opinions. However, another new teacher from Canada was able to express his ideas straight away in the department meeting when he first arrived. This might show that it was not only a result of the different strategies or styles of communication, but perhaps more about my own communication barrier, coming from a more conservative Chinese culture. My own experience has taught me that when students first join the EEC course, they might be shy and unable to speak out straight away. Asking them questions could help them to open up gradually. However, once students are comfortable talking in the EEC lessons, they should be challenged to break down the communication barriers in their real life, and this experience should be shared and celebrated in the EEC lessons.

Apart from foreign teachers, topics and interactions, the students also mentioned class size as another factor that might affect interaction.

The class size of the EEC course was smaller. So you could not hide in the lesson and not talk. But the class size of the university English speaking lessons was normally over twenty. There would be fewer opportunities for us to speak in a larger class size. (Hang)

It is true that a smaller class size allows teachers to pay more attention to each learner, which might boost students' progress in learning. In fact, the smaller class size of the EEC course was restricted by the Internet speed capacity. The most stable synchronous learning was mostly undertaken when there were only seven or eight participants, including teachers. The students also suggested that a class size of five to six students could give them the most efficient opportunity to interact with others. On the other hand, they also felt that if the class size were too small, for instance, fewer than five students, they would feel increasing pressure, as the teachers would call on them more often in the lessons, and there would be fewer voices to enrich their thinking. If the EEC course were able to offer a larger class size, such as 20 to 30 students, it should be supported by group chat rooms to maximise the opportunities for each student to

speak and interact with others in a lesson.

- **The aim of the courses**

The third difference that the students identified was the different objectives of the courses.

The EEC course was driven by students' interests in real life, but the university English course and many other commercial English courses, such as IELTS courses, were more driven by exams. (Mya)

After I went abroad to study for a year in Finland, I realised how valuable the EEC course was. I have applied a lot of what I have learnt in the EEC course to make friends and to contribute to the class discussion. When many Chinese students were shy speaking in lessons, I was the one talking loudly about my opinions. (Atlantis)

The EEC course focused more on our practical ability in communication, but the university English lessons were mostly talking about vocabularies, grammar, outdated news, American literature, or some Chinese way of understanding western cultures. (Kang)

The students identified that the EEC course was based more on students' interests and needs in real life. In contrast, the university English courses and most commercial English courses were aimed more at linguistic competence and English exams. Although some English courses were focused on speaking English, most focused on pronunciation and basic conversation. Few, if any, English courses were aimed at cultivating students' thoughts and competence to engage actively with a different culture in-depth. Designing a course to achieve such an aim requires the course designer to understand both the home culture of the students and the target culture of the language, not only theoretically but also practically. I would admit that after 14 years of living in the UK, I am still improving my communicative competence. I have also realised that if I had been taught some of the principles of communication at school or university, I would have made far fewer mistakes in later life. I am also more aware that the communicative competence that the EEC course was aiming for in the four research cycles was mostly limited to the needs of a student. The EEC course could extend its length and aim to reach much wider areas that students would need in their future life, such as communicative competence in the workplace and family life, which are the two key areas affecting people's happiness in their life. The aforementioned three main differences between the EEC course and the university English

lessons further demonstrate that the EEC course had a perceived impact on students' sociocultural competence through discussion with specialised IES, enriched topics and more in-depth discussions; and on interactive competence through developing meaningful spontaneous conversations. The interests and real-life needs of the students were the driving force behind the EEC course, which underpinned the whole course design. The next section investigates more details of the course design features.

12.5.4 Students' understanding of communicative competence

RC4 also investigated students' perceptions of communicative competence. The students were asked to write a sentence describing their understanding of communicative competence in English. The students wrote:

Be able to use English to express oneself and be understood by others. To people like me who are not good at English, it would be good enough just to let others understand what I wanted to express. (Mya)

Be able to understand the interlocutor's meaning and respond with a straightforward and appropriate reply. (Hang)

English communicative competence is . . . a process of overcoming the fear caused by exam-based education in the past years and the ability to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. (Atlantis)

From students' definitions of communicative competence in English, the majority of students mentioned the ability to express themselves "accurately and efficiently" and to understand others. Some students also mentioned overcoming their fear, being persuasive, making others want to communicate with them and being able to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. What the students understood of communicative competence described a few aspects of the concept.

Although there were no right or wrong answers, the students who perceived themselves as having lower English communicative competence tended to have lower expectations of what they could achieve. The concept of communicative competence is not fixed but varies according to the ability and expectation of individuals. The EEC course could help students to improve their communicative competence to achieve the following goals:

Goal 1: Overcoming fear and being able to express oneself to others, especially people from different cultural backgrounds.

Goal 2: Being more confident in understanding others and appreciating others' cultures, and being able to interact with individual interlocutors appropriately.

Goal 3: Being able to defend one's opinions without being offensive or emotional.

Goal 4: Being able to lead or participate in communication with a variety of group sizes and people with different cultural backgrounds.

Goal 5: Being able to communicate and develop sustainable positive relationships with others.

Goal 6: Being able to communicate, especially at difficult times, and being a strong, positive and happy person.

Of course, the EEC course cannot help all individuals achieve all of the above six goals in a short time. However, it could focus on certain goals when the needs of the communicative competence are identified. Ultimately, the aim of the course is to help learners become happier and more positive communicators. Therefore, it needs to be able to help with not only how students improve their English language and their ability to communicate, but also the way that they view the world, including themselves and others, so that they can communicate more competently and build positive relationships with others.

12.5.5 Students' perceptions of the structure of the EEC course

This section is divided into four sub-sections:

- Students' perceptions of the preparation and review of the EEC lessons.
- Students' perceptions of the first 30 minutes of the EEC lesson.
- Students' perceptions of the 60-minute EEC lesson.
- Students' perceptions of the final 15-minute plenary of the EEC lesson.

Figure 12.1 shows the course structure, course features and technology features of the EEC course in RC4.

a. Students' perceptions of the preparation for the EEC lessons

The preparation resources were sent to the students via the QQ group in RC4, as the students reported that it was very difficult for them to access the CamEnglish Weebly learning website in RC3. The responses show that the students liked the preparation task before each lesson, with mean rating 3.63 (sd=0.916). This was a slight improvement on RC3 (mean 3.25, sd=0.463), which only had two students liking the preparation tasks of the EEC lessons.

The students commented:

I realised. . .I could ask appropriate questions in the main lesson depending on how well I had prepared for the lesson. (Kaimobile)

The more I read the preparation materials for the EEC lessons, the better I understood the discussions of the topics in the lesson. (Hang)

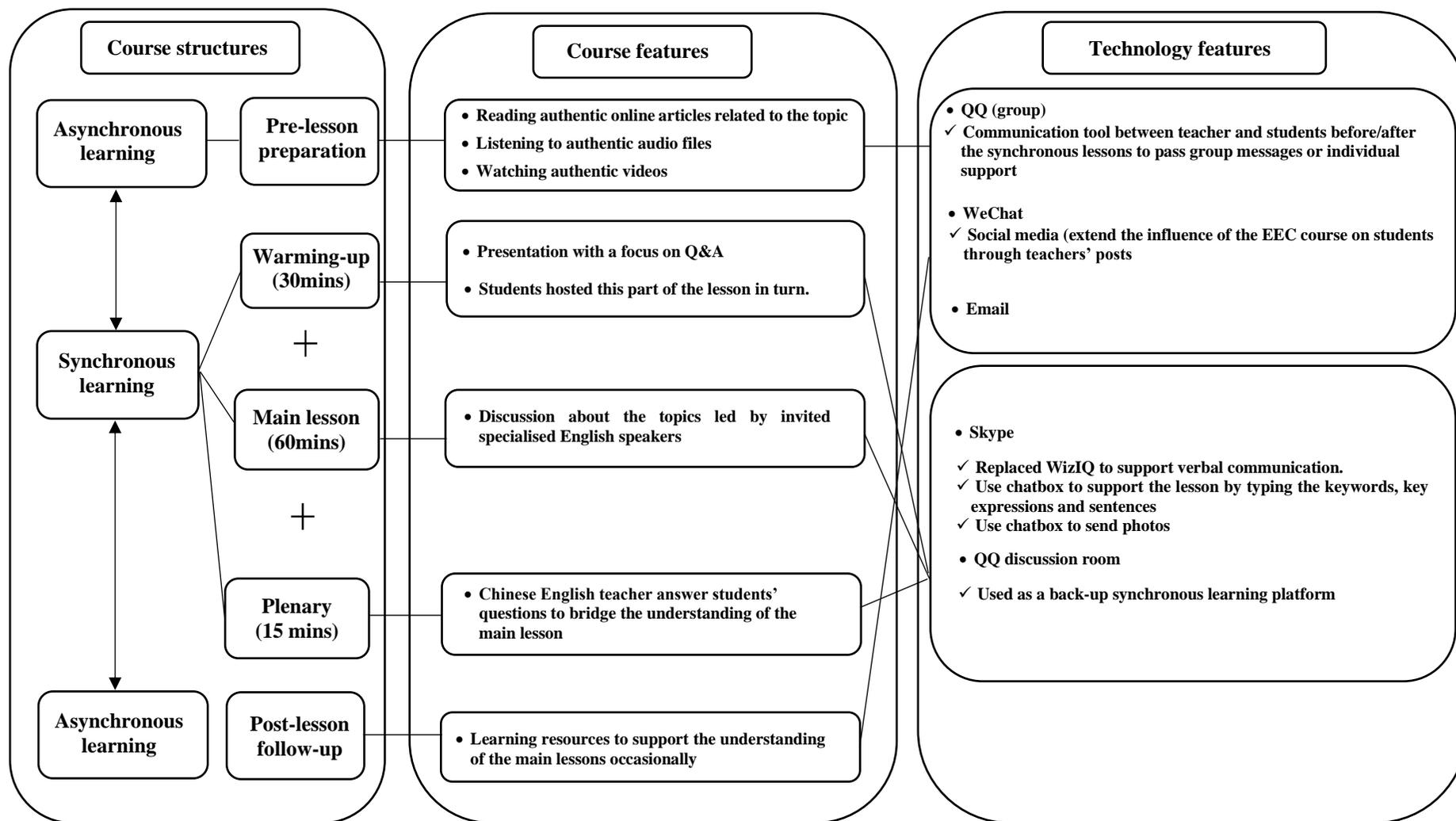


Figure 12.1: Course structure, course features and technology features of the EEC course in RC4

However, the students also pointed out the areas of the EEC course that needed to be developed:

The preparation resources sometimes had some distance from what the teacher was talking about in the main lessons. It would be better if the materials were more closely related. (Mya)

The EEC course could also send us learning materials after the lesson. I spent more time reading the learning materials after the lesson than before the lesson. This was because I had gained more understanding of the topic so had more interest to explore more after the lesson. (Tiny)

These were two excellent suggestions. Although not all topics could be delivered based on materials, at least the EEC course could reflect an awareness of students preferring more relevant learning materials. In consideration of the fact that the EEC course was a flexible course, which was designed spontaneously and depending on the speciality and interests of the guest English teachers, it could be challenging to send strictly related learning materials. Nevertheless, it could be much more easily managed by sending resources after the lessons. In the meantime, the preparation resources should either be recommended by the invited English speakers (IES) or shared with the IES so that they are more aware of what the students know about the topics.

b. Students' perceptions of the presentation with a focus on Q&A (30 minutes)

According to the findings of RC3, there were a few changes to this section in RC4. The first was that the topics were open, including the news or a story in their daily life. The second was that students were encouraged to create PowerPoints for their presentations. The third was that the students were asked to host the presentation and Q&A section to maximise the opportunity for interaction and develop a more active role in communication. The third change is discussed in Section 12.5.4 c, as there was a comparison between the two sections.

The findings show that the students liked the first 30-minute student presentation section (3.75, $sd=0.707$). It is evident that there was only a slight improvement in comparison to that of RC3 (3.63, $sd=0.744$). The students who liked the student presentation section commented:

The best part of this section was Q&A time. It really pushed me to go beyond my comfort zone. (Tiny)

I used to respond with very dry answers. I remembered how embarrassed I felt in my first one or two presentations. But now I would be able to give more detailed and rich answers. (Mya)

The comments were similar to that of RC3. It seems that the students liked this section mostly because of the Q&A section, which could help them to overcome their shortcomings in answering interlocutors' questions. However, one student pointed out:

I found it challenging to understand some students' presentations [so] I could not ask any questions. I felt very embarrassed when I was picked out to ask questions when I had no idea at all. (Hang)

Although students were asked to prepare PowerPoints for their presentations, Skype does not support the function of playing PowerPoint simultaneously. Even though QQ had this function, it was not stable when there were multiple participants, especially when there were overseas participants. It also took time to download the PowerPoint and it was not convenient to turn to the right slide at the same pace as the presenter. Therefore, most students still chose to present without PowerPoint. There are two strategies to solve this problem. The first is to continue searching for a synchronous learning platform that could support the PowerPoint display stably. The second is to develop the students' presentation and interaction skills, such as checking the understanding of the audience, improving pronunciation, and so on. In fact, this could be extended to a separate sub-course to support the main course.

In terms of feedback on their presentation skills, the students commented:

The students' peer comments and suggestions might not be reliable. I hope I could get more suggestions from the teachers about my performance in my presentation and answering questions. (Kang)

The teacher does not need to be polite when giving us comments and suggestions. It could be critical. But one or two points would be enough for us to take away each lesson. (Atlantis)

The students wanted to receive constructive comments from the teachers to improve their ability to deliver a presentation, answer questions and interact with the audience. Although the EEC

course invited the foreign English speakers to attend this section to interact with the students and give them informative feedback, very often it was disrupted by a poor Internet connection, which meant that it took much longer for the invited English speakers (IES) to connect to the group chat. In addition, the IES tended to give students praise but fewer critical comments. This might be because they wanted to encourage the students, although the students were expecting critical feedback. There was a cultural difference embedded in this problem, as western culture tends to value praise more than critique. However, most Chinese students are more used to getting critique from their teachers, although the latter situation might also be changing. Another reason might be because the presentation was not in their specialised area. Therefore, specific training should be provided to IES. In addition, if the students required more professional development in presentation and Q&A, a specialised English teacher might need to be invited to give such training to the students. This could be delivered as an individual topic in the main lessons with other topics. The number of lessons needed to cover this topic depends on the students' needs and the length of the EEC course.

c. Students' perceptions of the main lesson (60 minutes)

From the findings of RC3, three main changes were made to the main lesson in RC4. First, more foreign English teachers who were specialised in the topics were invited to lead this part of the lesson. Some teachers were invited to teach one lesson, and some were invited to teach two or three, depending on their specialised topics and available time. Second, attention was paid to giving every student a fair chance to speak and interact in the lessons. Atlantis was also advised to take care of the other students' participation, in part to develop his turn-taking interactional competence. The third change was to ask the students to host the main lessons in turn. The purpose of this change was also to further stretch the students' ability from the role of student to the more leading role of a teacher.

• Further development of the EEC course

Interestingly, in RC3 the less competent students requested more opportunities to interact in the main lessons. However, when efforts were put into engaging more of the less competent students in RC4, they stated that they felt too much pressure to engage in the interaction because of a lack of understanding of the IES and the other students.

Sometimes, I found it was challenging to understand what the foreign teacher was talking about. I wish there were more students in the class so someone else could ask the questions. (Hang)

This was also supported by students who had a much higher English-speaking level than others.

The amount of information in the EEC lessons might be too much for some students. You could see it, as the questions they were asking had nothing to do with what the teacher was talking about. You could feel the embarrassment of the teacher too. (Kang)

When the student who was struggling to keep pace with the class was asked why she did not ask the foreign English teacher to slow down or explain again, she explained:

I never thought of interrupting a teacher's talk. They were invited to teach us. How could I interrupt? (YiShan)

This was in line with the study of Don et al. (2014), which highlighted shyness as a common phenomenon in Chinese education, where students are educated to respect teachers and not to question or argue with teachers or elders, which is a culture we should value and treasure. However, there should be a balance. Students should also be encouraged to ask educators and others questions, as long as it is done respectfully. The EEC course certainly has a role to play in helping students break down this barrier and embrace a balance.

Another student pointed out a similar barrier:

I was not familiar with both the foreign teachers and the other students, so I was not brave enough to speak out. But I know this was my own problem. (Tiny)

This is an interesting issue, as I have noticed a similar phenomenon myself. I might feel comfortable talking in one environment but not in another. For instance, having attended the research community meetings for five years, I could see how I was developing from feeling uncomfortable talking in a research group of three to four people, to feeling comfortable speaking in a group of ten to fifteen people. Yet, I might struggle to speak at a conference, school briefing or even a staff maths department meeting of 15 people in a new school. In contrast, I have seen how people who have grown up in a western culture could express their opinions straight away when they first joined the group.

When I was in a new environment, one of the things I was aware of was that I was unsure about the norm of the existing group, or whether my opinion would be welcomed by the new group.

Thus, I would observe and wait until I was familiar with the rules of the new environment. Nevertheless, I always found that I needed to push myself forwards to speak for the first time. Once I had spoken out, as long as there was not much disagreement, I would feel more comfortable speaking out the next time. However, there could be situations when my first contribution was countered by others. This was one of the hardest parts, as, if I was not strong enough to accept that pressure and determined to try again, I would give up speaking up in that environment.

Nevertheless, I was very impressed by Atlantis' comment:

Through the EEC course, I found that as long as you wanted to talk, there would be people who wanted to listen. (Atlantis)

This is excellent advice to all those who are fearful that others might laugh at their speaking. However, turning this fear into action requires courage and practice. The EEC course should further explore strategies to help students overcome their fear of speaking out, both inside and outside the EEC classroom, and especially in very different environments. This might need to be broken down into small changes, step by step. Encouragement, patience and celebration are necessary. The EEC course should certainly encourage students to speak up in the lesson, no matter how badly they are speaking, giving them encouragement and acknowledging every little thing they have said correctly, and picking up on one or two points for them to continue developing. Once the students are comfortable speaking in the EEC lessons, the course could design the next task to help them speak up in another new environment. As discussed previously, it could be setting them a task in real life and asking them to share it in the EEC lesson, regardless of whether or not it is successful.

The students also suggested delivering the main lesson with a PowerPoint to make it easier for them to follow. This was required by not only the less competent students but also the higher-level ones.

It would be better to have PowerPoint in the main lesson. Otherwise, it was easy to lose concentration. (Atlantis)

It is true that a pre-prepared PowerPoint always makes communication easier. However, the reasons that RC4 did not use PowerPoint were based on the following three aspects. The first

was that requiring the teacher to prepare the PowerPoint would double the cost of the EEC course to pay for the invited English speakers (IES). The second was that there was still no virtual classroom that could stably deliver the EEC course. Even the QQ group was not supportive of the PowerPoint display function, especially when there were overseas participants. Nevertheless, to replace the function of the PowerPoint, in my role as the Chinese English teacher I uploaded photos, and the IES typed texts in the chatbox spontaneously, to help the students catch up with keywords or difficult words or sentences. Yet, it can be seen that the students still preferred the pre-prepared PowerPoint. Therefore, it is necessary to explore how best to solve this problem for the EEC course. If there is enough funding for the course, the IES could be asked to prepare PowerPoints before lessons. Alternatively, the course designer could communicate with the foreign teachers and request that they send him or her a number of web links or resources, so that he/she can create a draft PowerPoint for them to edit to suit their personal style of teaching. Of course, it is important to continue trying out other synchronous platforms that could support the function of displaying PowerPoint and other resources.

- **Employing different invited English speakers to teach the EEC course**

It has been identified in Section 12.5.3 that the invited English speakers (IES) were one of the main features of the EEC course, making it different to other English courses. This section further investigates students' perceptions of this feature. The students liked having different IES to deliver the EEC course, at the mean rating 4.13 (sd=1.126). However, there was one student that disliked this approach, and one student held a neutral opinion.

The students commented on the reasons why they liked having different IES:

If only one foreign English teacher was teaching us, his opinion might not represent others. We could lose the opportunity to see things from different angles. (Kang)

Communication is talking to different people, so talking to various foreign teachers is closer to the real way of communication. (Mya)

Different teachers have different stories. Their divergent views could influence us implicitly. (Atlantis)

However, some students preferred having one teacher because “it takes time to get used to a teacher” (Mya) and “if we keep changing teachers, it would be harder to maintain contact” (Tiny).

The above views were actually agreed upon by the students who preferred different IES. They explained that:

I could understand some foreign English teachers but not others. For instance, I could hardly follow one of the teachers because of the way he spoke. (Hang)

If a student does not cope with one teacher's style, he/she may not even want to attend the rest of the EEC course. (Atlantis)

Overall, the students stated that they welcomed different IES although they also preferred each teacher to teach at least two to four lessons in order to allow time to build up the relationship. There was no particular preference for the age range of the IES. However, the teachers that were of a similar age to the students were welcomed by all.

- **Perceptions of students hosting the lessons**

To expand the opportunities for students to participate in lessons, the students were asked to host presentations with a focus on Q&A and the main lessons in turn. The students commented:

I enjoyed hosting in the Q&A, as the topics that the students were talking about were fairly easy to understand. (Kai-mobile)

However, the students also pointed out:

It was very hard to host the main lessons. I struggled to understand what the foreign teacher was talking about. So I felt quite a lot of pressure when I hosted the lesson. But it was a good challenge for me. (Tiny)

Although I enjoyed hosting the main lesson I could see that some other students were really struggling to follow the words of the foreign English teachers. It actually stopped our enjoyment of the main lessons. (Kang)

I enjoyed the lessons much more when you (Miss Du) were hosting the main lessons. (Atlantis)

It seems that it was not a good idea to ask the students to host the main lessons of the EEC

course, as this requires a relatively high level of English competence; at least there was no problem understanding the IES and preferably having an understanding of the topics. Chinese English teachers might be the ideal people to play this role to host the main lessons of the EEC course. On the other hand, it seems that the students were happy to take the challenge of hosting the presentation and Q&A section, as it was easier for them to stretch themselves. Therefore, in future research cycles, students would not be requested to host the main lessons, but they could host the presentation and Q&A section.

d. Students' perceptions of the plenary of the EEC course

Further to the findings of RC3, the plenary section in RC4 was shortened to 15 minutes. The students were given a chance to ask questions about things they did not understand in the main lesson. Some students were also asked to describe what they had learnt in the main lesson. As I was busy contacting and helping the foreign English teachers to get into the Skype group chat, neither the IES nor I managed to listen to all of the students' presentation and Q&A sessions. Therefore, it was not possible to give feedback to the students in the plenary regarding their performance. The future EEC course must explore ways to solve this problem and make use of the teachers efficiently, especially in the presentation and Q&A section. Strategies could be employing a technician to assist with the connection of the IES to the synchronous lessons.

It shows that the students liked the plenary section of the EEC course at the mean rating 4.25 (sd=0.886). The students commented:

This section was essential. I really liked this section, as I could catch up with the parts I did not understand. (Tiny)

This was the most relaxed section, as there were only Chinese students and the teacher left. So I felt more relaxed speaking out about things that I would not talk about in front of the foreign English teachers. (YiShan)

This last sentence is interesting and shows the importance of the role of the Chinese English teacher, who is not only a facilitator but also a bridge-builder to help students understand the target culture.

When the students were asked which areas they would like to see improved in this section, they did not entirely agree with one another.

It would be more interesting if we could be asked to talk about our feelings about the lesson rather than what we have learnt. For instance, we could talk about our feelings when we heard the teacher say that he suspended his university study to go sailing overseas with his father. (Atlantis)

However, another student argued:

If we were asked our feelings, it was too vague. It would be better to ask us what we have learnt or at least combine what we have learnt with our feelings. (Mya)

It seems that some students preferred to recite what the teachers had taught in the lesson while others preferred to talk about their own feelings. This suggests that it would be better to give the students choices between discussing their feelings on a particular part of the lesson or summarising what they have learnt in the lesson. Furthermore, the students added:

It would be useful to ask us which part we did not fully understand. And then catch up on these parts in this section. (Hang)

This suggests that another useful question would be to find out which part of the main lesson the students would like to explore more. In fact, this could become the most valuable moment that a Chinese English teacher could have to impact the students. Ideally, this role should be played by a Chinese English teacher who has both knowledge and living experience in both China and western countries, and a good understanding of both cultures to bridge the understanding between the Chinese students and invited English speakers (IES). In reality, this could be played by Chinese English teachers at the university or English language courses.

12.5.6 Students' perceptions of the topics of the EEC course

The findings show that the students liked the teaching method of one topic per week (mean rating 3.88; sd=0.641). Although two students held neutral opinions, none of the students disliked this way of teaching. Ten topics were delivered and taught by six British English teachers in RC4. Table 12.15 further shows the ranking of preferred topics based on students' perceptions.

Table 12.15: Ranking of the topics based on the students' preferences in RC4

Ranking	Topics	Mean	S.D.	Minimum extent	Maximum extent
1	Students' life in Cambridge University	4.25	0.707	3	5
2	Making friends with British people	4.00	0.756	3	5
3	British architecture	3.88	0.641	3	5
4	Travelling around the world	3.75	0.886	2	5
4	American and British music (modern music)	3.75	0.886	2	5
5	Christmas culture	3.50	1.309	1	5
5	Halloween culture	3.50	1.414	1	5
6	American and British music (1960s–1970s)	3.25	1.389	1	5
7	British food	3.13	0.641	2	4
8	American and British music (1930s–1940s)	3.13	1.356	1	5

a. Student life at Cambridge University

Similar to RC2, student life at Cambridge University was ranked as the favourite topic by students. In this topic, a Year 2 university student at the University of Cambridge, who was also a member of the Cambridge Climbing Club, talked about his social life at the University. In this lesson, the Internet worked perfectly so he was even able to open the video camera to demonstrate how to tie a rope for climbing.

I was very curious about how students at Cambridge University live, as it might be very different from ours. And it was so fascinating that they were so much into outdoor activities. (Mya)

This was the most enjoyable lesson to me! What the foreign teacher talked about was very interesting. And he also demonstrated how to tie a rope for climbing. If every lesson were like this, it would be great! (Kang)

The foreign teacher was a similar age to us. Through listening and talking to him, I came to know what interests them and how they talk. (YiShan)

This lesson and travelling around the world really inspired me to do more outdoor activities. I have climbed NiuBei Mountain since the lessons. I am also planning more outdoor activities. (Atlantis)

The students' comments suggest that they were very interested in learning about the life of students in the UK, in particular, top universities such as Cambridge University, as it was very

different to their university life. Some were even inspired and started to apply what they had learnt in the lesson to their life. Although in the previous section the students mentioned that the age of the IES did not matter, for some students it was a factor that attracted them to the topic.

b. Making friends with British people

The second favourite topic was *making friends with British people*. This lesson was taught by an undergraduate student at another university in the UK. I invited this teacher because I knew she was very active at participating in social life with other British young adults. The students commented:

I have learnt that the principles of socialising with other people in both cultures were similar or the same. (Hang)

It was good to know how to react in a specific scenario such as the pub or afternoon tea. I also got to know that we should not ask others about private matters, especially in the first few meetings. (Kaimobile)

However, one student was critical:

What this teacher talked about was not representative. She didn't give reasons why to react in certain ways in social life. (Kang)

It seems that the students were very interested in this topic but also critical of the teacher's explanation. In fact, there was a very poor Internet connection in this lesson so the IES had to talk to the students via the loudspeaker of my mobile phone, which may have severely affected the learning experience. As a result, the students seemed to enjoy this lesson less. Apart from the poor Internet connection, I noticed that the teacher was not fully in the mood to deliver the lesson, as it was very early on her weekend morning. This suggests that the EEC course should provide the IES with some simple but clear guidance, or even a video to help them be more aware of the essential requirements of delivering a lesson.

c. British architecture

The third most popular topic among the students was British architecture, which was taught by a retired but very experienced property solicitor. The high ranking of this topic was a surprise

to me as a course designer. The students explained:

This was my favourite topic, as my father was working in the architecture industry. (Tiny)

I am studying material science, which is related to architecture. There are many western-style architectures in China. But I do not know how original the styles of these houses are. So this topic could help me understand more about my speciality. (Hang)

It was understandable that the reasons why the above two students were interested in this topic were related to their own specialist subject or their close family member's profession. However, the reasons that the following two students gave reflected a more common problem faced by many young people in China at the time.

House prices in China are so high. We could hardly afford one by ourselves. So I was very curious about the property market in the UK. (Kaimobile)

Housing is a crucial issue to our young generations. We have a lot of pressure to buy a property, and the pressure is higher for boys than for girls. When you want to get married or even when you start to look for a girlfriend or boyfriend, you will face this issue. It was a hot topic among friends and parents. (Mya)

It seems that the students liked this topic, as it was a hot topic in their daily life, so they wanted to know more about it in western countries. The housing issue is similar to what young people are facing in the UK. This could be a good topic for the future EEC course. Moreover, the students mentioned that:

The teacher was very friendly, and he shared with us his back garden from his video camera. I really liked his garden as it looked like my dream garden. (Atlantis)

To further develop this topic, a student suggested:

It was not necessary to talk about the difference between different architectures. It was too specialised. I was not focusing at the beginning of the lesson, but it attracted my attention when we talked about flats and the housing market. (Kaimobile)

I was distracted in the beginning. But when we talked about the garden, it attracted my attention. When speaking about this topic again, we could start by introducing the magnificent and most impressive architecture and then flow to other areas. (Atlantis)

These were the suggestions from the students regarding development of the topics. This also suggests that the EEC course should cultivate the links between the topics and the real lives of the students rather than introducing knowledge of the subject itself. The fundamental principle is to provide an opportunity for students to talk about their own experiences.

d. Travelling around the world

This topic was ranked as the fourth favourite topic by the students. The invited English speaker (IES) had travelled to around a hundred countries and had many adventures. One of his unique stories was that he had suspended his university course to join his father on a three-year sailing experience around the world. The students commented:

Most people like travelling, especially travelling around the world. This teacher had an extraordinary passion and unique experience in travelling. I was very impressed! (Mya)

I remembered the teacher said that he went to talk to his supervisor about his dad wanting him to sail with him for three years, and his supervisor supported his decision. If it were in China, it would not be possible. (Kang)

Most Chinese teachers and parents would regard learning as the most important task for children, but what he experienced was very different. Maybe it was because of the cultural difference. (Tiny)

Although many people like travelling, the teacher's individual experience came as a great cultural shock to the students. What they thought would be impossible in China happened in another culture. However, the student who said he disliked this topic argued:

Travelling around the world is not realistic to me. I do not have any plans at the moment. (Hang)

Hang was absent from this lesson. However, his comment shows that the EEC course still needs

to develop ways to help students be more open and unrestricted by their current life. Strategies to develop this are discussed in Section 12.5.7.

e. American and British music

This topic was divided into three sub-topics and delivered in three lessons according to the era of the music. It was taught by a PhD student at Cambridge University who initially came from America. Of the three sub-topics, *contemporary American and British music* was ranked fourth, *1960s–1970s music* was ranked sixth, and *1930–1940s music* was ranked last. The students stated the reasons why they had less interest in this topic:

The teacher was very knowledgeable in music. However, what he taught us was too subject-oriented. (Kang)

The Beatles are famous in Britain, but they are not so famous in China. I personally like Japanese music, especially JiuShiRang. (Hang)

I was not good at music, nor history of music, so I did not like this topic. In my daily life, I rarely talked about music but rather study and everyday life. (Kaimobile)

The students who enjoyed the lesson argued:

I was particularly impressed by the lesson when the teacher talked about different types of Saxophone and played a short piece of Saxophone music for us. (Atlantis)

Atlantis played the guitar in the lesson. I was very impressed. (Tiny)

This was further supported by another student's suggestions:

There was no need to talk about the music along the timeline. We would be more interested in musical instruments, as this is something we could talk about. It would be great if the teacher could play a few different musical instruments in the lesson too. (Kang)

What the student pointed out here is that the EEC course should plan the lessons in such a way that students can also share their specialist skills or knowledge on the subject. The student

further pointed out:

*One or two lessons on the topic of music is enough. Three lessons of music is too much.
(Hang)*

This is another valuable point. Out of eight lessons, three lessons were about music, making the proportion high. Although, as the students suggested that they preferred one IES teaching three to four lessons, the music teacher, who was from America and studying for a PhD at Cambridge University, could also talk about his other personal experiences, which could be interesting and engaging to the students. In other words, instead of one teacher per topic, it would be valuable to cultivate a few topics that an IES could teach.

f. Christmas culture and Halloween culture

The topics of Christmas culture and Halloween culture were ranked the fifth equal favourite topics in RC4. Both topics were taught by a British family consisting of parents and children. The students commented that these two topics had been taught quite often in other English lessons. However, the topics were delivered in a unique way.

The lesson of Halloween was taught by a family. They talked about how they celebrated Halloween as a family. When a young child came out to speak to us, the atmosphere was so cheerful as the little boy was so cute. (Atlantis)

I could feel the warmth and unity of the family, which was very different from what I know of an Australian family. I like their closeness as a family. (Kang)

The students also pointed out areas for improvement:

*Too much time was spent talking about the history of Halloween. And there were too many western culture terminologies, which could be taught in a simpler and easier way.
(Mya)*

This was the same family that had delivered Christmas culture to the students in RC3 (Section 12.5.4 b) and they were warmly welcomed by the students. However, the lesson was delivered in different ways, with less talking about the knowledge of Christmas culture and more talking about how they celebrated Christmas as a family, even singing some Christmas songs. However,

even with the same family, the students showed much less interest in teaching them about the festivals. This was partly because they had acquired this knowledge in other English courses, and partly because the knowledge could be gained through reading articles or watching videos. To make the EEC course unique, consideration should be given to using its strength of showing students something they could not experience in their regular English courses or daily life.

g. British food

British food was ranked seventh by the students in RC4. The lesson was taught by a British mum, who was very good at making Yorkshire pudding. The students showed less interest in this topic:

I do not eat western food, so I am not interested in British food. (Hang)

This topic has often been taught by our university foreign English teachers. So it was not very interesting to me. (Kang)

What I could remember was that the cooking method of British food is very simple so not very tasty. (Mya)

The students suggested:

Linking food to health or business could be more interesting. (Mya)

Further to the students' comments, from my observation, apart from this lesson being taught with a poor Internet connection, the way this lesson was taught might also have affected students' interest in it. As the teacher was providing last-minute cover, there was a lack of communication between me as the course designer and the IES. The teacher tried very hard to teach students as much food knowledge as possible. However, there was a lack of interaction in the lesson. The students' feedback and delivery of the lesson at the last minute led to an excellent question being raised about how emergency cover and last-minute communication would be handled in the course.

In summary, the topics that the students preferred seem more related to their university life, social life, daily life and outdoor activity. In terms of the topics related to festival cultures and British food, which were common topics on many other English courses, the students showed

less interest. However, this does not mean that these topics should not be taught in the EEC course; rather, the course could focus on areas that other English lessons would not normally talk about, thereby engaging or challenging students' existing knowledge or understanding. On the other hand, in addition to the topics themselves, who and how to deliver them also affect students' interest and effectiveness in improving their communicative competence.

12.5.7 Students' perceptions of the technology features of the EEC course

With the experience of RC3, the EEC course did not use the virtual classroom in RC4. Instead, it used Skype as the leading platform to deliver the synchronous lessons, backed up by the QQ discussion room when Skype failed to deliver. The CamEnglish website was suspended, as the students in RC3 reported that it was very slow to open and they preferred to receive learning materials from the QQ group, which was much quicker to download. Therefore, Skype and QQ were used as a synchronous learning platform, and QQ was also used as an asynchronous learning platform in RC4.

The students liked the virtual learning environment of the EEC course, at the mean rating 3.38 (sd=0.518). This was lower than in RC3 (mean 3.63, sd=0.518). The students preferred using Skype (mean 4.38, sd=0.744) to QQ (3.63, sd=0.916).

a. Skype

The students commented on their experience of using Skype in the EEC course:

I have never used Skype before. But I know many international business meetings were held via Skype. It seems easier for the foreign English teachers to connect to Skype than QQ. (KaiMobile)

The voice stream of Skype was smoother than on QQ when we were talking in the lesson. (Tiny)

Skype was quite convenient. We could use it from our mobiles. Once I was about to be late to the lesson as I was still outside. But I used Skype on my mobile to access the lesson on the way back to my dormitory. So I did not really miss much of the lesson. (YiShan)

It seems that, although Skype was a very basic online communication tool, as it required a

minimum amount of data stream, it supported mobile network connection, which made access to the lesson more flexible (Figure 12.2). This could hardly be achieved by many virtual classrooms technologies, which demand a much larger data stream. However, Skype also had problems connecting.

I received some of the pictures sent on Skype, but I also missed some pictures sent on Skype in the lesson. It also takes time to receive the pictures. (Mya)

I didn't manage to see the teacher when he switched on his video. I didn't know why. (Tiny)

The quality of a Skype connection seemed to depend on the Internet quality of individuals. In terms of how we could improve the use of Skype, the students suggested:

It would be useful if the teacher could open the video camera but the students could be allowed not to open their video camera. (Kang)

This was in line with the students' comment that they enjoyed the lessons more when the IES opened the video camera and demonstrated how to tie a rope. Ideally, it would be better if all participants could switch on their webcams so it would feel more like a physical classroom where everyone could see one another's actions. In reality, given that Skype struggled to support the audio connection of a group, it is clear that it could not support a webcam. Nonetheless, we should respect students who do not want to show their faces to others in an online environment. This is understandable, especially when students are not familiar with the learning environment or other participants. Giving students a choice to switch on their video camera is a democratic approach to learning, which should be maintained as a policy of the EEC course. In addition, there should be a comprehensive e-course policy to ensure that the rights of all students, teachers and other staff are protected.

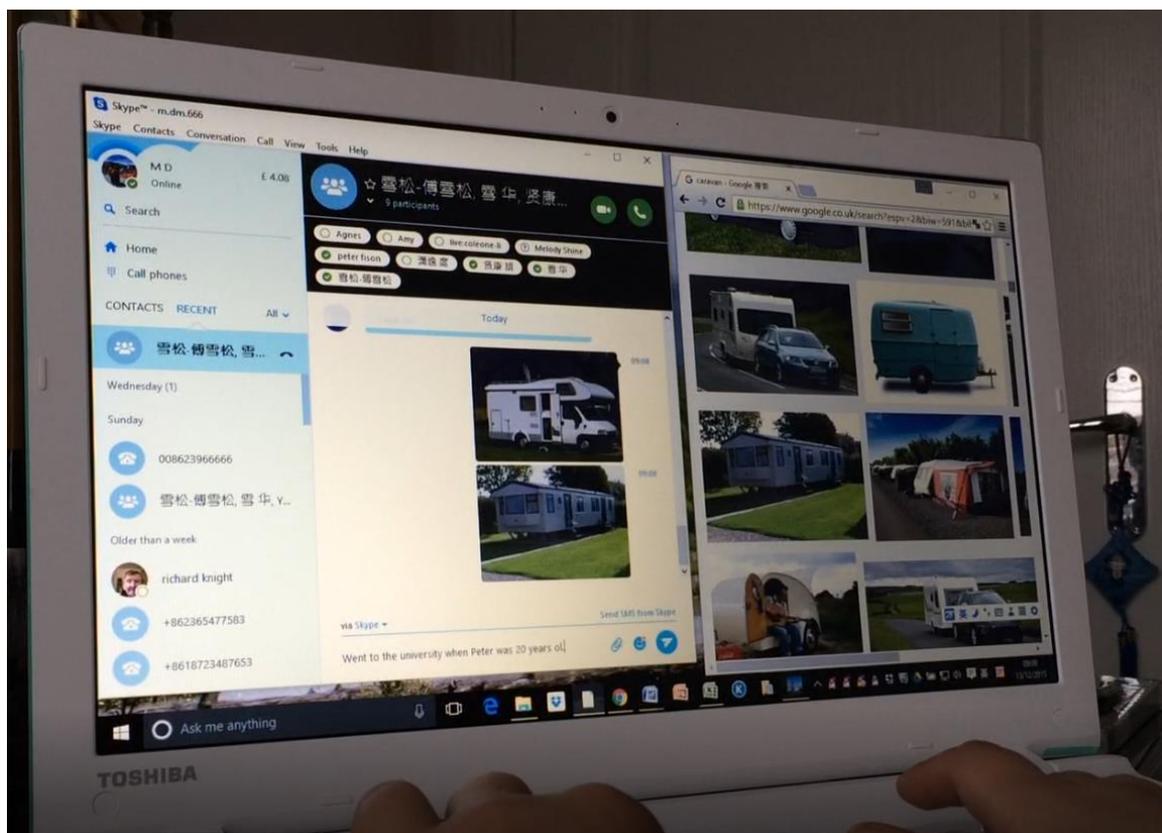


Figure 12.2: Delivering the travelling around the world lesson via Skype (RC4)

b. QQ

QQ and the QQ group were mainly used as an asynchronous learning platform to provide students with the preparatory learning resources for each lesson, to pass messages to students and to communicate with individual students.

A QQ account in the English version was registered for the invited English speaker (IES) to access the QQ group and discussion room when Skype was not running smoothly (Figure 12.3). The IES and I did a one-to-one test before the lesson, when text messages, voice messages and QQ telephone all seemed to be working well. Yet, when the lesson was delivered, problems occurred.

The first time the students and teachers were due to move to the QQ discussion room, the IES could not use the QQ audio function in the QQ discussion room. As a contingency plan, I had to ring the IES through the loudspeaker of my mobile to talk to the students via my QQ speaker. The students complained:

The voice of the foreign English teacher through the mobile was not clear. I was really struggling to listen to her and understand her. (Hang)

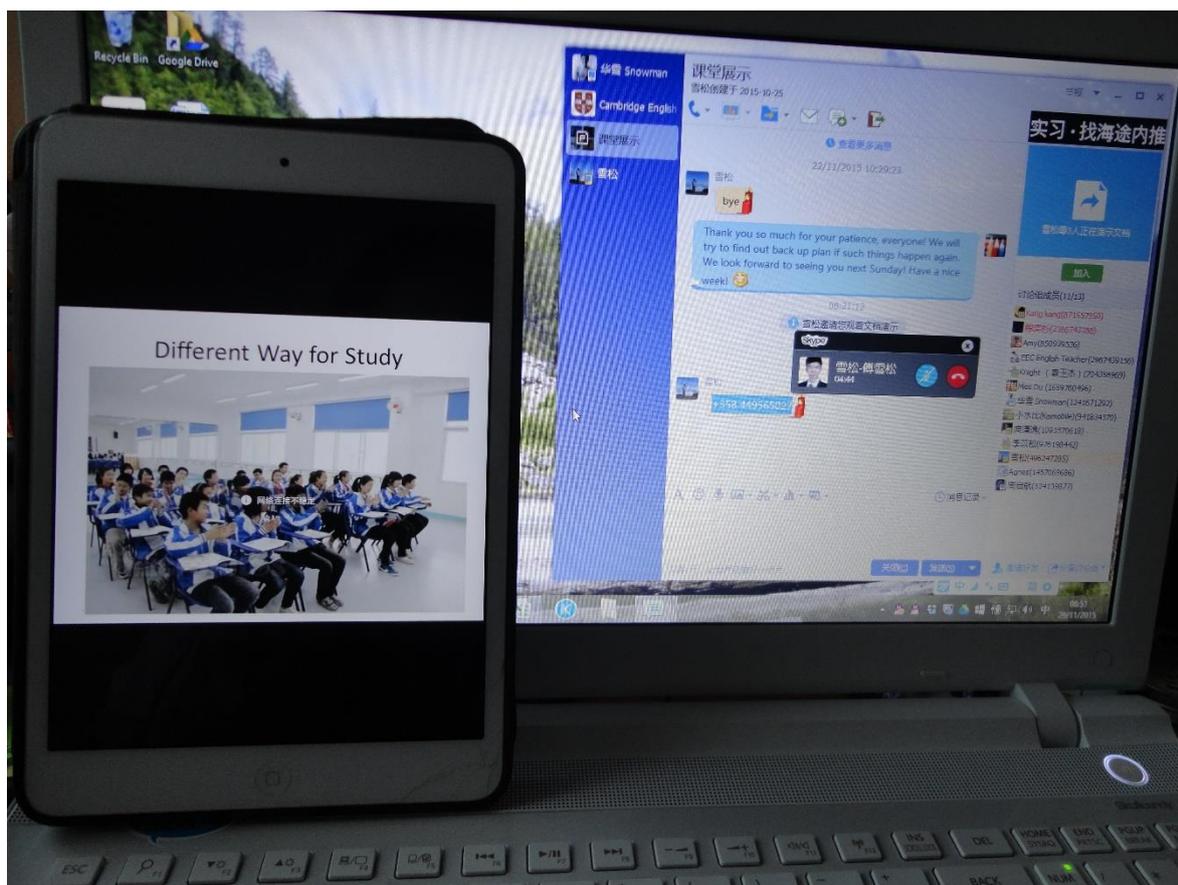


Figure 12.3: Using the QQ discussion room to deliver the EEC lesson

The second time when Skype was not functioning well we moved to the QQ discussion room again. However, another IES still could not speak in the QQ discussion room. Learning from past experience, we chose to use voice messages to deliver the lesson to improve the teacher's voice quality. Consequently, this seemed even worse.

There was no feeling of real-time communication. I felt it was chaos in that lesson. (Mya)

It was very embarrassing in that lesson. I had to force myself to finish the lesson. (KaiMobile)

As an EEC course teacher, who had expected many technological disruptions in the lessons, I felt this was the worst scenario the EEC course had encountered to date. The students suggested:

We should stick to Skype, as even though there might be one or two students who could not hear properly on Skype, at least there were other students who could hear clearly.

But on QQ, no one could hear anything. (Atlantis)

It seems that QQ was the least reliable platform for synchronous learning that the EEC course tried, even though QQ claimed support for a group discussion. Possible reasons for this are that there might be some restrictions in its English version, and also its group audio call was not functioning at all well when there was a group of participants. Nevertheless, it is not convenient for the IES to use the Chinese version. For this reason, in the future EEC course, QQ will be considered not as a synchronous learning platform, but as a purely asynchronous learning platform, to share information and resources with the students and to communicate with individual students.

Moreover, Atlantis, who studied in RC3, stated that:

The concept of CamEnglish was perfect. I quite miss that website. It'd be good to bring that website back in the future... It had all the topics listed on one web page, and all the resources could be accessed from that page, which was very convenient. QQ was convenient to download documents, but the resources were scattered among the other notices. And QQ had a time limitation to download the documents. It is hard to retrieve the previous resources, particularly when it was several weeks ago.

This was a valuable suggestion from someone who also had experience of RC2 and RC3. However, learning from the experience of RC3, CamEnglish, the asynchronous learning website, should be built from a web server based in China to speed up students' accessibility to the website.

On the whole, the technology of the EEC course in RC4 was simplified to its simplest form: Skype for synchronous learning, and QQ for asynchronous learning. The experiment of using QQ as a synchronous learning platform in RC4 was not successful and proved to be something that should be avoided. The EEC course should keep Skype as the synchronous learning platform until there is a better platform that is more efficient in connecting to China. The consideration of whether such a platform works better should be tested with a group of ten to fifteen people in both China and the UK before the lesson, around the same time as the EEC lessons. Unless such a platform has passed the test, the new potential synchronous learning platform should not be used in the EEC course, to reduce the chance of an embarrassing scenario, as in RC4.

Furthermore, the synchronous learning platform should open teachers' video cameras to engage students more. However, this means that more effort should be put in the EEC course into ensuring that IES have good access to the Internet during lessons. Strategies to develop this could include setting up a checklist for the invited English speakers (IES) to follow. The EEC course should also have technical support available to support the lessons running smoothly.

QQ remained the leading asynchronous learning platform to give the students lesson information, provide learning resources and communicate with individual students. However, a course website was still the preferred choice for some students to ensure that all lessons were presented neatly on one website. Yet, the asynchronous learning website must be built on a web server in China with a tested high speed.

12.6 How RC4 could inform future study

Table 12.16 presents a summary of the implications of the course design in RC4 for future study. The implications for Research Cycle 4 are discussed next in Chapter 13.

Table 12.16: Summary of the implications of the course design in RC4 for future study

		Delivery of RC4	Implications for future studies
Why and who to take the course	Identifying the gap in needs	The lack of ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with English speakers from different cultures for a happy and positive life	
	Identifying participants	<p>Students: Intervention group: Year 2 university students from the same university and taught by the same English teacher</p> <p>Comparison group: The rest of the classmates of the intervention group who are taught by the same English teacher at the same university</p> <p>Teachers: Primary teacher: invite more specialist English speakers to lead the main lesson Supporting co-teacher: Chinese English teacher (I, the researcher)</p>	<p>Students: 1. University/School students Could integrate the EEC course with regular university/school English lessons to teach the EEC course in the university/school English lessons</p> <p>2. Students who are preparing for overseas studies/work Could cooperate with English training organisations to help students who are preparing for overseas studies/work to improve their communicative competence</p> <p>Comparison group: Strategies must be adopted to ensure that: 1. The comparison group is comparable with the intervention group 2. Pre-test and post-test data can be collected from both the intervention group and the comparison group under the same condition</p> <p>Teachers: 1. Develop a bank of English speakers who are specialised in different topics 2. Develop training programmes and materials to help invited specialised English speakers to become more confident looking after students' needs when delivering the EEC lessons 3. Develop training programmes and materials to help Chinese English teachers become more confident assisting the specialised English speaker and leading the plenary discussion session</p>
What to achieve	Defining and developing the key concepts	<p>Communicative competence: 1. Linguistic competence: a. Lexical resource and accuracy b. Grammatical range and accuracy c. Coherence and cohesion</p> <p>2. Interactional competence a. Ability to express oneself, understand and respond to interlocutors clearly b. Ability to take alternative strategies to keep the interaction fluent</p> <p>3. Sociocultural competence a. Ability to achieve the aim/goal of the communication appropriately</p>	<p>1. Further reviewing and developing the concepts and assessment of communicative competence</p> <p>2. Further clarify the difference between interactional competence and sociocultural competence</p>

		<p>b. Ability to show personal qualities contributing to the appropriateness of the communication</p> <p>Openness</p> <p>Emotional regulation</p> <p>Flexibility</p> <p>Critical thinking</p>	
	Formulating goals and objectives	<p>Goals: Unchanged</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <p>1. To develop sociocultural competence: Please refer to Table 6.5.1</p> <p>To develop interactional competence: Please refer to Table 6.5.2</p>	<p>1. Develop interactional competence:</p> <p>Teachers</p> <p>a. Develop a series of teaching pedagogies aimed at developing students' interactive competence</p> <p>Develop teacher training programmes to help the EEC teachers grasp the pedagogies</p> <p>Students</p> <p>b. Develop learning resources to raise students' awareness of what is interactive competence and how to improve international competence</p> <p>The students complete a short self-reflection form regarding intercultural competence after each synchronous lesson</p> <p>2. Develop sociocultural competence:</p> <p>a. Develop a series of teaching pedagogies aimed at developing students' sociocultural competence</p> <p>Develop a teacher training programme to help the EEC teachers grasp the pedagogies</p> <p>Students</p> <p>b. Develop learning resources to raise students' awareness of what is sociocultural competence and how to improve it</p> <p>The students complete a short self-reflection form regarding sociocultural competence after each synchronous lesson</p> <p>3. Develop linguistic competence</p> <p>Develop linguistic competence explicitly through asynchronous learning and implicitly through synchronous learning</p>
How to assess the progress and evaluate the course	Designing an assessment plan for learner's progress	<p>1. IELTS general writing test (Task 1)</p> <p>2. Presentation with a focus on Q&A</p> <p>Both tests were conducted in the university English lessons</p>	<p>Continue exploring tests that cannot just evaluate interactional competence and sociocultural competence but also be presented in a way that simulates real-life communication</p> <p>Written test: Exploring other conflict contexts that the students are familiar with, etc.</p> <p>Speaking test: Small-group discussion on a topic; role play; debate, etc.</p>

Data-collection plan for evaluation of the course	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The same procedure as RC3 2. Adapted questionnaire questions to reflect the change of RC4. Added some questions in the interview to triangulate the findings to RQ1 and questionnaire (e.g. the top three achievements of the EEC course) 	Further develop questionnaire items to reflect the change of the EEC course and find out more about learners' perceptions of the course features contributing to the development of their communicative competence and the impact on their real life
Delivering time of the course		
Course structure	Please see Figure 10.5	
Course features	<p>Pre-lesson preparation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sent more selective and authentic learning materials via QQ group to the students at least five days before the synchronous lesson 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students would like the preparation resources to be released at least one week before the delivering of the next lesson 2. Be more selective about reducing the number of preparation resources
	<p>Warming-up time (the first 30 minutes):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students were asked to host the presentation with a focus on the Q&A section in turn 2. Awareness was raised that the questions should mainly be given to the presenter and everyone should follow the turn-taking rule to ensure every student has an approximately equal chance to interact in the lesson 3. Although the invited specialised English speakers were invited to attend this part of the lesson in order to give the students constructive feedback, they were mostly delayed to join this part of the lesson because of technical problems 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students welcomed the opportunity to host the presentation with a focus on the Q&A section. This could be continued in the future study. 2. Arrange technicians to assist the invited English speaker and students to connect to the synchronous learning platform 3. Train the invited English speaker to give constructive feedback 4. Exploring other forms of warming-up activities. For example, debate, role play, group discussion on a topic, instant 5 minutes writing and then sharing with one another.
	<p>Main lesson (60 minutes):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main lessons were delivered by a number of specialised foreign English speakers 2. I modelled how to host the main lesson for a few lessons and then let more able students host the main lesson in turn to play the role of the Chinese English teacher 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a bank of specialised English speakers with their specialised areas 2. The main lesson still needs to be hosted by the Chinese English teacher, as even the able students are likely to struggle to play this role 3. Prepare PowerPoint for each topic to assist the learning. This could be drafted by the course designer but edited by the invited English speakers.
	<p>Plenary time (15 minutes):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students asked Chinese English teachers questions regarding the main lesson 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Apart from answering students' questions, the Chinese English teacher could also use this opportunity to organise students to have a discussion/debate on one or two questions related to the main lesson 2. Develop pedagogies to make the best use of the Chinese English teacher
	<p>Post-lesson follow-up:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The same as RC3 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop learning website/apps to help the students to reinforce learning that can develop their linguistic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence
	<p>Topics:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The students continued showing more interest in the following topics:

		<p>1. Matched the foreign English teachers with their specialised topics</p> <p>2. Continued exploring new topics. However, because the priority of this research cycle was to match foreign English teachers with their specialised topics, the topics delivered in RC4 were less spontaneous.</p>	<p>a. The topics relate to their real life</p> <p>b. The topics that the native English teachers are specialised in</p> <p>c. The spontaneous topics happening at the delivery time</p> <p>2. The students showed less interest in the following topics:</p> <p>a. American and British music in 1930s–1970s (more interest in modern music)</p> <p>b. The topics that they have been taught before at the University or school</p> <p>3. Maybe a large bank of English speakers should be developed in the teacher human resources before the delivery of the EEC course.</p>
	Technology features	<p>Technologies to support synchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Leading synchronous learning platform: Skype</p> <p>2. Back-up synchronous learning platform: QQ discussion room</p>	<p>1. Continue exploring the latest video conferencing platform, which can provide a more stable connection in a group conference in China. For example, Zoom.</p> <p>2. To solve the connection problem, some administration procedures may need to be undertaken to get permission from the Chinese government to avoid Internet interruption such as the firewall</p> <p>3. The Chinese English teachers and students should be trained on how to access and use the virtual conference classroom before the EEC lesson</p> <p>4. A technician should also be assigned to give instant support if the connection problem occurs</p>
		<p>Technologies to support asynchronous learning:</p> <p>1. Used QQ group to replace the self-designed learning website to send students learning resources</p> <p>2. Continued using WeChat and email to support social media communication</p>	<p>1. Develop a self-designed learning website/app for asynchronous learning</p> <p>2. WeChat may continue to be used as a social media platform to extend the influence of the EEC course on students implicitly through the teacher’s personal interests and hobbies</p> <p>3. Update asynchronous learning platform to be in line with the development of AI technology</p>

Having presented findings from all four research cycles in the previous four chapters, the following one focuses on discussion of all the presented findings.

Part V

13. Discussion of findings

The EEC course was designed to develop Chinese learners' communicative competence in English through design-based research. In this chapter I discuss the findings obtained from the development and implementation of the intervention from RC1 to RC4. First, I discuss the development of the understanding of the concept of communicative competence, and the corresponding assessment of this concept, over the research cycles (Section 13.1). Next, I discuss the findings related to each of the research questions (RQ1 in Section 13.2; RQ2 in Section 13.3). I conclude with a reflection on the teaching, learning and course design theories that underpinned the development of the EEC course and discuss the insights I obtained from conducting the study (Section 13.4).

13.1 The understanding of the concept and the assessment of communicative competence

The notion of communicative competence was the principal concept of this study. Figure 13.1 shows the development of the understanding of the concept of communicative competence from RC1 to R4. Similar to Chomsky's (1957) understanding of communicative competence, this study only developed the understanding of the concept of communicative competence as linguistic competence in RC1. There were two reasons for this focus. First, in RC1 it was still unclear to me which sub-competencies the EEC course could develop. Second, I could not find existing assessment criteria to assess any other sub-competencies in RC1, apart from IELTS speaking and writing assessment criteria, which were mainly assessing linguistic competence.

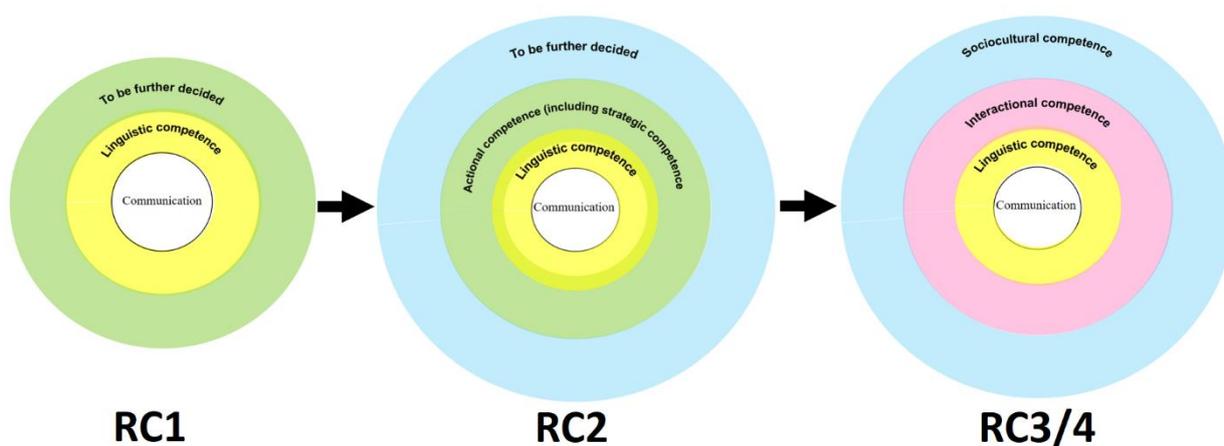


Figure 13.1: The development of the understanding of the concept of communicative competence from RC1 to RC4

After analysing the findings of RC1, in terms of which elements of communicative competence the students perceived the EEC course helped them develop, sociocultural competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), actional competence (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995) and strategic competence (Canale, 1983) were identified as the three main elements. To simplify the study, the elements of strategic competence were combined with actional competence. Regarding sociocultural competence, there were few existing assessment criteria available to assess the related sociocultural competence of these cultural elements, and it was much more challenging to develop these assessment criteria than it was in actional competence. Therefore, the sociocultural aspect was not considered in RC2.

However, the findings in RC2 continued to show that the EEC course was contributing more elements of sociocultural competence to the students' development in communicative competence. There was a pressing need to develop assessment criteria for sociocultural competence. The findings of RC2 also suggested that interactional competence would be a more appropriate name to replace actional competence, as "interaction" was often used in students' comments.

According to the chronological evolution of communicative competence (Figure 2.2) listed by Celce-Murcia et al. (2007) and the model of Bachman and Palmer (Figure 2.1, 1996), communicative competence was divided into more and more sub-competencies. Although this detailed division could help the understanding of the components of communicative competence in a more precise way, too many sub-competencies would not help the design of the course and the assessment. Dividing communicative competence into too many sub-competencies would make the course design less focused and therefore less effective, which would also generate more assessment criteria, and hence make marking more complicated too. This is in line with the findings of Bagarić and Djigunović (2007) that, despite the comprehensive models of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996), many researchers still use the simple model of Canale and Swain (1980).

As indicated in Chapter 2, the EEC course was open to the model of communicative competence at the beginning of the study. Through four research cycles, the study could claim that it supports more the model of Hymes (1967), which classifies communicative competence into linguistic competence and sociolinguistic competence. However, in order to build a bridge between linguistic competence and sociocultural competence, enabling learners to see their improvement in smaller steps, interactional competence was also included as another sub-

competence. Therefore, the model of communicative competence developed through the EEC course is composed of three sub-competencies: linguistic competence, interactional competence and sociocultural competence. Figure 13.2 shows the evolution of communicative competence, which supported this study to generate its own model of communicative competence.

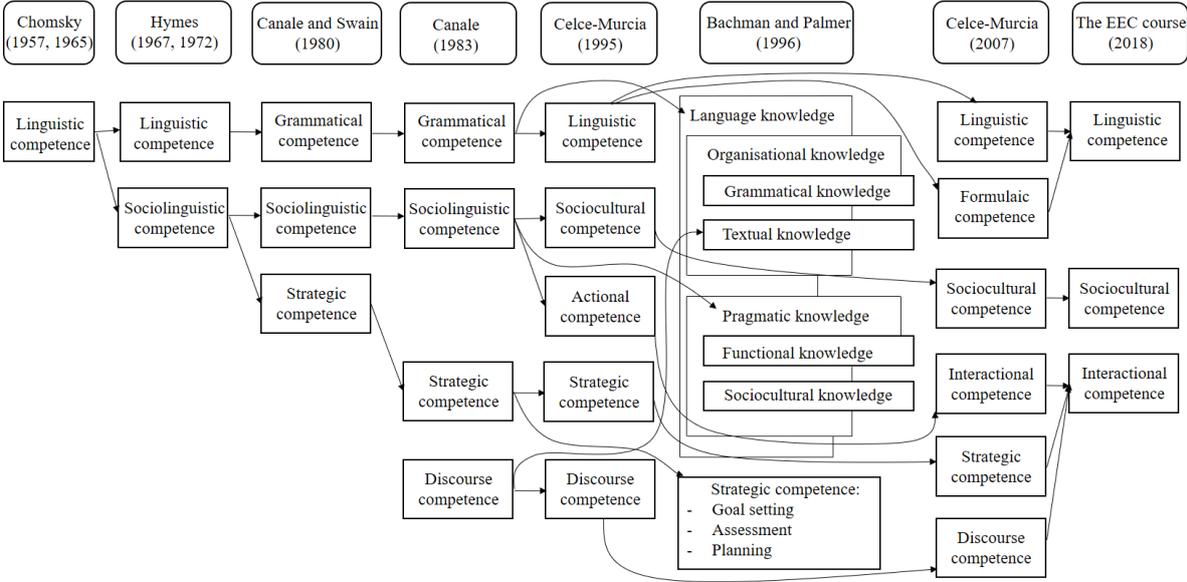


Figure 13.2: The evolution of the communicative competence models in this study

This study defines communicative competence as follows:

Communicative competence is the ability to communicate the communication goals effectively and appropriately with the interlocutors through the use of language, as well as personal qualities.

Communication goals do not necessarily mean specific goals but they could involve developing a relationship with the interlocutors or simply enjoying the communication process. Language means not just linguistic language, but also body language or any other forms of language. Personal qualities refer to any qualities that a person has that could impact the deep root or performance of communicative competence.

Overall, this study demonstrated an example of how the understanding of the concept of communicative competence was developed through developing a communicative competence course. This study shows that development of the understanding of the concept of

communicative competence could be through the integration of reviewing the previous literature, developing the assessment tools and criteria, and developing a communicative competence course (Figure 13.3). Not only the concept of communicative competence that it developed, but also the approach to develop this concept, could be regarded as being among the contributions of this study to the literature on the concept of communicative competence.

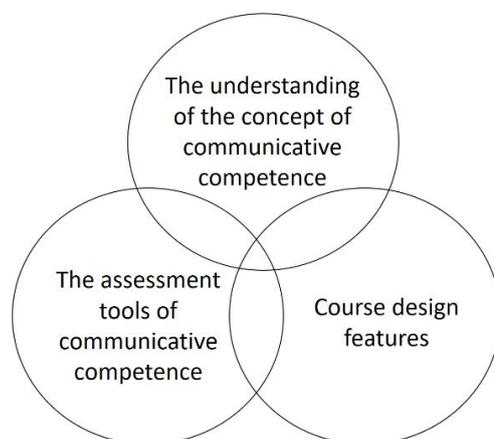


Figure 13.3: The mutual effects of the development of the understanding of the concepts of communicative competence, assessment (tools and assessment criteria) and course design and implementation of the EEC course from RC1 to RC4

13.2 Findings related to research question 1 (RQ1)

RQ1: Does the EEC course improve learners’ linguistic, interactional and sociocultural communicative competence in English, in comparison with learners undertaking the usual university course in English? If so, in what ways?

13.2.1 Development of assessment tools

Since there were few best-practice assessment tools and criteria to assess sociocultural competence through actual performance rather than self-reflection or indirect assessment (Deardorff, 2016), assessing communicative competence was one of the most challenging areas of this study. The development process of assessment of this study supports the test design cycle of Fulcher (2010), namely that a test design should start from identifying the test purpose to guide the rest of the test design cycles. This study also shows that even identifying the test purpose may involve a few research cycles for a newly designed course. Through the trial and improvement of assessment tools, each research cycle discovered one or two assessment principles (Figure 13.4).

Initially in this study it was not clear which aspects of communicative competence should be assessed based on the lack of understanding of the concept of communicative competence. Consequently, the test purpose was not clear. As Fulcher (2010) identified, without clarification of a clear and practical test purpose, there would be a high chance of design chaos in the end. As a result, the tests in RC1 and RC2 were too complicated to be conducted with the comparison group. Consequently, both RC1 and RC2 failed to collect the data from the comparison group. Learning from this experience, the test purpose focused on interactional competence and sociocultural competence, as these two competencies represented the key features of the EEC course in RC3 and RC4. Two tests, the IELTS general writing test (Task I) and the presentation with a focus on Q&A (PQA) test, proved to be practical to assess some aspects of interactional and sociocultural competence, in addition to linguistic competence.

Although Walsh (2012) and Skehan (2010) supported peer interactional assessment, and in fact Cambridge English Assessment has adopted peer assessment in its official speaking tests, East et al. (2016) argued that peer assessment was too time-consuming, which was not practical for the classroom teacher to conduct in the limited lesson time. Therefore, this study used a PQA (presentation with a focus on Q&A) test. This was because presentation was already part of the original university assessment. The only difference was that the EEC course required adding a few minutes to conduct Q&A after the presentation, which proved to be manageable and practical. In addition, delivering a presentation and answering the audience's questions was one of the most popular academic uses of English for Chinese university students. Figure 11.4 illustrates this process.

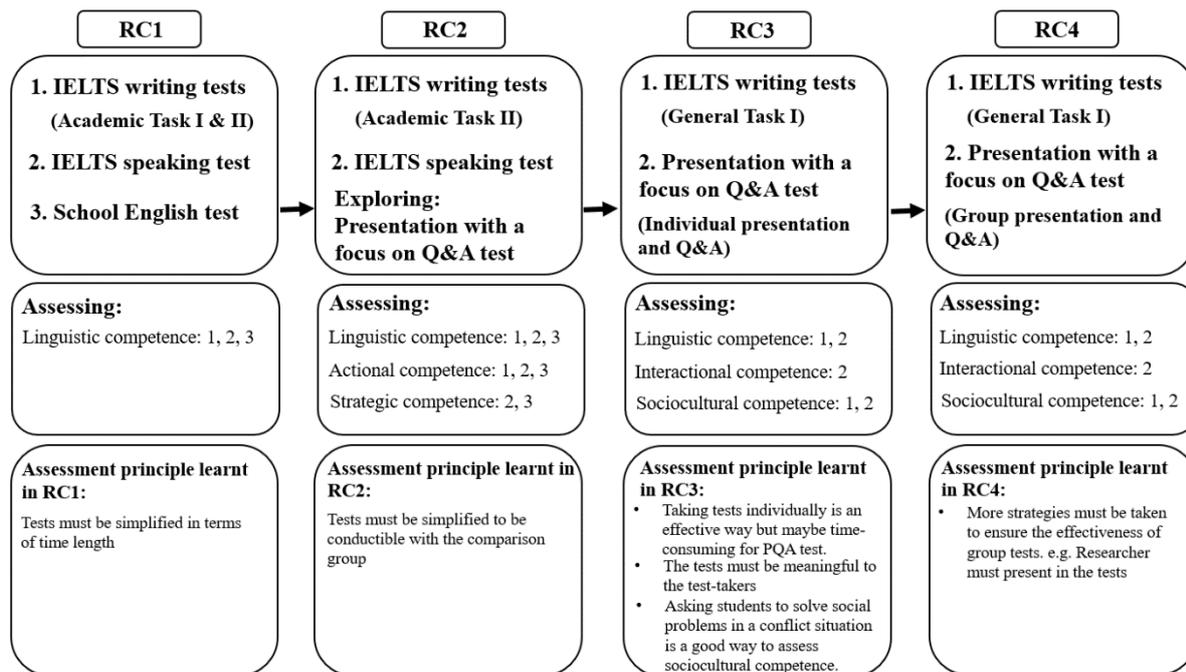


Figure 13.4: The development of the assessment tools of the EEC course from RC1 to RC4

An interesting phenomenon was noticed: despite the choice of the PQA test and the writing test of this study, for the reasons stated above, the presentation test and writing test were also two of the top three most popular assessment tools selected by Chinese teachers of English to assess intercultural competence (Gu, 2015). It was also interesting to notice that there was a slight problem delivering and collecting the data for the presentation and writing tests. However, the process of conducting the Q&A test was more problematic than the presentation test and writing test. This suggests that if the research requires classroom teachers to conduct the tests, these tests should be in test formats that they are familiar with. Otherwise, any other formats of testing that classroom teachers have not conducted before should be undertaken by the research team.

13.2.2 Development of assessment criteria for sociocultural and interactional communicative competencies

In comparison to the assessment criteria for the three sub-communicative competencies, the assessment criteria for linguistic competence were the most well developed and widely applied. Based on three groups of interactional features identified by May (2011), it was also not difficult to create assessment criteria for interactional competence (Appendix XVII). However, as discussed in Section 13.2.1, there are few successful practical assessment tools to assess sociocultural competence, especially regarding how learners think and act socioculturally (Deardorff, 2016). This was mostly due to the lack of assessment criteria to assess these

performances against (Deardorff, 2016). As a result, assessment criteria had to be developed for this study in order to address this issue.

The overall approaches to generating the assessment criteria were through reviewing the concepts of sociocultural competence and analysing students’ writing tests. As the current literature only reflects a partial picture of the assessment of sociocultural competence (Deardorff, 2016), it is necessary to integrate different but relevant literature to explore the possibility of generating a wider picture of communicative competence. The literature employed in this study was the literature about the concepts of sociocultural competence and the Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS) developed by Matsumoto et al. (2001). Figure 13.5 summarises the integration of the two parts of the theories to form the assessment criteria in this study.

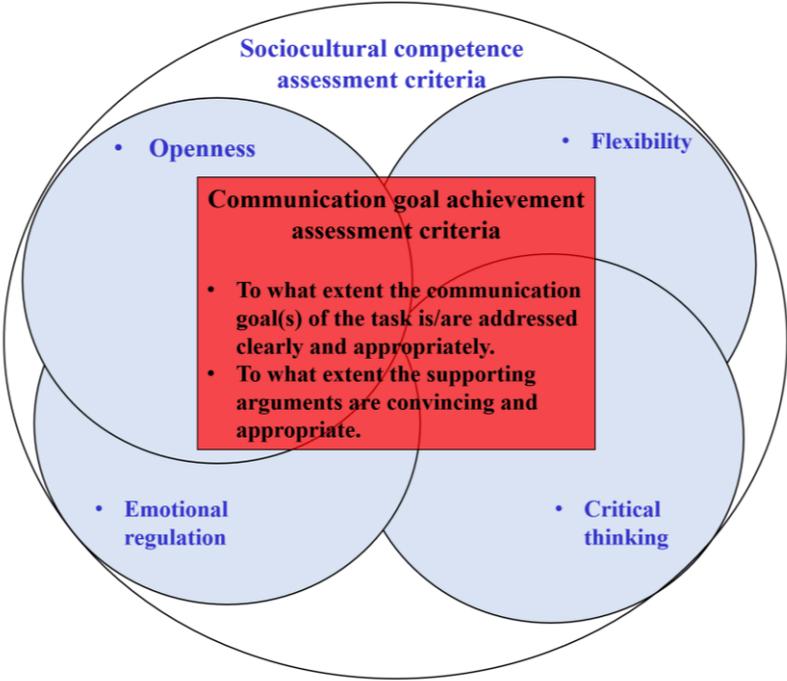


Figure 13.5: Structure of assessment criteria for sociocultural competence

The main assessment criterion (highlighted in red) assesses the extent to which the communicator achieves the communication goal, which was generated from the review of the concepts of sociocultural competence. This criterion was supported by the personal quality criteria, highlighted in blue, which were developed from the ICAPS (Matsumoto et al., 2001). The colours and shapes were specifically chosen to show the function of the assessment criteria. Without the blue-coloured personal qualities, the communication goal(s) could still be achieved. However, the communication goal(s) could be achieved in an aggressive way, which could

create other follow-up problems because of the unpleasant communication feelings. Therefore, this was represented by the red colour and rectangular shape. The surrounding sociocultural personal qualities, openness, emotional regulation, flexibility and critical thinking, could ease the tension through more consideration of the interlocutors' views and feelings; therefore, they were represented in circles. Integration of the assessment criteria of achieving communication goals and personal qualities addressed the issue of assessing learners' thinking and acting in a sociocultural environment. The four personal qualities – openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking – reflect whether an individual can think socioculturally. The performance in both communication goal achievement and personal qualities represents whether an individual can act socioculturally.

13.2.3 The findings of the assessment of communicative competence

As the assessment tools of RC1 were focusing on linguistic competence and those of RC2 on actional competence, in addition to the failure to collect test data from the comparison group in RC2, the only test data that could be used to analyse the progress of learners' interactional competence and sociocultural competence was from RC3 and RC4. The findings of RC3 and RC4 (Table 13.1) showed that the intervention-group students made significant progress in sociocultural and interactional competence in both cycles. The students also showed significant progress in linguistic competence in RC3, but not in RC4. This might be because of the effect of the IELTS writing test, as RC3 only included the PQA test, while RC4 also incorporated the IELTS general writing test. One possible explanation was that the EEC course did not emphasise writing. Consequently, the students did not show sufficient progress in the writing test, which narrowed the difference between the two groups. However, the sociocultural competence reflected in the IELTS general writing test justified keeping this test despite its impact on linguistic competence.

Table 13.1: Comparison of the progress between the intervention group (IG) and the comparison group (CG) in RC3 and RC4

		Linguistic competence		Interactional competence		Sociocultural competence	
		IG	CG	IG	CG	IG	CG
RC3	Mean progress	0.85	0.40	0.92	0.05	1.06	-0.39
	S.D.	0.632	0.830	0.814	1.300	0.750	0.656
	Sig. (2-tailed)	p=0.027		p=0.000		p=0.000	
RC4	Mean progress	0.49	0.10	0.94	-0.13	0.75	-0.24
	S.D.	0.235	0.615	0.320	0.479	0.496	0.418
	Sig. (2-tailed)	p=0.064		p=0.003		p=0.004	

- **Interactional competence**

The intervention group showed significant progress in all three sub-categories of interactional competence, and the intervention group perceived that they had mostly improved their interactional competence in expressing themselves clearly, using alternative approaches and asking interlocutors questions both clearly and sensibly. However, they also perceived that they were struggling to understand the meaning of the interlocutors, possibly because they were unable to understand the language or the culture itself and sometimes the way the interlocutors expressed themselves.

- **Sociocultural competence**

Out of emotional regulation, openness, flexibility and critical thinking (Matsumoto et al., 2001), the students perceived that the EEC course particularly helped them to improve their openness, as they were more able to appreciate different cultures and to welcome new experiences and thoughts. However, some students also claimed that they did not feel they had improved their flexibility, as they were unable to transfer the new culture and ideas to their own life.

The contrast between the students feeling that they were able to welcome new cultures and ideas and feeling that they were unable to integrate these into their own life might reflect a few issues. The students suggested that the culture discussed in the EEC course might not fit into the existing Chinese culture. However, the students who had studied overseas after attending the EEC course spoke highly of the impact of the EEC course on their sociocultural behaviour overseas, which was to immerse themselves in the overseas culture. This suggests that the EEC

course has more impact on students who aim to study, work or live overseas, or work for overseas companies in China.

- **Linguistic competence**

As the EEC course was not explicitly designed to teach linguistic competence, the improvement the students showed in this study was less significant than in interactional and sociocultural competence. The students' perception of the three highest achievements of the EEC course also supported the above findings. It can be seen that the strength of the course lay in developing students' sociocultural and interactional competencies rather than linguistic competence. This study supports the findings of Alamri (2018) that CLT might risk neglecting the importance of linguistic competence, and focusing on communication itself is not sufficient in linguistic learning. Special strategies should be taken to amend this weakness of CLT. The findings might support the claim of Dörnyei (2009) that implicit learning is effective for infants but not for adults. There should be a balance between implicit and explicit learning to achieve optimal benefits.

13.2.4 Implications for the assessment of communicative competence

This study supports the claim of Deardorff (2016) that no single test can assess a test-taker's communicative competence in all aspects. For instance, someone could be very good at communicating with peers in pairs but struggle to talk with peers in a group; someone could be very comfortable talking to people he/she is familiar with but find it challenging to speak to people when they first meet; someone could be very good at chatting with friends but not good at solving conflicts; someone could communicate very well in his/her workplace but struggle to communicate with his/her family. Therefore, it is essential for the assessment of communicative competence to clarify its limitations.

Although this study shows that it is possible to assess learners' sociocultural competence through them dealing with accommodation conflicts and presenting and answering the audience's questions, the tests do not claim that they can assess an individual's performance in other contexts. Therefore, for future research in this area, it might be useful to establish a bank of tests to evaluate different aspects of communicative competence in different contexts. For example, the tests for communicative competence could be classified into areas of:

- Daily-life communication
- Conflict communication
- Group communication

- Presentation and Q&A communication
- Speech communication
- Social communication
- Workplace communication
- Relationship communication
- Parent–child communication
- Public communication

The above could be supported by the collection of assessment forms:

- Presentation with Q&A
- Role play
- Written test
- Problem-solving test
- Questionnaire
- Interview
- Portfolio
- Peer-group discussion

(Gu, 2015; Skehan, 2010)

Of course, it is neither necessary nor practical to conduct all of the above tests to assess a test-taker's general communicative competence. However, it might be useful to have a collection and systematic tests to make it convenient for test users to select the ones that are most relevant to them in a particular context.

Despite the long list of tests for communicative competence, learners' performance in real-life communication is the ultimate test of the effectiveness of the EEC course. According to Liu and Evans (2016), assessment should be regarded as a tool, not only to assess learners' prior learning but also to inform teaching and learning. The assessment criteria for sociocultural competence developed in this study could play an important role in guiding teaching and learning, as well as supporting learners' development of communicative competence in real-life practice. In other words, the course design could use assessment criteria of communicative competence as a tool to inform the development of the course features to help learners improve their communicative competence.

13.3 Findings regarding RQ2

RQ2: How do learners perceive the course features of the EEC course, which influence their progress in linguistic, intercultural and sociocultural communicative competence in English?

The students were asked to share their opinions about:

- The overall lesson structure, including each part of the lesson
- The content/topics
- Teachers
- Technology features
- The distinctive course design features

First, I discuss the distinctive course design features perceived by the students (Section 13.3.1). This is followed by a discussion of students' perceptions of the key features of the EEC course (Section 13.3.2), the topics (Section 13.3.3) and the technology (Section 13.3.4). I finish with an exploration of the implications of the findings related to RQ2 for future studies (Section 13.3.5).

13.3.1 The distinctive course design features perceived by the students

The students of the intervention group enjoyed the EEC course in all four research cycles. They identified three key course features that differentiated it from other English courses they had attended:

- The interaction feature
- The aim of the EEC course (in RC3 and RC4)
- The specialities of the invited English speaker (IES) on the course (in RC4)

Although the students were not aware of complex educational design theory, they in fact identified some features of complex educational design theory that were applied in this study (Table 13.2). First, corresponding to the constant interaction features of the complex educational design theory (Bertin & Narcy-Combes, 2012), the students recognised that the EEC course was highly interactive among teachers and students. Second, the students identified that the aim of the EEC course was not exam-based but interests-based. This was in line with boosting interactions between “educational practices and students’ real life” (Freire, 2013: 176). Third, the students pointed out that inviting different IES to teach specialised topics was another distinctive feature of the EEC course. This corresponded to establishing “genuine partnership

among teachers and students” (Freire, 2013: 176).

Table 13.2: Comparison of the perceived EEC course features by the students and the complex educational design theory

The EEC course features	Complex educational design theory
The interaction feature	Facilitating constant interactions between sub-systems (Bertin & Narcy-Combes, 2012)
The aim of the EEC course (in RC3 and RC4) is to help students improve their communicative competence in real life	Boosting interactions between “educational practices and students’ real life” (Freire, 2013: 176)
The specialities of the invited English speakers (IES) on the course (in RC4)	Boosting interactions between “educational practices and students’ real life” (Freire, 2013: 176)

The main challenge of applying the complex educational design course model (Freire, 2012) was finding or supporting the invited English speakers (IES) to deliver the updated topics to a high standard. The IES struggled to teach some of the unfamiliar topics (RC3), and this might be the reason why the students did not identify the IES of the EEC course as a distinguishing feature of the course in RC3. This suggests that it is important to invite different specialised IES to enable the students to talk to a variety of teachers with different backgrounds. Nevertheless, consideration should also be given to letting an IES teach more than one lesson, as the students also mentioned the lack of opportunity to build a relationship with the IES. However, this required storing a considerably large bank of IES and knowing their specialist areas. If the EEC course were to expand to benefit more students, a teacher resource department should play an important role in enabling the application of the complex educational design model.

13.3.2 Course structures

Despite the suggestion of Macaro (2000) regarding the length of lesson time being less than 50 minutes, this study showed that the EEC lesson time could be stretched to 1 hour, 45 minutes. Figure 13.6 shows the development of the course structures and teachers of the EEC course from RC1 to RC4.

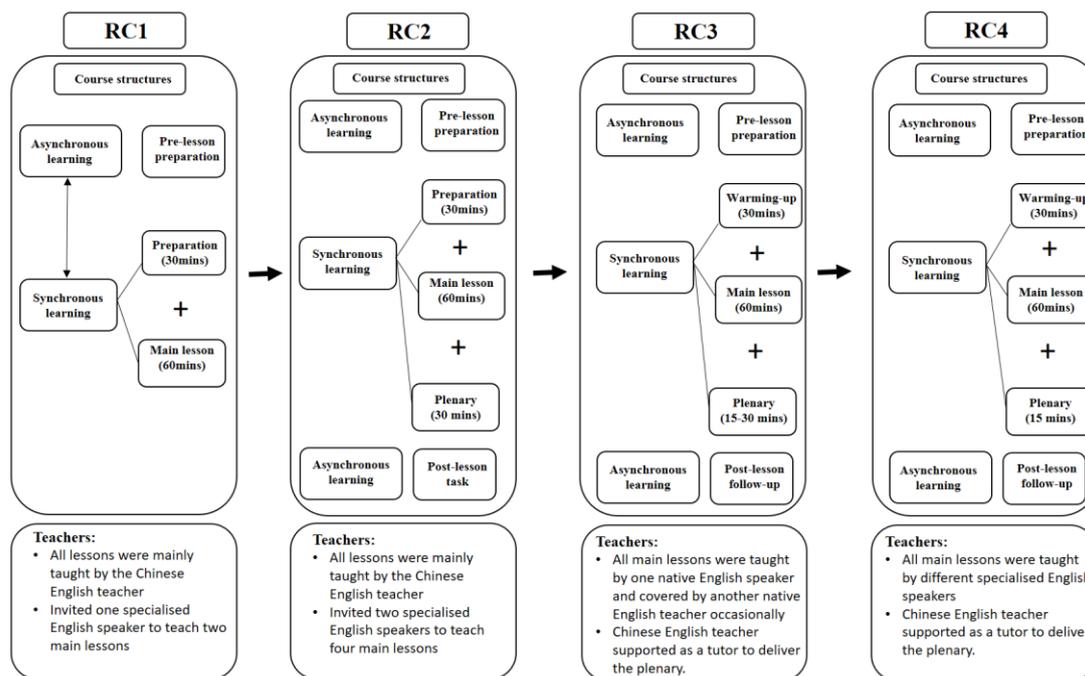


Figure 13.6: The development of the course structures and teachers of the EEC course from RC1 to RC4

Pre-lesson preparation/ Post-lesson follow-up

The students perceived the preparation for the lesson and post-lesson exploration as ways to develop their autonomous learning skills (Hamilton, 2013; Fisher et al., 2004). As a result of the topics being based on the students' interests and the most recent news, the learning resources of the EEC course were all authentic. This was also to prepare students to familiarise themselves with real-life language (Lee, 1995). However, the students identified that some of the learning materials did not entirely match what the IES were teaching in the lesson. Therefore, these materials did not prepare them very well for the lesson. This highlighted that authentic resources may not necessarily mean good materials. A good way to find good authentic resources, which “encourage learners to learn” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1992), could be through a recommendation of the IES and approved by the course designer. In this way, it could encourage the IES to integrate more of the learning resources in the main lesson.

Warming-up

The presentation with Q&A section was designed to improve the students' ability to answer others' challenging questions spontaneously (Walsh, 2012; Dörnyei, 1991; Pachler et al., 2014). The students liked chairing this part of the lesson to strengthen their sense of ownership of their learning (Hamilton, 2013). This was also one of the main parts of the EEC course to develop students' interactional competence, as well as sociocultural competence. Different from

traditional language lessons, which mostly employ teacher–pupil interaction, this part of the lesson provided a practical example of how to organise pupil–pupil interactional relationships (Pachler et al., 2014:200). In fact, this warming-up section could also be replaced by other forms of activities, such as debating, asking students to share their real-life communication stories or problems, and so on.

Main lesson

The main lesson was the most essential part of the EEC course, the aim of which was to develop students' sociocultural competence, as well as interactional competence. The students enjoyed the main lesson based on being able to have conversations with the IES with different specialities and backgrounds, on being able to open their minds to different cultures through discussion, and on being able to challenge themselves to go out of their comfort zone.

These findings were in line with the features of sociocultural competence promoted by the EEC course, which suggested that it was effective in developing students' understanding of the interlocutor's culture (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006), opening their minds (Matsumoto et al., 2001) and developing critical thinking skills (Matsumoto et al., 2001). However, this study also shows that the EEC course had less impact on students' flexibility. Strategies should be taken to address this issue.

One of the main problems that the students at a lower English level identified was that they felt they did not have sufficient opportunities to speak in the lesson because they felt some other students were far better at speaking in the main lessons. In contrast, some higher-performing students also complained that they felt some students were not following the conversations with the IES, which was embarrassing and deferring their learning. This was in line with the findings of Lee (2018) that higher-performing students in English tend to communicate more and produce high-quality tasks, and students with lower performance in English tend to struggle even to get basic conversations correct. Although the EEC course included strategies designed to ensure that every student had opportunities to speak in the lesson, there was still an uneven level of participation, as some students naturally wanted to contribute to the discussion, while others, especially the low performers, were trying to hide more from the conversations.

This suggests that there is still room for the EEC course to improve in this regard. There are a few different models to be further explored. The first model is to group similar English levels of students in the same group and then compare this with the second model, which is to mix up

the students with English levels but request that students take different strategies to deal with the difference. For instance, higher-performing students are requested to pay more attention to turn-taking rules and take care of lower-performing students through encouraging or helping them when necessary. On the other hand, lower-performing students are requested to overcome emotional barriers, and not to be afraid of asking questions when they do not understand, making mistakes and speaking their thoughts. Although there were similar studies on comparing the learning progress of mixed-ability groups and ability groups (Linchevski & Kutscher, 1998; Francis, et al., 2016), which grouping works better in this online communicative competence course is something that still needs to be explored.

Corresponding to the principle of CLT (Nunan, 1989), the EEC course emphasised communication and paid less attention to linguistic competence in the main lesson. As the main lesson was attempting to produce a real communication, the error correction was reduced to a minimum to avoid a harmful psychological impact on learners (Lightbown, 1998). In this main lesson, the invited English speaker (IES) led the main discussions, and the Chinese English teacher played the role of facilitator. As Harmer (1982) suggested, CLT is not throwing learners into a swimming pool of communication to let them sink or swim; indeed, the Chinese English teacher supported students' learning in the main lesson through texting the keywords or uploading relevant pictures spontaneously alongside the main foreign teacher's teaching.

According to Hu (2012), the main barriers to applying CLT in China were the "teachers' lack of language proficiency and sociolinguistic competence" and the hierarchical Chinese culture of learning. The EEC course overcame these two main barriers and showed a practical way to integrate CALL to assist the delivery of CLT in China.

Plenary

The plenary was the part where the students felt free to ask the Chinese teacher questions that they might feel uncomfortable asking the IES. This design was in line with Harmer (1982), who indicated that CLT does not seek to throw learners into a swimming pool to let them sink or swim; teachers should also provide learners with feedback and support (Alamri, 2018).

13.3.3 Topics

In line with Freire's (2012) complex educational design model, the topics of the EEC course were not fixed but open to the interests of the students (Freire, 2012; Walsh, 2003), and some of the topics in each cycle varied according to what was happening in the world at the time. The

findings showed that the students were more interested in the topics about western culture and life that were related to their own life, such as university life, making friends, housing for young people and travelling around the world. In other words, they liked the topics to be linked to what they could talk about. The students also responded better to the spontaneous topics happening at the time than to other topics. This finding supports Vygotsky's (1997) theory of connecting learners' interests to their real life, and the statement of Scarino (2010) that teaching the culture of a foreign language should not be separated from students' mother culture, identities and values.

Although other English courses may also teach the above topics, the students perceived that the EEC course addressed these topics in a more open and enriched way. Therefore, it was about not just the topics but also the thoughts behind the topics to provoke students' critical thinking, openness, emotional regulation and flexibility (Matsumoto et al., 2001).

The choice of the topics also reflected the needs of the students in this study. Richterich (1983) noted that learners may not be clear about what they need and may not be able to describe their needs accurately, and so the course designers chose some topics that were quite remote from the students' life, such as John Lennon and Yoko Ono and the Beatles. It was observed that, for these topics, the students showed less interest and only a few students continued exploring the topics after the lesson. Some other topics initiated by the specialised English teachers, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and American and British music (1930s–1960s), also had a low rating in the questionnaire. This further showed that the choice of topics should not be based on the speciality of the English teachers but rather on students' interests.

13.3.4 The technology features of the EEC course

The development of the technology features of the EEC course is shown in Figure 13.7.

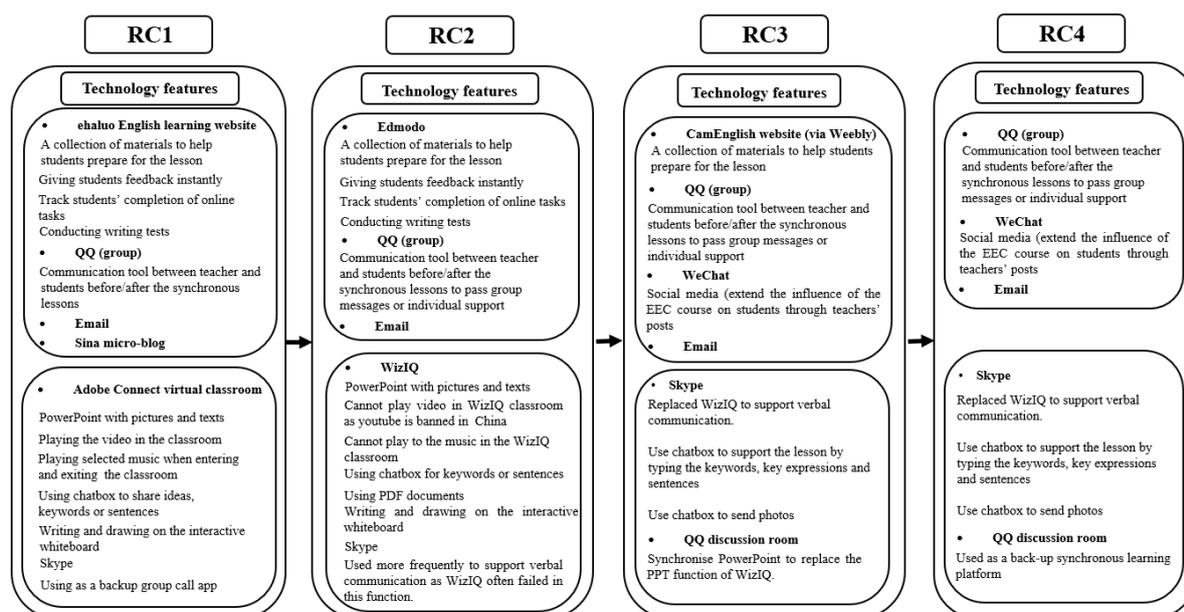


Figure 13.7: The development of the technology features of the EEC course from RC1 to RC4

- **Synchronous learning**

The EEC course started employing synchronous learning platforms, from the luxurious functions of the Adobe Connect virtual classroom (RC1) to the WizIQ classroom (RC2 and RC3), Skype (RC1–RC4) and QQ (RC4), and then back to Skype (RC4). This finding supports the claim of Hensman (2012) that Skype enjoys unbeatable popularity among other similar software and apps. However, it was far from ideal in supporting undisrupted online real-time lessons, which was the biggest problem of the EEC course, leading to student frustration and reducing students' enjoyment of the course (Koehler & Mishra, 2008).

This journey also confirmed that, because of the great firewall (Li, 2008, 2009) of China, Skype seemed a more effective platform to deliver synchronous lessons to Chinese students from abroad at the time. Although Skype still has some technical problems, it has fewer problems than many other synchronous platforms. Nevertheless, this still depends on the policy of the Chinese government regarding communication software. In fact, by the time of submitting this thesis, Skype has also been removed from the app stores in China, which means that Skype is no longer an option to deliver synchronous lessons. Nevertheless, there are new synchronous conferencing platforms, such as Zoom and Webex Meet, which could be considered for use in the future.

- **Asynchronous learning**

The study established a completely self-designed website (Ehaluo) in RC1, employed Edmodo in RC2, produced the CamEnglish website via Weebly in RC3, and explored the QQ group in RC1–RC4 as the asynchronous learning platforms of the EEC course. The findings show that students preferred the self-designed websites Ehaluo and CamEnglish as platforms to present learning resources because a self-designed website is a simple platform to display all of the course's learning resources in one place. However, it was noticed that, to make the learning website and app accessible to students in China, the EEC course had to register both and use a server based in China to reduce the problem of accessibility.

The QQ group proved to be one of the most convenient asynchronous learning platforms for students to receive notices and communicate after lessons at the time, which was in line with the findings of Chen and Tang (2011). Sina-microblog and WeChat were also tried as asynchronous learning communication platforms, although the students did not show much interaction in these platforms. Nevertheless, this does not mean that WeChat will not replace or support QQ as an asynchronous social learning platform, as it is gaining more popularity than QQ. The EEC course must be kept open to the development of technologies and update their platforms accordingly.

13.3.5 Implications

- **Implications for the design of the EEC course**

The students identified that the EEC course was not strong enough in helping them to be more flexible and to integrate with the new culture or thoughts. As a communicative language teaching (CLT) based course, this suggests that there is a need to strengthen the link between the EEC course and students' real life. To increase the impact of the EEC course on students' real life, as a complex education design (Freire, 2012), the EEC course could be further expanded to four stages, as below.

Stage 1: Cultivating the foundations of communicative competence

The aim of this stage is to help students break down barriers in order to open up in communication, be able to talk to the IES with specialised backgrounds on the topics and to look at things from different angles. This is the stage for developing students' interactional and sociocultural competence in openness and critical thinking. This study did, in fact, focus on this stage of developing students' communicative competence.

Stage 2: An Individualised programme to develop specific aspects of communicative competence

According to the weakness identified in the first stage, Stage 2 focuses on the specific aspects and skills of the needs of each individual student and organises training courses accordingly. For instance, a student may be identified as weak in responding to the audience's questions, so a course could specifically be designed to develop students' ability to respond to challenging questions using a variety of strategies simultaneously. Other examples are that a student might like to develop communicative competence in an interview scenario, public speech, defending his/her thesis in a viva, developing interpersonal skills, and so on. A course at this stage would offer the student specific training to boost his/her confidence according to individual needs in developing communicative competence.

Stage 3: Developing communicative competence in real life

Stage 3 is designed to encourage and support students in developing their communicative competence through their real-life experience. The students are required to go and communicate with others and share their real-life communication stories in a small group. There is individual support for students when they encounter problems in communication in their overseas study, work or life. There is also a programme to help students develop certain communication skills identified in their real-life communication problems, for instance, how to deal with complex or conflict situations through communication.

Stage 4: Lifelong support to develop communicative competence

As Jacobs and Farrell (2003) suggested, CLT is a lifelong process: even after learners have completed the first three stages of learning, they may still encounter many communication problems in their future life. At this stage, the EEC course builds a network to continuously support learners through sharing posts, audio- or video-clips to address common communication problems or sharing successful communication stories, organising seminars or events related to a variety of communication topics, or continuously supporting learners on an appointment basis when they really need individual support.

The design of these four stages is supported by the scaffolding theory oriented from VST (Vygotsky's sociocultural theory) (Berk, 2001). Overall, Stage 1 and Stage 2 are the stages when teachers set up scaffolding to support learners intensively. Gradually, teachers remove the support of scaffolding from Stage 3 and only offer general and occasional support in Stage 4 to help learners become independent life-long learners in developing communicative

competence.

The aim of the EEC course is not to train learners to be flawless communicators (Carr, 1999). Instead, it values mistakes that learners make in real communication and uses mistakes as learning opportunities. It aims not just to develop learners' communicative strategies to deal with conflicts but also to strengthen their mind power during clashes and crises (Carr, 1999). Dealing with clashes and crises offers one of the best opportunities to develop students' emotional regulation when facing difficulties in real life (Matsumoto et al., 2001).

- **Implications for the technology features of the EEC course**

Synchronous learning

As the synchronous learning platform was shown to be one of the biggest problems of this study, the EEC course should continue exploring synchronous learning platforms and strategies that can deliver smooth lessons in China. However, this problem may only be solved if the EEC course is recognised by the Chinese government, so that the great firewall (Li, 2008, 2009) does not interrupt the synchronous lessons.

Another implication concerns the recording and use of synchronous lessons. As it is not practical to review the whole lesson recording and not easy to pick up the audio- or video-clips related to a particular learner from a whole video-recording file, it might be useful to hire technology that can automatically classify different speakers and even transcribe the audio files into texts. In this way, learners and teachers can listen to their own speaking conveniently and identify areas for improvement. With this technology, problems in linguistic competence could more easily be discovered and addressed.

The consideration behind the above strategy was that it is challenging to find our own linguistic mistakes when we are speaking. If the teacher stops a student to correct his or her mistakes too often, it could severely disrupt the flow of the conversation and discourage students from speaking fluently (Bangs & Cantos, 2004). It is also very time-consuming to transcribe a paragraph of speech by hand. However, new technologies such as XunFei YuJi make it possible to decipher audio file to texts, even though the texts still need to be checked manually.

Asynchronous learning

As a result of limitations of time and funding, this study focused mainly on developing synchronous learning pedagogies; it was discovered that the EEC course was not strong in helping learners to develop linguistic competence. This could be improved through the

development of the asynchronous learning platform, such as an intellectual learning website and app.

The intellectual feature is reflected in how a web or app for mobile devices interacts with learners. For instance, the designed website and app would collect students’ English mistakes in communication and remind students when they make similar mistakes. The students may also use the website or app to write down their notes to consolidate their learning. The whole learning process would be tracked and processed by the database of the website and the app. Every effort made by the students to learn on the website or app would be recorded and awarded when crossing specific milestones. There are many other ideas to develop such an asynchronous learning platform. This could be an important direction for the EEC course in a future study when there are sufficient financial and human resources to put the ideas into practice.

13.4 Reflection on teaching, learning and course design theories

13.4.1 Teaching theory: an integration of CLT and CALL

Further to the discussion of how the EEC course incorporates opportunities for the development of sociocultural competence and interactional competence in Section 6.9, Figure 13.8 and Figure 13.9 summarise the features of the EEC course employed to develop sociocultural competence and interactional competence in this study.

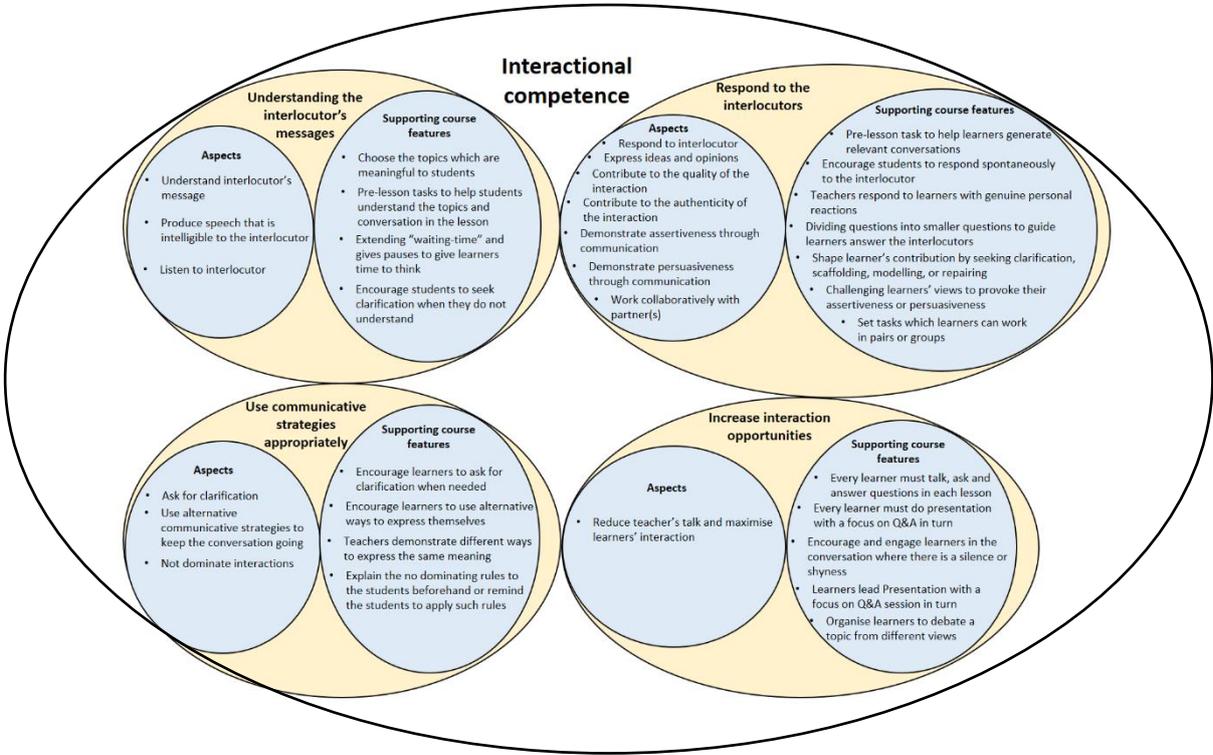


Figure 13.8: Which features of the EEC course were designed to develop different aspects of interactional competence

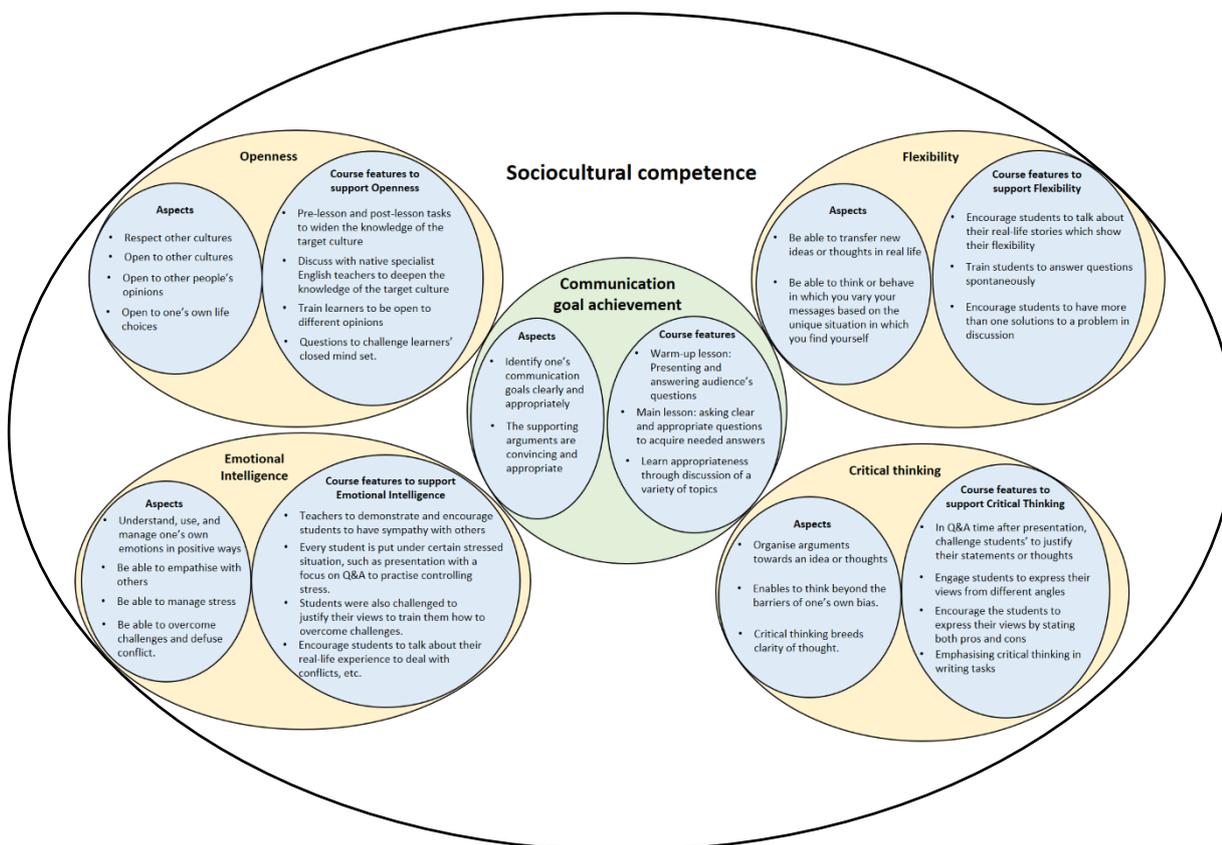


Figure 13.9: Which features of the EEC course were designed to develop different aspects of sociocultural competence

From the above course features, it can be seen that, despite the obstacles of application of CLT (communicative language teaching) in China (Hu, 2012), the EEC course demonstrated a practical approach to applying CLT in teaching Chinese English learners through integrating with communicative CALL, which allows more authentic English communication to take place across the globe (Lee, 2018).

First, the EEC course overcame the obstacles of a “lack of necessary resources” (Hu, 2002: 93). Instead of textbooks, the EEC course used the latest authentic online English resources related to the topics. Regarding the critiques that the CLT does not use textbooks, which provides more systematic and collaborative activities and reduces the workload of teachers, the EEC course developed activities based on authentic resources. Although, as Ozsevik (2010) indicated, developing activities from authentic resources requires substantial preparation; the preparation work was undertaken by the course designer and some was assisted by the automatic marking of the computer program. Therefore, there would be a much smaller workload for the teachers, with the exception of becoming familiar with the updated authentic resources.

Second, the EEC course overcame the problem of the "teachers' lack of language proficiency

and sociocultural competence" (Hu, 2002: 99) through inviting specialised English speakers to lead the discussion of the topics that they were specialised in. In this way, Chinese English teachers do not have to prepare themselves to deliver the lesson but rather to offer support as a facilitator and tutor.

Third, unlike many other English courses, which involve "examination pressure" (Hu, 2002:99), the ultimate assessment of the EEC course is the real life of the students: the extent to which they can communicate well to live a happier life. Fourth, unlike the traditional Chinese educational culture, which involves students putting all their effort into learning and minimising their social life (Hu, 2002), in the EEC course students are encouraged to have a social life and to go outdoors to gain communicative competence from their real-life experience.

13.4.2 Learning theory and course design theory

The learning theory and the course design theory were closely linked in this study. As discussed in Section 2.4, the learning theories that the EEC course employed were VST (Vygotsky's sociocultural theory) and CDST (complex dynamic systems theory), which informed the CED (complex educational design). According to the study of Cui (2016), which identified the specific attractor states (De Bot, 2007) and repeller states (De Bot, 2007), the EEC course activated the repeller state factors (De Bot, 2007) through the following strategies:

Learning environment: Invited specialised English teacher to deliver the main lesson to change the learning environment. This was to build up authentic classroom conversations and help students increase confidence gradually and eventually affect their personality to more appropriately fit the target culture. This was also, according to VST, to maximise the effect of ZPD (zone of proximal development) through MKO (more knowledgeable others) (Veer & Valsiner, 1991).

Learning effort: Motivate students to attend the EEC course, prepare for the synchronous lesson and do more research after the lesson.

Learning strategies: Produce PowerPoint, upload pictures synchronously, use video and audio documents to maximise Chinese students' visual and audio learning strengths.

Learning anxiety: Ensure that every student participated and interacted in the synchronous lesson. Constructive feedback instead of criticism or simple corrections were given to reduce

students' anxiety levels.

Learning motivation: The topics were mostly chosen based on what the students were interested in and English teachers were chosen who were specialised in the topics. The invited English speaker (IES) talked to every student with encouragement to motivate them to learn.

Based on CDST (complex dynamic systems theory), Freire (2013) introduced CED (complex educational design), presented the CED model (Figure 2.6.3) and articulated some features of a complex course (Appendix XIII). Responding to the call of Freire (2013) to operate the CED model, the EEC course adopted the CED model and developed course design features from RC1 to RC4. Figure 13.10 to Figure 13.13 show the development of the complex educational course design system of the EEC course from RC1 to RC4. Figure 13.14 shows the implications of RC4 for the future course model of the EEC course. Figure 13.15 shows the overall development of the course models from RC1 to the future course models of the EEC course. These models were drawn to illustrate the application of the principles for the complex educational design theory, as discussed above.

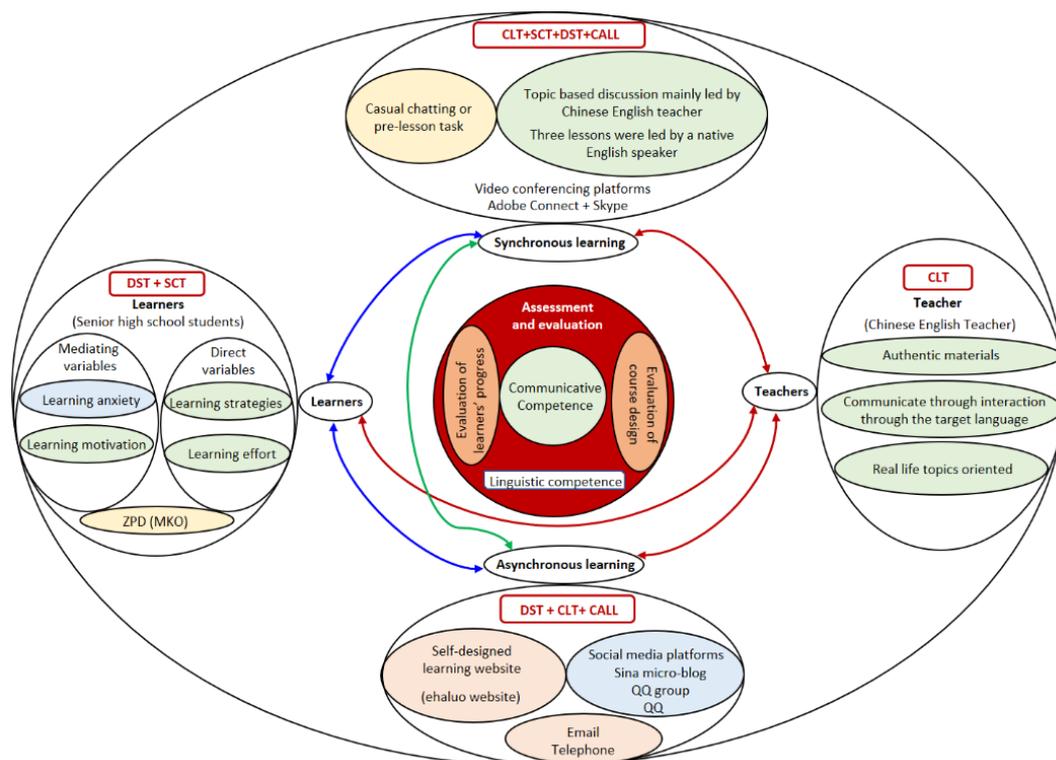


Figure 13.10: The complex educational design (CED) model of the EEC course in RC1 (CDST: complex dynamic systems theory; SCT: Vygotsky's sociocultural theory; CLT: communicative language teaching; CALL: computer-assisted language learning; ZPD: zone of proximal development; and MKO: more knowledgeable others)

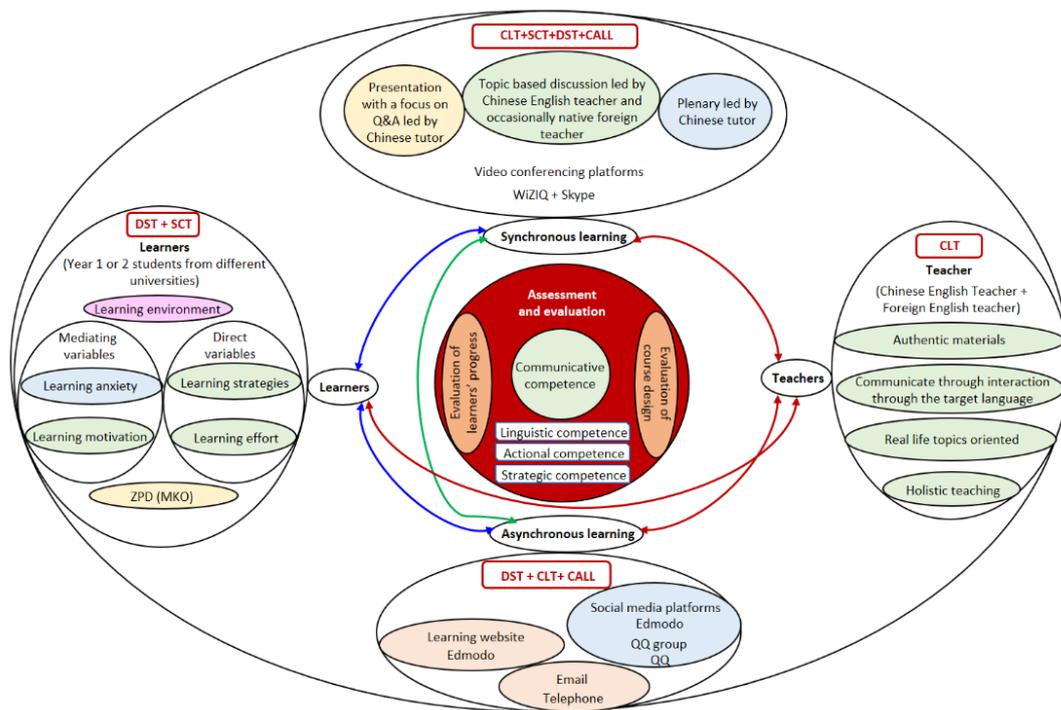


Figure 13.11: The complex educational design model of the EEC course in RC2

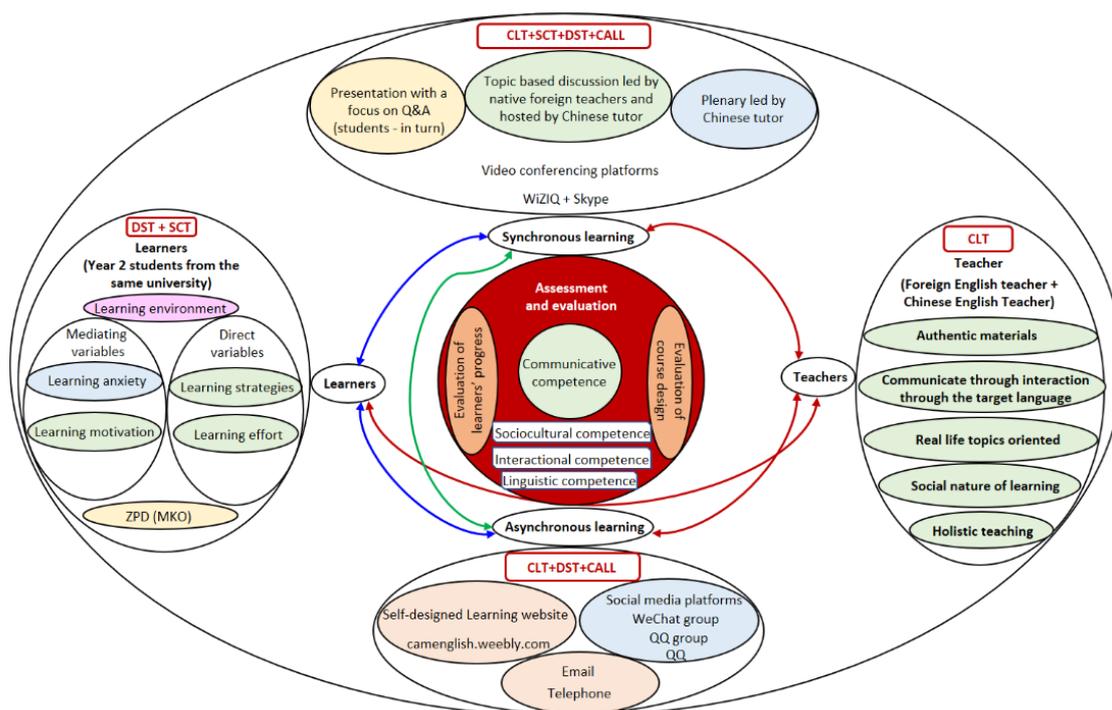


Figure 13.12: The complex educational design model of the EEC course in RC3

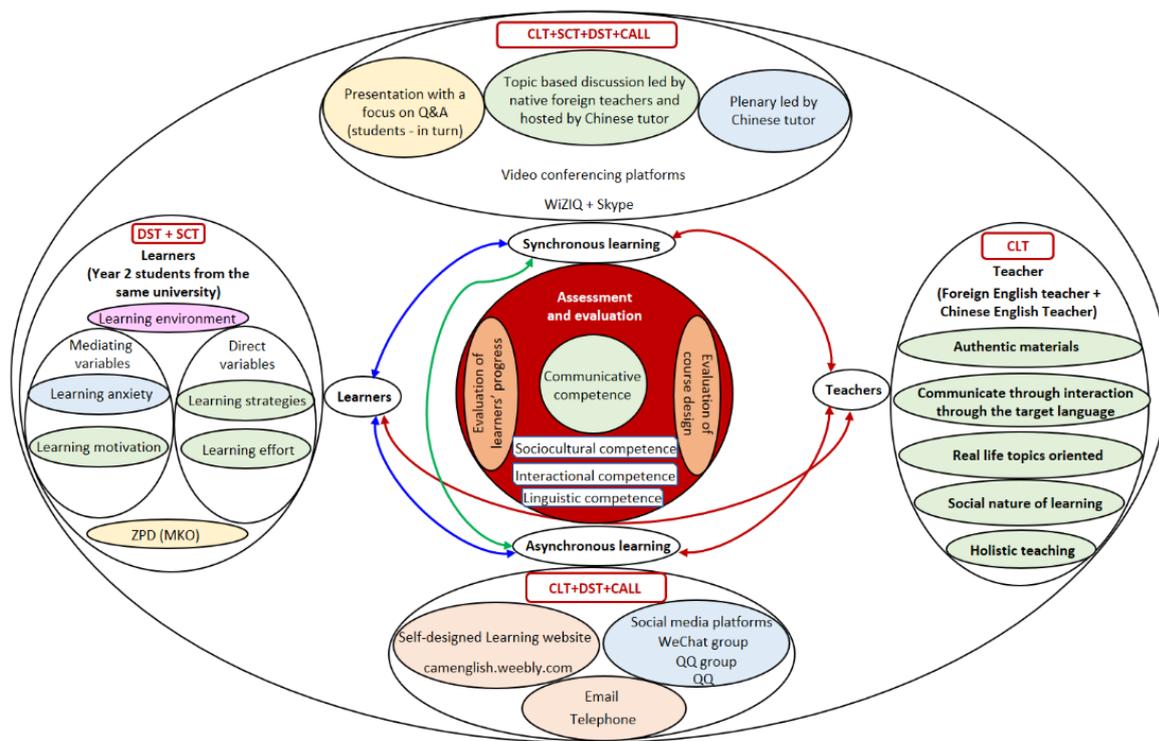


Figure 13.13: The complex educational design model of the EEC course in RC4

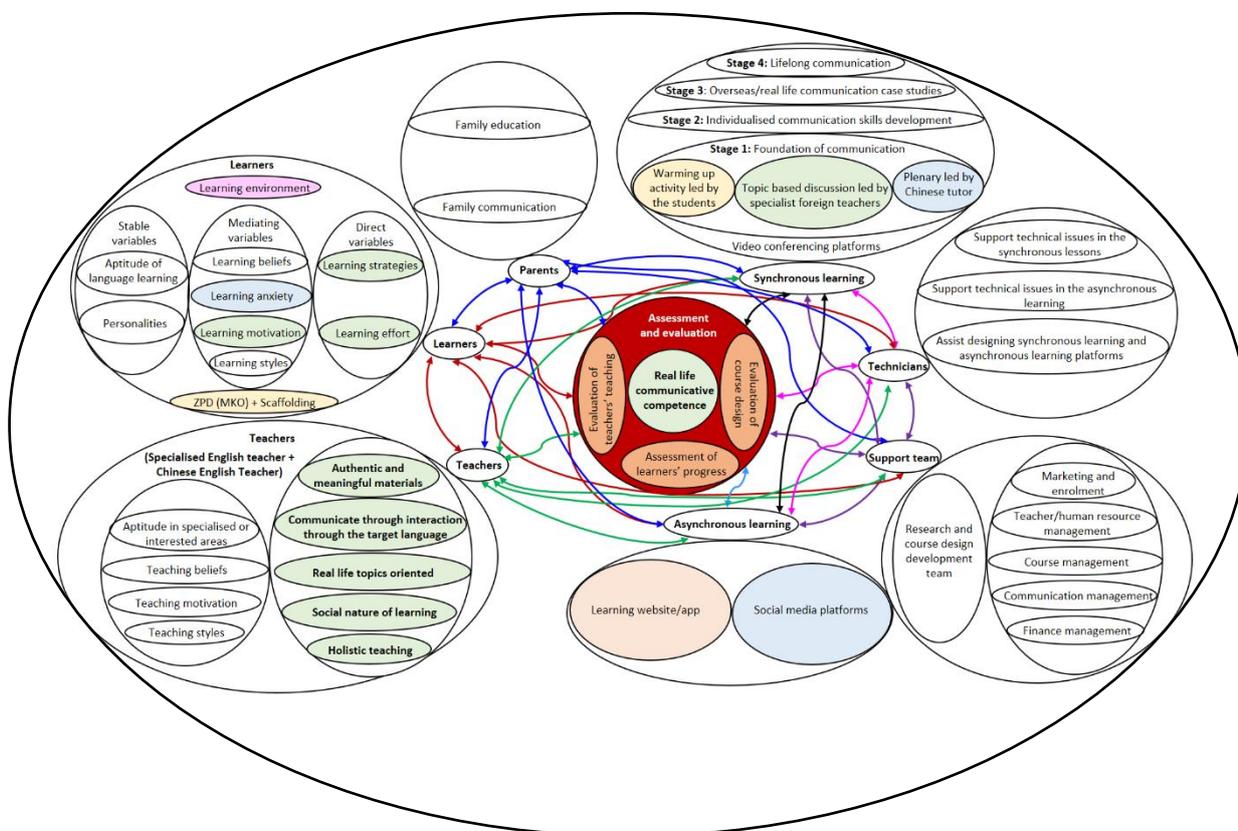


Figure 13.14: The complex educational design model of the EEC course for the future study

Figures 13.10 to Figure 13.14 show that the EEC course was divided into four sub-systems: teachers, students, synchronous learning and asynchronous learning. Every sub-system was supported by its own or combined theories (e.g. CLT, SCT, CDST and CALL). Each sub-system was facilitated to interact with other sub-systems. Although formal assessment was set at the beginning and end of the EEC course, each student's performance in each lesson was observed by the Chinese English teacher and feedback was given as another form of mini-assessment. The students' opinions regarding the lessons were also collected to inform the adjustments to the coming lessons.

The guidelines of the features of a complex course (Freire, 2013; Appendix XIII) were useful for the design of the EEC course in Stage 1 (cultivating the foundations of communicative competence) and Stage 2 (an individualised programme to develop specific aspects of communicative competence). However, as a result of the nature of its complexity, as indicated by the supporting theory of CDST, the complex dynamic system should not be algorithmed (Bertin & Narcy-Combes, 2012). Therefore, the generalised features of the CED course may risk restricting the innovation of further development. For instance, in Stage 3 (developing communicative competence in real life) and Stage 4 (lifelong support to develop communicative competence of the EEC course) (Figure 11.13; Section 11.3.6), "Students' previous knowledge" is not necessary as the starting point of the learning process. Stage 3 was designed to help students improve communicative competence through their real-life experience. Therefore, there was no need to start from their previous knowledge; rather, it began with their own choice of communication experience in real life. Stage 4 gave students choices to decide how they wanted to engage in the more informal CED course. The students could choose whether to learn only from the learning resources provided by the EEC programme, to attend selected webinars or seminars, or to make an appointment to talk to the EEC teachers. There would be no assessment conducted by the EEC course in Stage 4, but the students' real life would be the assessment of their communicative competence. Therefore, the operation of the EEC course suggested that the CED should develop more in terms of course design theory rather than focusing on giving specific guidelines for the CED course design.

Therefore, based on CDST (Lowie, 2017; Bot, 2017), this study suggests that the following principles should be considered to support the CED theory.

Principle 1: Dividing the education or course system into sub-systems and boosting interactions between sub-systems

Dividing a whole educational system into sub-systems helps to identify the individual functions of each sub-system. On the other hand, boosting interactions between sub-systems helps to activate the life of the education or course system. This includes boosting interactions among teachers and students, synchronous learning and asynchronous learning platforms, the teaching system and learning system, and all participants (teachers, students, parents, research and support staff, social media, society, etc.). As indicated in Figure 13.10 to Figure 13.14, this study divided the EEC course into the sub-systems of:

- The key concept: communicative competence
- Assessment of communicative competence
- Teachers and teaching theories
- Learners and learning theories
- Synchronous learning
- Asynchronous learning
- Course evaluation

Strategies were adopted to boost interactions between the sub-systems. For instance, as discussed in Section 13.1, the development of the concept of communicative competence was an outcome of the interaction among the development of assessment criteria and the course design features.

Principle 2: Building an ecological system to allow the sub-systems to be self-organised

Instead of building a hierarchical administration system to instruct how each sub-system should interact, the education or course designer should design an ecological system to allow spontaneous interactions among the sub-systems to be able to adjust themselves to become an effective self-organisation system. For instance, the system should facilitate opportunities to allow different sub-systems (teachers, students, parents, support staff) to interact with one another and give them opportunities to settle on agreements or rules that all sub-systems would accept. In other words, all sub-systems' "voices" must be heard and exchanged to enable sub-systems to reach an ecological agreement.

The study of the perceptions of the EEC learners on the teachers, course design features and their progress in communicative competence informed the intervention plan for the next

research cycle. The successful aspects of the intervention were strengthened and the unsuccessful ones were either adapted or not employed in the future research cycles. Through four research cycles, the EEC course has developed into a much more advanced model in comparison to RC1.

Principle 3: Facilitating a “non-linear” assessment system

Different from a traditional assessment system, focusing on students' test results and designed to promote students' progress continuously, a complex educational design system normalises non-linear progression and focuses on identifying and boosting factors that might trigger the transformation of learning outcomes. For instance, instead of focusing on test results, the assessment system of a complex educational design system emphasises identifying the reasons behind the positive or negative progression, and adopts strategies to boost relevant factors.

Similar to learning, the development of the course design could also not be a linear progression model. Some of the problems encountered in RC1 continued in RC4 despite different trials. For instance, the connection issue of the technology remained throughout the four research cycles. However, this does not mean that the study has not learnt or improved in the connection of technology; indeed, it collected the wide range of failure experiences to boost success in future studies once more resources are available.

Principle 4: Evaluating and detecting the constant changes of the complex educational design system and facilitating what can support the emerging change

This is in line with what De Bot (2007) proposed regarding detecting attractor states and repeller states in the sub-systems through evaluation and taking strategies to activate repeller state factors, influence attractor states, and nurturing a system that could increase the chances of helping learners reach an emergency point in learning.

For example, the topics of the EEC course are open to change in accordance with the needs of students, which in fact required the high organisational ability of the EEC course designer and organiser to coordinate the needs of the students and topics delivered. Apart from that, through the EEC course feedback was constantly collected from students in each lesson to inform the improvement of the coming lessons.

Principle 5: Design intervention plans to support iterative development

This principle is also in line with the “iterative feature”, which is one of the key features of design-based research (Cobb et al., 2003; Akker, et al., 2006). Different from the previous four principles, which focused on the complex dynamic systems in one research cycle, Principle 5 zoomed out to develop the complex educational design from one cycle to another. Figure 13.15 shows an example of the iterative principle of CDST through this study.

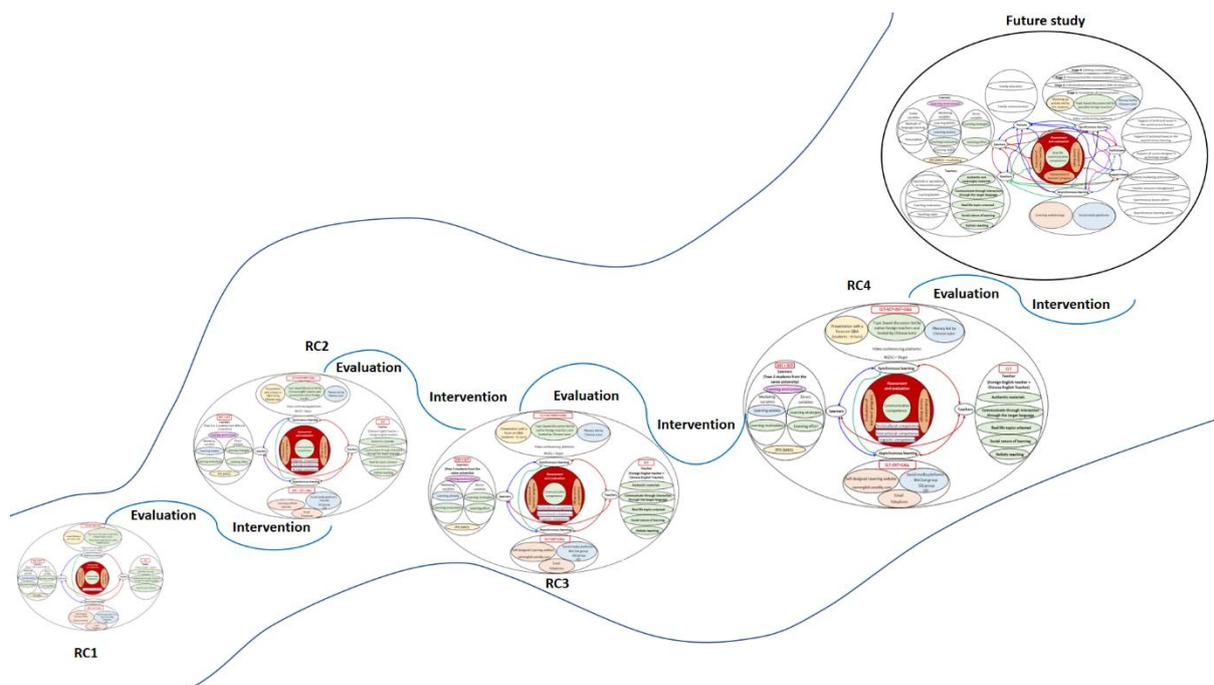


Figure 13.15: The development of the complex educational design system of the EEC course in this study

As discussed above, the reason for not including establishing “genuine partnership among teachers and students” and boosting interactions between “educational practices and students’ real life” (Freire, 2013: 176) was because these two statements may apply to some educational designs but not all. In comparison to Vygotsky’s theory of ZPD (zone of proximal zone) (Veer & Valsiner, 1991), complex educational design theory is more open to a wider range of interactions that could boost students' learning. For instance, complex educational design theory does not restrict students from leaning from MKO (Vygotsky, 1978), but it encourages students to interact with one another and, in fact, with any possible interlocutors, in order to learn. The criticisms of this approach are that there could be a danger in letting the students waste time on low-value interactions. For the EEC course, foreign teachers were selected who were highly specialised in the topics. Therefore, they could be regarded as MKO (more knowledgeable others). However, eventually, students must make their own choice about who to interact with

in real life. The complex educational design system encourages learners to interact with others and make their own decisions about who to interact with through their own experience.

The chapter presented discussion of findings of the study and paved a way for the final concluding chapter that will reflect on the study's limitations and contributions as well as on dissemination and impact pathways.

14. Conclusion

14.1 Overview of this study

The aim of this study was to design a unique new course to help Chinese English learners improve their communicative competence, especially interactional competence and sociocultural competence. The aim was generated from practice, as well as from identifying the research gaps. To achieve this goal, there were two research questions. The first concerned whether the EEC course could help the Chinese English learners improve their communicative competence, and which aspects. The second question explored students' perceptions of which course features helped them improve certain aspects of communicative competence.

The research paradigm of this study was defined as pragmatism, for the reasons discussed in Section 6.1. The research methodology was design-based research, which consisted of four research cycles. Each research cycle involved designing and delivering the EEC course, assessing students' progress in communicative competence, exploring students' perceptions of course features that were effective at helping them improve communicative competence, and developing an intervention plan. The implications and intervention plans were summarised at the end of each research cycle.

Communicative competence was the key concept of this study (Chapter 2). Its definitions have varied according to different researchers' interpretations. The understanding of this concept was also a developing process in this study (Section 13.1). As a result, the exploration of assessment tools and assessment criteria adopted in this study was also a developing process (Chapter 3, Section 13.2). In addition to assessing interactional competence, this study developed assessment criteria for sociocultural competence (Section 8.7), which could be regarded as one of the main contributions of this study (Section 14.3.1). Assessment of communicative competence in this study showed that the students made significant progress in sociocultural competence and interactional competence. However, only RC3 showed significant progress in linguistic competence. The study suggested a few implications to further develop the assessment of communicative competence (Section 13.2.3).

To support the course design, the study also reviewed the teaching theory of CLT (communicative language teaching) (Chapter 4), the learning theories of CDST (complex dynamic systems theory) and SCT (Vygotsky's sociocultural theory) (Chapter 5), and the CALL (computer-assisted language learning) model and technologies supporting the EEC

course (Chapter 6). Responding to the call of Freire (2012) to test the CED (complex educational design) model (Chapter 7), the study not only offered implementation of the CED model, but also further developed the CED theory, and complemented it with principles that could be applied in a wider context, through implementing this course design theory (Section 13.4.2). This is another contribution of this study, which is specified in more detail in Section 14.3.2.

From the perceptions of the students, the key course features facilitating synchronous learning and asynchronous learning were identified. The key course features to help develop interactional competence and sociocultural competence were also identified (Section 8.9 and Section 13.3).

On the whole, this study has shown that the EEC course was successful in helping students improve their sociocultural and intercultural competence. The areas for further development were discussed in Chapter 13. The EEC course might be capitalised upon through cultivating Stage 2 to Stage 4 courses, and there is scope to develop linguistic competence, especially through asynchronous learning.

14.2 Limitations

This section clarifies the limitations of this study in the assessment of communicative competence (Section 14.2.1), course design (Section 14.2.2), synchronous learning and asynchronous learning platforms (Section 14.2.3).

14.2.1 Limitations in the assessment of communicative competence

As Deardorff (2016) identified, communicative competence cannot be assessed through a single test, and therefore the assessment tools and criteria may only reflect some aspects of communicative competence. In other words, some elements of sub-communicative competence were reflected in the tests more than others. For a small-scale study like this, the validity and reliability of these assessment criteria need to be further tested in more and larger-sized tests.

Specifically, the assessment tools developed in this study were mainly focused on university life but did not test students' communicative competence in other contexts. For instance, there was not much opportunity to assess students' communicative competence in a peer discussion (Skehan, 2010). Therefore, it could not reflect students' communicative competence in terms of turn-taking strategies (Yong, 2000), awareness of not dominating interactions and helping

partners out (May, 2011).

Another limitation of the assessment in this study was that the format was restricted by the existing assessment requirements of the university, as indicated by Gu (2015). Therefore, in RC4, the presentation with Q&A (PQA) was conducted in groups rather than individually. This not only made it much harder to collect and process the data but also reduced the volume of usable data, as not all students answered the audience's questions in the group Q&A time. Nevertheless, the lesson learnt in RC4 also evidenced that group presentation and group Q&A are not the most effective way to assess communicative competence.

14.2.2 Limitation in course design

As a result of the time and funding limitations of this study, it mainly developed real-time synchronous lessons, with limited development of asynchronous learning platforms. The foreign native English teachers who were invited to deliver the EEC course were restricted to people I knew. If the course were to be expanded to more groups, this would require a large bank of English speakers from different backgrounds and age groups.

Another limitation of teaching students living in China was that the topics and content of the EEC course had to take into consideration the requirements of the Chinese government. Although China has developed hugely in terms of economics, it still has a long way to go before it becomes a democratic country at the level of the western world. Therefore, the topics and content needed to be balanced.

14.2.3 Limitations in synchronous learning and asynchronous learning platform

As discussed in Section 11.3, the Internet connection represented the most substantial obstacle to the synchronous lessons of the EEC course. As the poor connectivity could not support the webcam function, it was difficult in the EEC course to develop students' body language (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Another limitation was the limited funding to support the development of synchronous and asynchronous learning platforms. Building a high-level functional app and learning website requires a substantial amount of investment. However, the EEC course has created a framework and idea tank to support the development of an asynchronous learning platform once funding is available.

14.3 Contributions

Despite its limitations, this study has made potentially significant contributions to both theories

and practice in the following areas:

- **The concept and assessment of communicative competence, especially sociocultural competence**
- **The complex educational design theory**
- **The application of design-based research**

14.3.1 Contribution to the concept and assessment of communicative competence, especially sociocultural competence

The contributions of this study in assessing communicative competence are presented in the following three aspects:

- a. Contribution to the development of the concept of communicative competence
- b. Contribution to the development of assessment tools of communicative competence
- c. Contribution to the assessment criteria of sociocultural competence

a. Contribution to the development of the concept of communicative competence

As communicative competence is a complex concept and it is dynamic rather than static (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), it is necessary to develop a concept to suit the specific context. This study shows how the understanding of communicative competence was developed through interconnection with the development of the course design and the assessment tools and criteria. It is the development process rather than the concept itself contributing to the development of the concept of communicative competence.

b. Contribution to the development of assessment tools of communicative competence

There was a significant gap between theory and practice in assessing communicative competence, especially sociocultural competence. This study explored a few ways of testing and discovered that communicative competence tests should be relevant and beneficial to students' communication in real life, and also the tests should be as simple and practical as possible. Otherwise, it would not be ethical and practical to collect test data from the students, especially from the comparison group.

This study identified two tests that were practical to conduct (Paran & Sercu, 2010), able to generate genuine spontaneous interaction (East et al., 2016) and relevant to test-takers'

university life. Figure 14.1 illustrates how the IELTS general writing test (Test A) and the PQA test (Test B) were used to measure linguistic, interactional and sociocultural competence in RC3 and RC4.

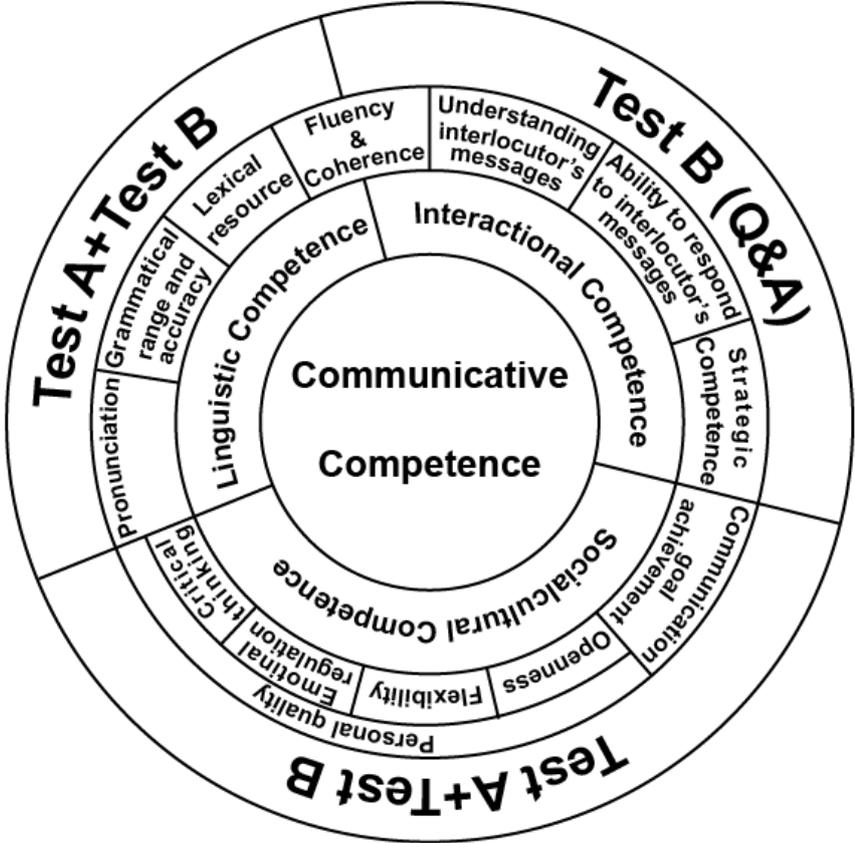


Figure 14.1: Tests A and B to measure linguistic, interactional and sociocultural competence (Test A: IELTS writing test Task I; Test B: presentation with a focus on Q&A)

Test A: Writing test

Not all writing tests are suitable for assessing communicative competence. On the other hand, no single test can assess all aspects of communicative competence as well. However, a writing test that requires students to deal with conflicts in a familiar scenario is a good way to assess communicative competence, especially sociocultural competence and linguistic competence.

Task B: Presentation with a focus on Question and Answering (Q&A)

Presentation with Q&A is a widely used scenario, both in academic study and the workplace. The test itself is a practice of presentation and Q&A skills for students. All students could engage throughout the lesson, as they could contribute either as presenters or as an audience challenging the presenter. Therefore, it is an ethical test. Although the presentation was widely employed by Chinese universities to assess students' speaking level, Q&A was not a popular

choice. Introducing Q&A after the presentation proved to be a manageable test in this study. However, more training and more strategies are needed to ensure that university English lecturers and students understand the requirement and potential issues while taking a Q&A test.

It is acknowledged that other ways are also employed to assess communicative competence, such as peer conversations, which are widely used in advanced English assessment. However, this is time-consuming and cost-ineffective for research. Nevertheless, group discussion is another method that could be developed in future research. Caution must be taken when organising group discussion, however, to avoid some students speaking little or not at all.

c. Contribution to the assessment criteria of sociocultural competence

The current assessment for sociocultural competence was far behind the understanding of its concept (Nguyen & Le, 2013). One of the main contributions of this study was that it developed the assessment criteria of sociocultural competence, which not only contain assessment criteria regarding the achievement of communication goals with appropriateness but also embrace the personal qualities that underpin the performance of sociocultural competence (Section 8.7; Table 8.5), thereby contributing to sociocultural competence. The communication goal achievement assessment criteria (CGAC) provided a solid basis to help learners understand that it is critical to identify their communication goals clearly and appropriately. The personal quality assessment criteria, on the other hand, transformed qualities of openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking into assessable assessment criteria embedded in ordinary language tests, which further clarified what “appropriateness” means to support the CGAC.

The assessment criteria for sociocultural competence could provide a clearer direction for teachers and students to follow in order to develop sociocultural competence. The developed sociocultural competence assessment criteria have been applied in this study and proved to be practical. If the assessment criteria for sociocultural competence are adopted in the formal examinations, it could have a significant impact on the teaching and learning of languages, as it would draw teachers and students’ attention towards developing personal qualities, which would eventually benefit students in real life. However, this is a small-scale study and the assessment criteria for sociocultural competence developed in this study need to be further studied to test their effectiveness. Before that, teachers and students could still benefit from using the assessment criteria to guide their teaching and learning to develop sociocultural competence.

14.3.2 Contribution to the complex educational design theory (CED)

There were two areas where this study contributed to the complex educational design theory:

- a. Contribution to the application of the complex educational design model
- b. Contribution to the theory of the complex educational design theory

a. Contribution to the application of the complex educational design model

Responding to the call of Freire (2012) for the operation of the complex educational design to evidence the model, this study designed a complex educational system and improved its system through design-based research (Figures 13.10–13.15). This study provided evidence that it is possible and practical to apply the complex educational design model in a virtual language course. However, this does not mean it can be applied to other educational contexts, especially the existing mainstream education system, as it may require significant changes that the participants may not support. Nevertheless, this study could be used as an example to inspire other education practitioners or researchers to explore their own ways of applying a CED model.

This study has established a foundation for a CALL course model, which can be developed to benefit a large population of students who want to improve their communicative competence. In fact, the more the study deepened, the more areas I became aware of in which this course and the study can be cultivated.

b. Contribution to the complex educational design theory

Although Freire (2012) established the complex educational design model (Figure 7.3), the features identified for a complex course (Appendix XIII) were focusing on applying CED in a specific educational context. There is a gap between the model (and some specific features) and the theory itself. There is a need to further theorise the CED model.

Derived from the supporting theory of CED, complex dynamics systems theory and the four research cycles process of this study, five principles were identified to complete the CED theory and set an overarching guide for the application of the CED model (Section 13.4.2). The significance of this contribution requires validation through further implementations of CED.

14.3.3 Contribution to design-based research

This study contributed to design-based research in the following two areas:

- a. Justification of the reasons to choose design-based research

- b. Identifying the importance of completing the research report at the end of each research cycle before moving on to the next research cycle

a. Justification of the reasons for choosing design-based research

According to the features of the CED (complex educational design) theory, iterative development is one of its key features. In the CED theory, sub-systems are constantly changing and interacting with others. This is different from experimental research, which controls elements of the experiment to see the effect of the tested variables. The CED theories do not restrict the changes and interactions of sub-systems but instead observe and respond to the changes. Therefore, if a study is employing CED theory, the study should consider design-based research for the reasons stated above.

b. Identifying the importance of completing the research report at the end of each research cycle before moving on to the next research cycle

As an empirical study applying design-based research methodology, this study further supported the importance of an iteration process. It confirmed how important it is to conduct a design-based project over a number of cycles in order to develop its core concepts, theories and practice. For instance, if this study had stopped at RC1, it would not be clear that the main aspects of communicative competence that the learners were developing through the EEC course were sociocultural competence and interactional competence. If the study had stopped at RC2, it would not have had any evidence to show that the PQA test was a practical test to assess learners' communicative competence. If the study had stopped at RC3, it would not have developed assessment criteria for sociocultural competence or developed the CED theory to the same degree.

To benefit from the iteration process, it is also vital to develop an intervention plan by following a strict procedure. An intervention plan could be developed through a process of analysing test data and participants' perceptions, updating the technologies, further reviewing the literature and generating new ideas. It is critical to write the evaluation report including a further literature review and an intervention plan before starting implementation of the next research cycle. Although intervention plans could still be designed before the written evaluation and intervention report were completed, the quality of the intervention plan after completing the report could be much higher. It is worth either accelerating this report or waiting a little longer before starting the next research cycle.

14.4 Dissemination and impact pathways

Conferences and seminars

To disseminate and also further develop the study, I have presented it in a variety of ways. Apart from presenting in the STEM community seminar and EdD community meetings, I have also presented a paper and poster at the first (2015) and second (2016) EdD Conferences at Cambridge University; they have received warm feedback, suggestions and advice. To disseminate my study to a wider audience, I presented at the Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium Conference 2018 at the University of Illinois, America. I am also planning to disseminate my study in more conferences and to publish my study in journals.

Bring the EEC course into practice to generate a real impact on English learners' communicative competence

Most importantly, to enlarge the impact of the study, I am determined to take this study to the next level and stage. I will research the opportunities to cooperate with relevant organisations to further develop and promote the EEC course in order to benefit more students to improve their communicative competence in English. Apart from students who aim to study, work or live overseas, the EEC course could also serve students who work for corporations with international business in China. Furthermore, communicative competence is about not just how we communicate with other English speakers from different cultural backgrounds, but also how to communicate with oneself, to be strong in oneself and mentally healthy in one's life. Ultimately, communication is one of the key factors that keeps us living happily and in harmony. I can see vast potential for the development of the EEC course in achieving this aim.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Questionnaire for RC1 (English version)

Questionnaire

Boy or Girl _____

Today's date _____

This is a questionnaire about the English Enrichment Communication (EEC) course. It is being administered as part of my EdD research project at the University of Cambridge. Please feel free to express any views you may have about the course. Your answers will be kept completely confidential and will not be shared with anyone at your school.

Thank you for your time and for completing this questionnaire!

Min Du
Email: md590@cam.ac.uk



I. About the EEC Course

Please put a tick (✓) in one of the boxes or circle your answer.

1. Did you enjoy the EEC Course?

Yes No Not sure

2. To what extent do you agree the EEC Course has improved your interest in learning English?

Not at all A lot
1 2 3 4 5

3. How would you rate the EEC Course?

Not at all A lot
1 2 3 4 5

4. To what extent do you agree the EEC Course has improved your English Communication Competence?

	Not at all				A lot
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Culture awareness	1	2	3	4	5
Communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
Overall	1	2	3	4	5

5. Did you take the notes for the EEC Course?

Never Sometimes Always

III. About the EEC Course Curriculum

1. To what extent do you agree the following topics are interesting to you?

	Not at all				A lot
	1	2	3	4	5
London Olympics	1	2	3	4	5
London Olympic Mascots	1	2	3	4	5
Tour of London	1	2	3	4	5
Easter and Christianity	1	2	3	4	5
British Education	1	2	3	4	5
Madame Tussauds	1	2	3	4	5
Royal Wedding	1	2	3	4	5
William Shakespeare	1	2	3	4	5
A Midsummer's Night Dream	1	2	3	4	5
Meeting with Musical Actor	1	2	3	4	5
Queen's Diamond Jubilee	1	2	3	4	5
End of Term Exam Revision	1	2	3	4	5
Others	1	2	3	4	5

Please specify others: _____

2. To what extent do you think the course contents of the EEC Course meet your needs of learning English?

Not at all					A lot
1	2	3	4	5	5

IV. About yourself

1. What is your age? _____
2. How many years have you been learning English? _____

Have you attended English tuition or any other English courses outside of the school between March and June 2012 except the EEC course?

Yes No

If YES, on average, how many hours did you attend the course/tuition every week?

4. On average, how many hours per week did you spend on learning English except school lessons from March to June 2012?

Listening _____
Reading _____
Writing _____
Speaking _____
Overall _____

5. On average, how many hours did you spend on learning the EEC Course every week?

Listening _____
Reading _____
Writing _____
Speaking _____
Overall _____

6. Did your parent(s)/Guardian(s) know that you are studying the EEC Course?

Yes No Not sure

7. To what extent do you agree your parent(s)/Guardian(s) support you learning the EEC Course?

Not at all A lot

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix II: Questionnaire for RC1 (Chinese version)

调查问卷

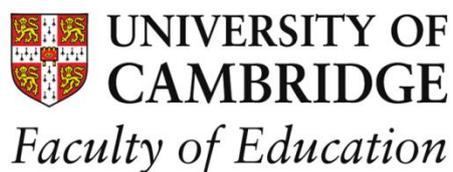
性别 _____

今天的日期 _____

这是一份关于英语延伸课程的调查问卷。这是我在剑桥大学教育学博士课程研究项目的一部分。请真实地表达你对该课程的任何观点。你的填写内容将会被完全匿名保密，不会与你所在学校的老师、同学或其它任何部门分享。非常感谢你花费时间填写此问卷！

杜敏

邮箱: md590@cam.ac.uk



IV. 关于你自己

1. 你的年龄? _____

2. 你学习英文有多少年了? _____

3. 在 2012 年 3 月与 6 月期间, 你有参加过巴蜀中学英语课程和英语延伸课程以外的任何其它英语培训吗 (包括家教)?

有 没有

如果有参加, 平均每周你花几个小时用于学习和完成其它英语培训或家教布置的学习任务?

听力 _____

阅读 _____

写作 _____

口语 _____

综合 _____

5. 平均每周你花在学习英语延伸课程的时间是多少小时?

听力 _____

阅读 _____

写作 _____

口语 _____

综合 _____

6. 你的父母或监管家长知道你在参加英语延伸课程吗?

知道 不知道 不确定

如果知道, 在何种程度上你认为你的父母或监管家长支持你学习英语延伸课程?

完全不支持 非常支持

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix III: Questionnaire for RC2

Questionnaire

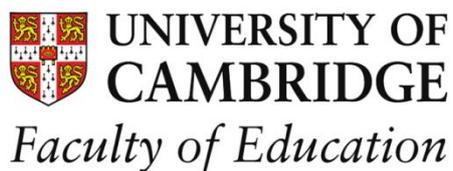
Gender _____

Today's date _____

This is a questionnaire about the English Enrichment Communication (EEC) course. It is being administered as part of my EdD research project at the University of Cambridge. Please feel free to express any views you may have about the course. Your answers will be kept completely confidential and will not be shared with anyone at your school.

Thank you for your time and for completing this questionnaire!

Min Du
Email: md590@cam.ac.uk



2. To what extent do you agree the following technologies are useful to your learning in the EEC Course?

	Not at all				A lot
QQ	1	2	3	4	5
Skype	1	2	3	4	5
camenglish.weebly.com	1	2	3	4	5
Email	1	2	3	4	5
Mobile phone	1	2	3	4	5
Others	1	2	3	4	5

Please specify others: _____

III. About the EEC Course Curriculum

1. To what extent do you agree the following topics are interesting to you?

	Not at all				A lot
Christmas culture	1	2	3	4	5
Tour of London	1	2	3	4	5
Easter and Christianity	1	2	3	4	5
British Education	1	2	3	4	5
Madame Tussauds	1	2	3	4	5
Royal Wedding	1	2	3	4	5
William Shakespeare	1	2	3	4	5
A Midsummer's Night Dream	1	2	3	4	5
Meeting with Musical Actor	1	2	3	4	5
Proofreading	1	2	3	4	5
End of Term Exam Revision	1	2	3	4	5
Others	1	2	3	4	5

Please specify others: _____

2. To what extent do you agree the feedback to your writing help you improve your writing skills in English?

Not at all				A lot
1	2	3	4	5

3. To what extent do you agree that the course content of the EEC Course meets your needs of learning English?

Not at all				A lot
1	2	3	4	5

IV. About yourself

- 1. What is your age? _____
- 2. How many years have you been learning English? _____

Have you attended any English tuition or other English courses outside your university time between January and December 2014, apart from the EEC Course?

Yes No

If so, for how many hours on average did you attend the course/tuition each week?

- 4. On average, how many hours did you spend learning in the EEC Course each week?
Face-to-face virtual lesson _____
Homework set by the EEC course _____
Others _____
Please specify: _____

Appendix IV: Questionnaire for RC2 (Chinese version)

调查问卷

性别 _____

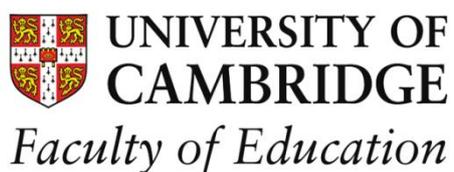
今天的日期 _____

这是一份关于英语延伸课程的调查问卷。这是我在剑桥大学教育学博士课程研究项目的一部分。请真实地表达你对该课程的任何观点。你的填写内容将会被完全匿名保密，不会与你所在学校的老师、同学或其它任何部门分享。

非常感谢你花费时间填写此问卷！

杜敏

邮箱: md590@cam. ac. uk



I. 关于英语交流能力

请圈出你的选项。

1. 在何种程度上你喜欢英语延伸课程?
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
2. 在何种程度上你认为英语延伸课程促进了你学习英语的兴趣?
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
3. 你认为英语延伸课程在何种程度上促进了你以下的英语交流能力?
 - a. 能够用正确的语法表达自己
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - b. 能够恰当地组织自己的讲话, 并能够向听者清楚地表达自己的想法。
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - c. 能够恰当地组织自己的写作, 并能够向读者清楚地表达自己的想法。
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - d. 能够向对方清楚地提出有意义的问题。
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - e. 能够清楚地回答对方的问题。
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - f. 能够理解对方言语后的真实意思。
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - g. 在需要对方阐明其意思时, 能够恰当地提出问题。
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - h. 能够与其他人用恰当的态度和语言来沟通。
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - i. 能够用不同的方式来让自己的表达流畅。
完全不 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

II. 关于英语延伸课程的网络学习环境

- 你在何种程度上喜欢英语延伸课程网络学习环境?
完全不 非常喜欢
1 2 3 4 5
- 你在何种程度上喜欢英语延伸课程的网络教室?
完全不 非常喜欢
1 2 3 4 5
- 你认为在何种程度上以下被应用到英语延伸课程的平台对你学习英语延伸课程有用?

	完全不			非常有用	
QQ	1	2	3	4	5
Skype	1	2	3	4	5
camenglish.weebly.com	1	2	3	4	5
电子邮件	1	2	3	4	5
手机	1	2	3	4	5
其它	1	2	3	4	5

请注明: _____

III. 关于英语延伸课程的设计

- 你认为在何种程度上, 你对以下课程话题感兴趣?
完全没有 非常大
- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| Christmas culture | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| British Luxury Brands | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| John Lennon and Yoko Ono | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Setting up a Dinner Table | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Dinner Etiquette | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Wine Glasses | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Easter | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Royal Wedding | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Life at the University of Cambridge | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The Different Styles of Writing for Theatre | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Being a Theatre Director | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Writing Feedback | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 每周同学自己的演讲练习 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 其它 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

请注明: _____

2. 你认为在何种程度上英语延伸课对你的写作的反馈意见帮助你提高英语写作水平?
完全没有 1 2 3 4 5 非常大
3. 你认为在何种程度上英语延伸课程帮助你实现了你学习英语的需求?
完全没有 1 2 3 4 5 非常大

IV. 关于你自己

1. 你的年龄是多少岁? _____
2. 你就读于大学几年级? _____
3. 你学习英语有多少年了? _____

除你的大学所开设的英语课程外，你在参加英语延伸课期间参加过其它英语培训课程吗？

有 没有

如果有，请注明你所参加的英语补习课程。

平均每周上几小时的英语补习课？

Appendix V: Questionnaire for RC3

Questionnaire

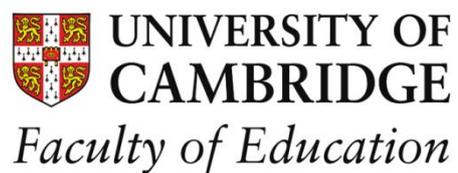
English name _____

Today's date _____

This is a questionnaire about the English Enrichment Communication (EEC) course. It is being administered as part of my EdD research project at the University of Cambridge. Please feel free to express any views you may have about the course. Your answers will be kept completely confidential and will not be shared with anyone at your school.

Thank you for your time and for completing this questionnaire!

Min Du
Email: md590@cam.ac.uk



- i. Having the knowledge and awareness of the cultures of others.
 The least extent A small extent Moderate A notable extent A very great extent
 1 2 3 4 5
- j. Being able to communicate with others using a sensitive and appropriate manner and language.
 The least extent A small extent Moderate A notable extent A very great extent
 1 2 3 4 5
- k. Showing respect to the audience at all times.
 The least extent A small extent Moderate A notable extent A very great extent
 1 2 3 4 5
- l. Being able to use appropriate and necessary strategies to make myself understood clearly.
 The least extent A small extent Moderate A notable extent A very great extent
 1 2 3 4 5
- m. Being able to use alternative ways to express myself fluently.
 The least extent A small extent Moderate A notable extent A very great extent
 1 2 3 4 5
- n. Being able to keep communication going without using an offensive language or attitude.
 The least extent A small extent Moderate A notable extent A very great extent
 1 2 3 4 5

II. About the virtual learning environment of the EEC course

1. To what extent did you like the virtual learning environment of the EEC Course?
 The least extent A small extent Moderate A notable extent A very great extent
 1 2 3 4 5
2. To what extent did you like using the following technologies to learn in the EEC Course?

	Not at all	A little	Moderate	A good extent	A very great extent
QQ	1	2	3	4	5
Skype	1	2	3	4	5
Camenglish.weebly.com	1	2	3	4	5
Skype	1	2	3	4	5
Email	1	2	3	4	5
Mobile phone	1	2	3	4	5
Others	1	2	3	4	5

Please specify others: _____

II. About yourself

1. What is your age? _____
2. How many years have you been learning English? _____

Have you attended any English tuition or other English courses outside your university time between January and December 2014, apart from the EEC Course?

Yes No

If so, for how many hours on average did you attend the course/tuition each week?

4. On average, how many hours did you spend learning in the EEC Course each week?
Face-to-face virtual lesson _____
Homework set by the EEC course _____
Others _____
Please specify: _____

Appendix VI: Questionnaire for RC3 (Chinese version)

调查问卷

英文名字 _____

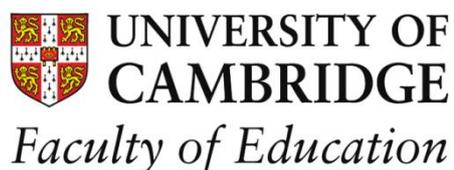
日期 _____

这是一份关于英语延伸课程的调查问卷。这是我在剑桥大学教育学博士课程研究项目的一部分。请真实地表达你对该课程的任何观点。你的填写内容将会被完全保密，不会与你所在学校的老师、同学或其它任何部门分享。你填写的内容仅供我的研究分析用并完全匿名。

非常感谢你花费时间填写此问卷！

杜敏

邮箱: md590@cam. ac. uk



I. 关于英语交流能力

请圈出你的选项。

1. 在何种程度上你喜欢剑桥英语延伸课程?
非常不喜欢 不喜欢 一般 喜欢 非常喜欢
1 2 3 4 5
2. 在何种程度上你认为剑桥英语延伸课程促进了你学习英语的兴趣?
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
3. 在何种程度上你认为剑桥英语延伸课程促进了你以下的英语交流能力?
 - a. 能够用正确的语法表达自己
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - b. 能够恰当地组织自己的讲话, 向听者清楚地表达自己的想法。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - c. 能够恰当地组织自己的写作, 向读者清楚地表达自己的想法。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - d. 能够向对方清楚地提出问题。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - e. 能够向对方提出有意义的问题。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - f. 能够清楚地回答对方的问题。
几乎全没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - g. 能够理解对方言语后的真实意思。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5
 - h. 在需要对方阐明其意思时, 能够恰当地提出问题。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

- i. 能够 与其他人用恰当的态度来沟通。
 几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
 1 2 3 4 5
- j. 能够用不同的方式来让自己的表达流畅。
 几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
 1 2 3 4 5
- k. 能够通过英语交流达到自己希望得到的交流结果。
 几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
 1 2 3 4 5

II. 关于剑桥英语延伸课程的网络学习环境

1. 你在何种程度上喜欢剑桥英语延伸课程网络学习环境?
 非常不喜欢 不喜欢 一般 喜欢 非常喜欢
 1 2 3 4 5
2. 你在何种程度上喜欢剑桥英语延伸课程的网络教室?
 非常不喜欢 不喜欢 一般 喜欢 非常喜欢
 1 2 3 4 5
3. 你认为在何种程度上以下被应用到剑桥英语延伸课程的平台对你学习剑桥英语延伸课程有用?

	几乎没有用	基本没有用	一般	作用比较大	作用非常大
	1	2	3	4	5
QQ	1	2	3	4	5
Skype	1	2	3	4	5
camenglish.weebly.com	1	2	3	4	5
电子邮件	1	2	3	4	5
手机	1	2	3	4	5
其它	1	2	3	4	5

请注明: _____

III. 关于剑桥英语延伸课程的设计

1. 你认为在何种程度上，你对以下课程话题感兴趣？

	非常不感兴趣	不感兴趣	一般	感兴趣	非常感兴趣
Christmas culture	1	2	3	4	5
Pantomime	1	2	3	4	5
Introduction of Adrian Hedley	1	2	3	4	5
Presentation Skills	1	2	3	4	5
The Beatles	1	2	3	4	5
John Lennon and Yoko Ono	1	2	3	4	5
Royal Wedding	1	2	3	4	5
Dinner Etiquette	1	2	3	4	5
Nepal Earthquake	1	2	3	4	5
British politics	1	2	3	4	5
Relationships	1	2	3	4	5
Travelling around the world	1	2	3	4	5
Role play	1	2	3	4	5
其它	1	2	3	4	5

请注明: _____

2. 你认为在何种程度上你喜欢我们每周针对一个话题进行讨论的教学方式？

非常不喜欢 不喜欢 一般 喜欢 非常喜欢
1 2 3 4 5

3. 你认为在何种程度上你喜欢我们布置的课前预习任务？

非常不喜欢 不喜欢 一般 喜欢 非常喜欢
1 2 3 4 5

4. 在以上的十三周的上课中，我们大概有九周需要大家完成课前预习任务。你有几周完成了课前预习的任务？

_____ 周

5. 你认为在何种程度上你喜欢每周课前的同学自己的演讲练习？

非常不喜欢 不喜欢 一般 喜欢 非常喜欢
1 2 3 4 5

6. 你认为在何种程度上每周课前的同学自己的演讲练习帮助你提高英语交流能力？

几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

IV. 关于你自己

1. 你的年龄是多少岁? _____
2. 你就读于大学几年级? _____
3. 你学习英语有多少年了? _____

除你的大学所开设的英语课程外，你在参加英语延伸课期间参加过其它英语培训课程吗？

有 没有

如果有，请注明你所参加的英语补习课程。

平均每周上几小时的英语补习课？

Appendix VII: Questionnaire for RC4 (English version)

Questionnaire

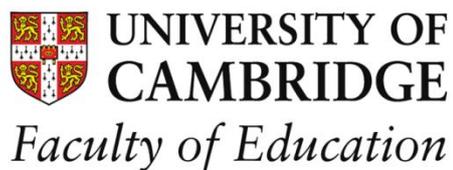
English name _____

Date _____

This is a questionnaire about the English Enrichment Communication (EEC) course. It is being administered as part of my EdD research project at the University of Cambridge. Please feel free to express any views you may have about the course. Your answers will be kept completely confidential and will not be shared with anyone at your school.

Thank you for your time and for completing this questionnaire!

Min Du
Email: md590@cam.ac.uk



IV. About yourself

1. What is your age? _____
2. Which year are you studying at the university? _____
3. How many years have you been learning English? _____

Apart from your university English courses, have you attended any English training courses during the period of learning on the EEC Course?

Yes No

If so, what course(s) have you attended?

And how many hours on average did you attend the course/tuition each week?

Appendix VIII: Questionnaire for RC4 (Chinese version)

调查问卷

英文名字_____

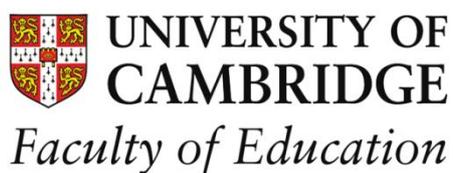
日期_____

这是一份关于英语延伸课程的调查问卷。这是我在剑桥大学教育学博士课程研究项目的一部分。请真实地表达你对该课程的任何观点。你的填写内容将会被完全保密，不会与你所在学校的老师、同学或其它任何部门分享。你填写的内容仅供我的研究分析用并完全匿名。

非常感谢你花费时间填写此问卷！

杜敏

邮箱：md590@cam.ac.uk



I. 关于英语交流能力

请圈出你的选项。

1. 在何种程度上你喜欢剑桥英语延伸课程?
非常不喜欢 不喜欢 一般 喜欢 非常喜欢
1 2 3 4 5

2. 在何种程度上你认为剑桥英语延伸课程促进了你学习英语的兴趣?
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

3. 在何种程度上你认为剑桥英语延伸课程促进了你以下的英语交流能力?
 - a. 能够用正确的语法表达自己
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

 - b. 能够恰当地组织自己的讲话，向听者清楚地表达自己的想法。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

 - c. 能够恰当地组织自己的写作，向读者清楚地表达自己的想法。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

 - d. 能够向对方清楚地提出问题。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

 - e. 能够清楚地回答对方的问题。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

 - f. 能够理解对方言语后的真实意思。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

 - g. 在需要对方阐明其意思时，能够恰当地提出问题。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

 - h. 能够与其他人用恰当的态度来沟通。
几乎没有 基本没有 一般 比较大 非常大
1 2 3 4 5

i. 能够用不同的方式来让自己的表达流畅。

几乎没有	基本没有	一般	比较大	非常大
1	2	3	4	5

j. 能够查问谈话对方是否跟上你的谈话。

几乎没有	基本没有	一般	比较大	非常大
1	2	3	4	5

k. 能够更多地欣赏不同的文化。

几乎没有	基本没有	一般	比较大	非常大
1	2	3	4	5

l. 能够更欢迎新的体验和想法。

几乎没有	基本没有	一般	比较大	非常大
1	2	3	4	5

m. 能够更批判式地来思考问题。

几乎没有	基本没有	一般	比较大	非常大
1	2	3	4	5

n. 能够将新学到的观念和想法转化为自己的行动。

几乎没有	基本没有	一般	比较大	非常大
1	2	3	4	5

o. 能够以更积极的态度来看待和处理问题。

几乎没有	基本没有	一般	比较大	非常大
1	2	3	4	5

II. 关于剑桥英语延伸课程的网络学习环境

1. 你在何种程度上喜欢剑桥英语延伸课程网络学习环境?

非常不喜欢 不喜欢 一般 喜欢 非常喜欢
1 2 3 4 5

2. 你认为在何种程度上你喜欢使用以下信息技术平台参加剑桥英语延伸课程?

	几乎没有用	基本没有用	一般	作用比较大	作用非常大
QQ	1	2	3	4	5
QQ 群	1	2	3	4	5
QQ 讨论室	1	2	3	4	5
Skype	1	2	3	4	5
微信	1	2	3	4	5
电子邮件	1	2	3	4	5
手机	1	2	3	4	5
其它	1	2	3	4	5

请注明: _____

III. 关于剑桥英语延伸课程的设计

1. 你认为在何种程度上你对以下课程话题感兴趣?

	非常不感兴趣	不感兴趣	一般	感兴趣	非常感兴趣
剑桥大学的学生生活	1	2	3	4	5
万圣节文化 (Halloween Culture)	1	2	3	4	5
英国饮食	1	2	3	4	5
与英国人的交友之道	1	2	3	4	5
英美音乐 (1930-1940 年代)	1	2	3	4	5
英美音乐 (1960-1970 年代)	1	2	3	4	5
英美音乐 (现代流行音乐)	1	2	3	4	5
英国建筑	1	2	3	4	5
周游世界	1	2	3	4	5
圣诞文化	1	2	3	4	5
其它	1	2	3	4	5

请注明: _____

2. 你认为在何种程度上你喜欢每周针对一个话题进行讨论的教学方式来帮助你提高英语交流能力?

非常不喜欢 不喜欢 一般 喜欢 非常喜欢
1 2 3 4 5

3. 你认为在何种程度上你喜欢由不同的外国老师讲授不同的话题来帮助你提高英语交流能力?

非常不喜欢 不喜欢 一般 喜欢 非常喜欢
1 2 3 4 5

4. 你认为在何种程度上你喜欢我们布置的课前预习任务来帮助你提高英语交流能力?
- | | | | | |
|-------|-----|----|----|------|
| 非常不喜欢 | 不喜欢 | 一般 | 喜欢 | 非常喜欢 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
5. 你认为在何种程度上你喜欢每周课前的同学自己的演讲和回答问题的练习来帮助你提高英语交流能力?
- | | | | | |
|-------|-----|----|----|------|
| 非常不喜欢 | 不喜欢 | 一般 | 喜欢 | 非常喜欢 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
6. 你认为在何种程度上你喜欢最后由中国老师引导的总结部分来帮助你提高英语交流能力?
- | | | | | |
|-------|-----|----|----|------|
| 非常不喜欢 | 不喜欢 | 一般 | 喜欢 | 非常喜欢 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

IV. 关于你自己

1. 你的年龄是多少岁? _____
2. 你就读于大学几年级? _____
3. 你学习英语有多少年了? _____

除你的大学所开设的英语课程外，你在参加英语延伸课期间参加过其它英语培训课程吗?

有 没有

如果有，请注明你所参加的英语补习课程。

平均每周上几小时的英语补习课?

Appendix IX: Interview questions for RC1

1. Why did you join the EEC course?

2. What is your overall opinion of the EEC course?

Follow-up question:

- Do you consider that the EEC course has played part in improving your communicative competence in English? How? Can you give an example?

3. What are the differences between the EEC and other English language courses that you have attended?

4. Could you please comment on how you find using the Adobe virtual classroom?

Follow-up questions:

- What do you like about the Adobe virtual classroom? Why?
- What do you not like about the Adobe virtual classroom? Why?

5. Could you please comment on the www.ehaluo.org website?

Follow-up questions:

- What do you like about the www.ehaluo.org website? Why?
- What do you not like about the www.ehaluo.org website? Why?

Further follow-up questions:

- What do you think of the home page and introduction pages of the www.ehaluo.org website? Do you like the style or not? Is there anything that we can do to make them better?
- What do you think of Course Centre? Do you think are there any sections that we need to add or delete? Why?
- What do you think of the course links? Are they useful to you? Why?
- What is your opinion of the study zone? What can we do to make it better?

6. Among QQ, Sina Micro-blog, email, and Skype, which are your favourite communication approaches? Why?

Follow-up questions

- Are there any other technologies or techniques that you like or think might be useful for the EEC course?

7. Could you please comment on the time structure of the EEC?

Follow-up questions:

- Do you think 30 + 60 minutes is a good structure of lesson time?
- What do you think we can do better in the first 30 minutes?
- What do you think we can do better in the second 60 minutes?

8. Could you please comment on the content of the EEC course?

Follow-up questions:

- Do you find the topics of the EEC course interesting?
- Do you learn the topics in your English lessons or any other English language courses?
- What other topics might interest you?

9. What are your suggestions for the EEC course?

Appendix X: Interview questions for RC2

1. Why did you join the EEC course?

2. What is your overall opinion of the EEC course?

Follow-up question:

- Do you consider that the EEC has played part in improving your communicative competence in English? How? Can you give an example?

3. What are the differences between the EEC and other English language courses that you have attended?

4. Could you please comment on how you find using the WIZIQ virtual classroom?

- What do you like about the WiZiQ virtual classroom? Why?
- What do you not like about the WiZiQ virtual classroom? Why?

5. Could you please comment on the Edmodo website?

Follow-up questions:

- What do you like about the Edmodo website? Why?
- What do you not like about the Edmodo website? Why?
- What can we do to make it better?

6. Among QQ, WeChat, email, and Skype, which are your favourite communication approaches? Why?

Follow-up questions

- Are there any other technologies or techniques that you like to think might be useful for the EEC?

7. Could you please comment on the time structure of the EEC?

Follow up questions:

- Do you think 30 + 60 + 30 minutes is a good structure of lesson time?
- What do you think we can do better in the first 30 minutes?
- What do you think we can do better in the 60 minutes?
- What do you think we can do better in the last 30 minutes?

8. Could you please comment on the topics of the EEC?

Follow-up questions:

- Do you find the topics of the EEC course interesting?
- Do you learn the topics in your English lessons or any other English language courses?

➤ What other topics might interest you?

9. What are your suggestions for the EEC course?

Appendix XI: Interview questions for RC3

1. **Why did you join the EEC course?**

2. **What is your overall opinion of the EEC course?**

Follow-up question:

- Do you consider that the EEC has played a part in improving your communicative competence in English? How? Can you give an example?

3. **What are the differences between the EEC and other English language courses that you have attended?**

4. **Could you please comment on how you find using the WiZIQ virtual classroom?**

- What do you like about the WiZIQ virtual classroom? Why?
- What do you not like about the WiZiQ virtual classroom? Why?

5. **Could you please comment on the www.camenglish.weebly.com website?**

Follow-up questions:

- What do you like about the www.camenglish.weebly.com website? Why?
- What do you not like about the www.camenglish.weebly.com website? Why?

Further follow-up questions:

- What do you think of the home page and introduction pages of the www.camenglish.weebly.com website? Do you like the style or not? Is there anything that we can do to make them better?
- What do you think of presentation of the website?
- What do you think of the structures of the website?
- What can we do to make it better?

6. **Among QQ, WeChat, email and Skype, which are your favourite communication approaches? Why?**

Follow-up questions

- Are there any other technologies or techniques that you like or think might be useful for the EEC course?

7. Could you please comment on the time structure of the EEC?

Follow-up questions:

- Do you think 30 + 60 + 30 minutes is a good structure of lesson time?
- What do you think we can do better in the first 30 minutes?
- What do you think we can do better in the 60 minutes?
- What do you think we can do better in the last 30 minutes?

8. Could you please comment on the topics of the EEC?

Follow-up questions:

- Do you find the topics of the EEC course interesting?
- Do you learn the course content in your English lessons or any other English language courses?
- What other topics might interest you?

9. What are your suggestions for the EEC course?

10. What are your top three achievements through the EEC course?

Appendix XII: Interview questions for Research Cycle 4

1. **Why did you join the EEC course?**
2. **What are the differences between the EEC and other English language courses that you have attended?**
3. **What are the differences between the EEC and other English language courses that you have attended?**
4. **Could you please comment on how you found using Skype and the QQ discussion room as a virtual learning environment?**

Follow-up questions:

- Are there any other technologies or techniques that you like to use or think might be useful for the EEC?

5. **Could you please comment on the time structure of the EEC?**

Follow-up questions:

- Do you think 30 + 60 + 30 minutes is a good structure of lesson time?
- What do you think we can do better in the first 30 minutes?
- What do you think we can do better in the 60 minutes?
- What do you think we can do better in the last 30 minutes?

6. **Could you please comment on the topics of the EEC?**

Follow-up questions:

- Do you find the topics of the EEC course interesting?
- Do you learn the course content in your English lessons or any other English language courses?
- What other topics might interest you?

7. **What are your perceptions of having different teachers to teach the EEC course?**

- What do you like about this approach?
- What do you not like about this approach?
- What do you think that we can do to make this approach better?

8. What is your overall opinion about the EEC?

Follow-up question:

- Do you consider the EEC has played a part in improving your communicative competence in English? How? Can you give an example?

9. What are your top three achievements through the EEC course?

10. What are your other suggestions for the EEC?

11. What is your definition of English communicative competence?

A Complex Course Based on the CED Pattern

- Goals and objectives are established according to the students' needs, profiles, and expectations, but they also contemplate the teacher's needs, profiles, and expectations.
- Goals and objectives are reviewed throughout the course and some of them may be changed while others may be added.
- Students' previous knowledge is the starting point of the learning process.
- Learning process is jointly controlled by teacher and students (they are *parts of the same whole*).
- The digital learning environment is open and flexible, but deadlines, rules, and procedures are discussed and jointly defined in the beginning of the course.
- Negotiation and self-expression are encouraged all the time.
- Subject matter is organized in such a way that knowledge network may emerge from the sequence of themes/topics/learning situations: a *recursive* movement may always occur.
- Themes/topics or real learning situations provide students with concrete reasons to interact and express opinions, to use the foreign language for genuine communicative purposes.
- By providing students with various themes/topics/learning situations, it is possible to interweave information from various fields and generate opportunities to construct inter-/trans-disciplinary knowledge.
- Knowledge (re-) connection (s) is (are) always encouraged for knowledge construction is non-linear and non-fragmented.
- Assessment is undertaken continuously and according to different formats.
- The sequence of contents is defined throughout the flow of action and interaction: each part is unique, although reflects the previous contents addressed (course as a *hologram*).
- By having an open course design, ongoing adaptations on the model are allowed.
- Conflicts, divergences, disruptions, and unpredictability are faced as normal parts of the course that naturally complement moments of calmness, order, and organization, establishing a *dialogue between opposite but complementary concepts*.
- Foreign language is viewed as social practice and each participant of the course (students and teacher) as a citizen who perform a social role within the group.

Appendix XIV: IELTS 9-band scale (ielts.org, 2012)

Band Score	Skill Level	Description
9	Expert user	has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
8	Very good user	has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriate words. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
7	Good user	has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate words and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
6	Competent user	has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriate words and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
5	Modest user	has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
4	Limited user	basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
3	Extremely limited user	conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
2	Intermittent user	no real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
1	Non user	essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
0	Did not attempt the test	No assessable information provided.

Table 1. Suggested Components of Discourse Competence

COHESION

- **Reference (anaphora, cataphora)**
- **Substitution/ellipsis**
- **Conjunction**
- **Lexical chains (related to content schemata), parallel structure**

DEIXIS

- **Personal (pronouns)**
- **Spatial (*here, there; this, that*)**
- **Temporal (*now, then; before, after*)**
- **Textual (*the following chart; the example above*)**

COHERENCE

- **Organized expression and interpretation of content and purpose (content schemata)**
- **Thematization and staging (theme-rheme development)**
- **Management of old and new information**
- **Propositional structures and their organizational sequences**
 - temporal, spatial, **cause-effect, condition-result**, etc.
- **Temporal continuity/shift (sequence of tenses)**

GENRE/GENERIC STRUCTURE (formal schemata)

- narrative, interview, service encounter, research report, sermon, etc.

CONVERSATIONAL STRUCTURE (inherent to the turn-taking system in conversation but may extend to a variety of oral genres)

- **How to perform openings & reopenings**
- **Topic establishment & change**
- **How to hold & relinquish the floor**
- **How to interrupt**
- **How to collaborate & backchannel**
- **How to do preclosings and closings**
- **Adjacency pairs (related to actional competence)**
 - **first and second pair parts (knowing preferred and dispreferred responses)**

Table 2. Suggested Components of Linguistic Competence

SYNTAX

- **Constituent/phrase structure**
- **Word order (canonical and marked)**
- **Sentence types**
 - statements, negatives, questions, imperatives, exclamations
- **Special constructions**
 - **existentials** (*there + BE...*)
 - **clefts** (*It's X that/who...; What + sub. + verb + BE*)
 - question tags, etc.
- **Modifiers/intensifiers**
 - quantifiers, comparing and equating
- **Coordination (and, or, etc.) and correlation** (*both X and Y; either X or Y*)
- **Subordination** (e.g., adverbial clauses, conditionals)
- **Embedding**
 - noun clauses, relative clauses (e.g., restrictive and non-restrictive)
 - reported speech

MORPHOLOGY

- **Parts of speech**
- **Inflections** (e.g., agreement and concord)
- **Derivational processes** (productive ones)
 - compounding, affixation, conversion/incorporation

LEXICON (receptive and productive)

- **Words**
 - content words (Ns, Vs, ADJs)
 - function words (pronouns, prepositions, verbal auxiliaries, etc.)
- **Routines**
 - word-like **fixed phrases** (e.g., *of course, all of a sudden*)
 - formulaic and semi-formulaic chunks (e.g., *how do you do?*)
- **Collocations**
 - **V-Obj** (e.g., *spend money*), **Adv-Adj** (e.g., *mutually intelligible*), **Adj-N** (e.g., *tall building*)
- **Idioms** (e.g., *kick the bucket*)

PHONOLOGY (for pronunciation)

- **Segmentals**
 - vowels, consonants, syllable types, sandhi variation (changes and reductions between adjacent sounds in the stream of speech)
- **Suprasegmentals**
 - prominence, stress, intonation, rhythm

ORTHOGRAPHY (for spelling)

- **Letters** (if writing system is alphabetic)
- **Phoneme-grapheme correspondences**
- **Rules of spelling**
- **Conventions for mechanics and punctuation**

Table 3. Suggested Components of Actional Competence

KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

- **INTERPERSONAL EXCHANGE**

- Greeting and **leavetaking**
- Making introductions, identifying oneself
- Extending, accepting and declining invitations and offers
- Making and breaking engagements
- Expressing and acknowledging gratitude
- Complimenting and congratulating
- Reacting to the interlocutor's speech
 - showing attention, **interest**, surprise, sympathy, happiness, disbelief, disappointment

- **INFORMATION**

- Asking for and giving information
- Reporting (**describing** and narrating)
- Remembering
- Explaining and discussing

- **OPINIONS**

- Expressing and **finding** out about opinions and attitudes
- Agreeing and disagreeing
- Approving and disapproving
- Showing satisfaction and dissatisfaction

- **FEELINGS**

- Expressing and finding out about feelings
 - love, happiness, **sadness**, pleasure, anxiety, anger, embarrassment, pain, relief, fear,
 - annoyance, surprise, etc.

- **SUASION**

- Suggesting, requesting and instructing
- Giving **orders**, advising and warning
- Persuading, encouraging and discouraging
- Asking for, granting and withholding permission

- **PROBLEMS**

- Complaining and criticizing
- Blaming and accusing
- Admitting and denying
- Regretting
- Apologizing and forgiving

- **FUTURE SCENARIOS**

- Expressing and finding out about wishes, hopes, and desires
- Expressing and eliciting plans, goals, and intentions
- Promising
- Predicting and speculating
- Discussing possibilities and capabilities of doing something

KNOWLEDGE OF SPEECH ACT SETS

Note: This table is for oral language; » parallel **list** of specifications is needed for written language—perhaps labeled 'rhetorical competence.'

Table 4. Suggested Components of Sociocultural Competence

SOCIAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

- **Participant** variables
 - **age**, gender, office and status, social distance, relations (power and affective)
- **Situational** variables
 - time, place, social situation

STYLISTIC APPROPRIATENESS FACTORS

- Politeness conventions and strategies
- Stylistic variation
 - degrees of formality
 - field-specific registers

CULTURAL FACTORS

- Sociocultural background knowledge of the target language community
 - living conditions (way of living, living standards); social and institutional structure; social conventions and rituals; major values, beliefs, and norms; taboo topics; historical **background**; cultural aspects including literature and arts
- Awareness of major dialect or regional **differences**
- **Cross-cultural** awareness
 - differences; similarities; strategies for **cross-cultural** communication

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATIVE FACTORS

- **Kinesic** factors (body language)
 - discourse controlling behaviors (non-verbal turn-taking signals)
 - **backchannel** behaviors
 - affective markers (facial expressions), gestures, eye contact
- **Proxemic** factors (use of space)
- **Haptic** factors (touching)
- Paralinguistic factors
 - acoustical sounds, **nonvocal** noises
- Silence

Table 5. Suggested Components of Strategic Competence

AVOIDANCE or REDUCTION STRATEGIES

- **Message** replacement
- Topic avoidance
- Message abandonment

ACHIEVEMENT or COMPENSATORY STRATEGIES

- Circumlocution (e.g., *the thing you open bottles with for corkscrew*)
- Approximation (e.g., *fish for carp*)
- All-purpose words (e.g., *thingy, thingamajig*)
- Non-linguistic means (mime, pointing, gestures, drawing pictures)
- Restructuring (e.g., *The bus was very... there were a lot of people on it*)
- Word-coinage (e.g., *vegetarianist*)
- Literal translation from **L1**
- **Foreignizing** (e.g., **L1** word with **L2** pronunciation)
- Code switching to **L1** or **L3**
- Retrieval (e.g., *bro... bron... bronze*)

STALLING or TIME-GAINING STRATEGIES

- Fillers, hesitation devices and gambits (e.g., *well, actually..., where was I...?*)
- Self and other-repetition

SELF-MONITORING STRATEGIES

- Self-initiated repair (e.g., *I mean...*)
- **Self-rephrasing (over-elaboration)** (e.g., *This is for students... pupils... when you're at school...*)

INTERACTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Appeals for help
 - direct (e.g., *What do you call...?*)
 - indirect (e.g., *I don't know the word in English... or puzzled expression*)
- **Meaning negotiation strategies**

Indicators of non/mis-understanding

- requests
 - repetition requests (e.g., *Pardon? or Could you say that again please?*)
 - clarification requests (e.g., *What do you mean by...?*)
 - **confirmation** requests (e.g., *Did you say...?*)
- expressions of non-understanding
 - verbal (e.g., *Sorry, I'm not sure I understand...*)
 - non-verbal (raised eyebrows, blank look)

*interpretive summary (e.g., **You mean...?/So what you're saying is...?**)*

Responses

- repetition, rephrasing, expansion, reduction, confirmation, rejection, repair

Comprehension checks

- whether the interlocutor can follow you (e.g., *Am I making sense?*)
- whether what you said was correct or grammatical (e.g., *Can I/you say that?*)
- whether the interlocutor is listening (e.g., on the phone: *Are you still there?*)
- whether the interlocutor can hear you

Appendix XVI: Assessment criteria for writing task

Band	Sociocultural competence	Coherence and cohesion	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies communication goal clearly with full appropriateness to the task the supporting arguments are completely convincing with full appropriateness shows four of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention skilfully manages paragraphing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features; rare minor errors occur only as “slips” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as “slips”
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies communication goal clearly, with high appropriateness to the task the supporting arguments are highly convincing, with the appropriateness to a very high level, shows at least three of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sequences information and ideas logically manages all aspects of cohesion well uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings skilfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures the majority of sentences are error-free makes only very occasional errors or inappropriate words
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies communication goal clearly with considerable appropriateness to the task the supporting arguments are considerably convincing, with some inappropriateness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout uses a range of cohesive devices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision uses less common lexical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a variety of complex structures produces frequent error-free sentences

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows at least two of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking 	<p>appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use</p>	<p>items with some awareness of style and collocation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal clearly to the task • the supporting arguments are moderately convincing, with considerable inappropriateness • shows at least two of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression • uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical • may not always use referencing clearly or appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task • attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy • makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms • makes some errors in grammar and punctuation but they rarely reduce communication
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal clearly to the task • the supporting arguments are not convincing, with considerable inappropriateness • shows at least one of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presents information with some organisation but there may be a lack of overall progression • makes inadequate, inaccurate or over-use of cohesive devices • may be repetitive because of lack of referencing and substitution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a limited range of vocabulary, but this is minimally adequate for the task • may make noticeable errors in spelling and/or word formation that may cause some difficulty for the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a limited range of structures • attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences • may make frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty; errors can cause some difficulty for the reader •

4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal clearly, with wide-ranging inappropriateness to the task • the supporting arguments are not convincing, with wide-ranging inappropriateness • shows at least one of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presents information and ideas but these are not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression in the response • uses some basic cohesive devices but these may be inaccurate or repetitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses only basic vocabulary, which may be used repetitively or may be inappropriate for the task • has limited control of word formation and/or spelling • errors may cause strain for the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a very limited range of structures, with rare use of subordinate clauses • some structures are accurate but errors predominate, and punctuation is often faulty
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal vaguely to the task • the supporting arguments are largely not convincing, with wide-ranging inappropriateness • shows at least one of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not organise ideas logically • may use a very limited range of cohesive devices, and those used may not indicate a logical relationship between ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a very limited range of words and expressions, with very limited control of word formation and/or spelling • errors may severely distort the message • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attempts sentence forms but errors in grammar and punctuation predominate and distort the meaning
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • either misinterprets the task but has identified a communication goal • or does not identify communication goal clearly but shows the context of the communication • the supporting arguments show wide-ranging inappropriateness despite whatever the communication goal is • shows at least one of openness, flexibility, emotional control or critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has very little control of organisational features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses an extremely limited range of vocabulary essentially no control of word formation and/or spelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cannot use sentence forms except in memorised phrases

<p>1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • either misinterprets the task and does not identify communication goal • or does not identify the communication goal and the context of the communication is also not (entirely) clear • shows none of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fails to communicate any message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can only use a few isolated words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cannot use sentence forms at all
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Appendix XVII: Assessment criteria for Presentation and Q&A test

Band	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation	Interactional competence	Sociocultural communicative competence
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction; any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar • speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features • develops topics fully and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision during both presentation and Q&A time • uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a full range of structures naturally and appropriately • produces consistently accurate structures apart from “slips” that are characteristic of native speaker speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety • sustains flexible use of features throughout • is effortless to understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can understand and answer all of the questions of the audience relevantly to almost the highest level • produces an engaging, warm and positive interactional atmosphere to almost the highest level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal clearly with full appropriateness to the task • the supporting arguments are completely convincing with full appropriateness • shows four of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaks fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction; hesitation is usually content-related and only rarely to search for language • develops topics coherently and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning • uses less common and idiomatic vocabulary skilfully, with occasional inaccuracies • uses paraphrasing effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a wide range of structures flexibly • produces a majority of error-free sentences with very occasional inappropriateness or basic/unsystematic errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a wide range of pronunciation features • sustains flexible use of features, with only occasional lapses • is easy to understand throughout; 1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can understand and answer all of the questions of the audience relevantly to a very high level • produces an engaging, warm and positive interactional atmosphere to a very high level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal clearly, with high appropriateness to the task • the supporting arguments are highly convincing, with the appropriateness to a very high level, • shows at least three of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking

7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence • may demonstrate language-related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction • uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses vocabulary resource flexibly during both presentation and Q&A time • uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation, with some inappropriate choices • uses paraphrasing effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility • frequently produces error-free sentences, though some grammatical mistakes persist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows all the positive features of band 6 and some, but not all, of the positive features of band 8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can understand and answer the majority of questions from the audience relevantly to a considerably high level • produces an engaging, warm and positive interactional atmosphere to a considerably high level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal clearly with considerable appropriateness to the task • the supporting arguments are considerably convincing, with some inappropriateness • shows at least two of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times as a result of occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation • uses a range of connectives and discourse markers but not always appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriateness • generally paraphrases successfully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a mix of simple and complex structures, but with limited flexibility • may make frequent mistakes with complex structures, though these rarely cause comprehension problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control • shows some effective use of features, but this is not sustained • can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can understand and answer most of the questions of the audience relevantly to a moderately high level • produces an engaging, warm and positive interactional atmosphere to a moderately high level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal clearly to the task • the supporting arguments are moderately convincing, with considerable inappropriateness • shows at least two of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking

5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and/or slow speech to keep going • may over-use certain connectives and discourse markers • produces simple speech fluently, but more complex communication causes fluency problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manages to talk about topics during both presentation and Q&A time, but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy • uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows all the positive features of band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of band 6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can understand and answer most of the questions from the audience relevantly to a moderate level • produces an engaging, warm and positive interactional atmosphere to a moderate level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal clearly to the task • the supporting arguments are not convincing, with considerable inappropriateness • shows at least one of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cannot speak without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly, with frequent repetition and self-correction • links basic sentences but with repetitious use of simple connectives and some breakdowns in coherence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is able to talk about topics during presentation but only conveys basic meaning on Q&A and makes frequent errors in word choice • rarely attempts paraphrasing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produces basic sentence forms and some correct simple sentences, but subordinate structures are rare • errors are frequent and may lead to misunderstanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a limited range of pronunciation features • attempts to control features but lapses are frequent • mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can understand and answer some of the questions of the audience relevantly to a moderately low level • produces an engaging, warm and positive interactional atmosphere to a moderately low level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal clearly, with wide-ranging inappropriateness to the task • the supporting arguments are not convincing, with wide-ranging inappropriateness • shows at least one of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking

3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaks with long pauses • has limited ability to link simple sentences • gives only simple responses and is frequently unable to convey a basic message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses simple vocabulary to convey personal information • has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attempts basic sentence forms but with limited success, or relies on apparently memorised utterances • makes numerous errors except in memorised expressions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows some of the features of band 2 and some, but not all, of the positive features of band 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can understand and answer a few of the questions of the audience relevantly to a considerably low level • produces an engaging, warm and positive interactional atmosphere to a considerably low level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies communication goal vaguely to the task • the supporting arguments are largely not convincing, with wide-ranging inappropriateness • shows at least one of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pauses lengthily before most words • little communication is possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • only produces isolated words or memorised utterances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cannot produce basic sentence forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speech is often unintelligible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can understand and answer a few of the questions of the audience relevantly to a very low level • produces an engaging, warm and positive interactional atmosphere to a very low level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • either misinterprets the task but has identified a communication goal • or does not identify communication goal clearly but shows the context of the communication • the supporting arguments show wide-ranging inappropriateness despite whatever the communication goal is • shows at least one of openness, flexibility, emotional control or critical thinking

1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •no communication possible •no rateable language 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can hardly understand and answer the questions of the audience relevantly to almost the lowest level • produces an engaging, warm and positive interactional atmosphere to almost the lowest level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • either misinterprets the task and does not identify communication goal • or does not identify the communication goal and the context of the communication is also not (entirely) clear • shows none of openness, flexibility, emotional control and critical thinking
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Appendix XVIII: Writing task assessment template sheet

(adapted from Cambridge English C2 writing assessment sheet and IELTS general writing test assessment criteria)

Writing task	
Number of student:	
Sociocultural competence	
Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer identify communication goal clearly?</p> <p>If so, is the communication goal appropriate to the task?</p>	Comments
<p>Are the supporting arguments appropriate enough to be convincing?</p> <p>If so, to what extent?</p>	Comments
<p>To what extent is the writing format appropriate to the context?</p>	Comments
Personal quality assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer show openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking?</p> <p>Openness:</p> <p>Flexibility:</p> <p>Emotional regulation:</p> <p>Critical thinking:</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples of openness:</p> <p>Examples of flexibility:</p> <p>Examples of emotional regulation:</p>
<p>Communication goal achievement mark:</p> <p>Personal quality assessment mark:</p> <p>Total mark (sociocultural communicative competence):</p>	

Coherence and cohesion	
To what extent does the writing show coherence?	Comments
To what extent does the writing show cohesion?	Comments
Coherence and cohesion mark:	
Lexical resource	
To what extent does the writer use vocabulary?	Comments
To what extent does the writer make errors in lexical resource?	Comments
Lexical resource mark:	
Grammatical range and accuracy	
To what extent does the writer use structures with flexibility and accuracy?	Comments
To what extent does the writer make grammatical errors?	Comments
Grammatical range and accuracy mark:	
Overall score:	

Appendix XIX: Writing task sample scripts and assessment sheet for the sample script 1

Sample script 1:

Dear Sir or Madam:

I would like to bring my accommodation issues, created specifically due to my roommate's irrational behaviours, to your immediate attention. I cannot concentrate on my studies and find it unbearable to live with such a housemate. I am hoping that you allow me to shift into another room soon.

I have been living in a shared hostel accommodation for the last one year. My previous roommate was extremely cooperative and friendly. There was nothing he was not willing to solve together with me as a roommate. However, the student I have been living with for the past two months is quite the opposite. He refuses to collaborate with me and doesn't clean the room. He has frequent visitors and they smoke in the room. To make things worse, my roommate has bought a television lately and likes to watch the television all the time with a high volume. Even after my cordial requests, he refuses to cooperate and I find it extremely tough to live with such a roommate and study properly.

I want to move out of this room as soon as possible and have a different roommate. I would prefer a single room with kitchen and bathroom facilities. If arranging a single room is not possible, I would like any room that is peaceful.

I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,

Eva Morris

Writing task	
Number of student: <i>Sample Script 1</i>	
Sociocultural competence	
Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer identify communication goal clearly?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>If so, is the communication goal appropriate to the task?</p> <p>Full appropriateness to the task</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The writer states the communication goal clearly in the beginning of the letter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I would like to bring my accommodation issues, created specifically due to my roommate's irrational behaviours, to your immediate attention. I cannot concentrate on my studies and find it unbearable to live with such a housemate. I am hoping that you allow me to shift into another room soon." <p>Then the writer emphasises the communication goal again at the end of the letter with specific expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I want to move out of this room as soon as possible and have a different roommate. I would prefer a single room with kitchen and bathroom facilities. If arranging a single room is not possible, I would like any room that is peaceful."
<p>Are the supporting arguments appropriate enough to be convincing?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>If so, to what extent?</p> <p>Highly convincing with appropriateness to a very high level</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "However, the student I have been living with for the past two months is quite the opposite. He refuses to collaborate with me and doesn't clean the room." • "He has frequent visitors and they smoke in the room." • "To make things worse, my roommate has bought a television lately and likes to watch the television all the time with a high volume." • "Even after my cordial requests, he refuses to cooperate and I find it extremely tough to live with such a roommate and study properly." <p>The only inappropriateness is that the writer has not shown that he is willing to listen to his roommate but simply requests that his roommate cooperate with him.</p>

<p>To what extent is the writing format appropriate to the context?</p> <p>Uses right register of words, as well as sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question to the highest level</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Uses formal language throughout the letter.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Dear Sir or Madam” • “I would like to bring my accommodation issues, ..., to your immediate attention.” • “I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.” • “Yours faithfully,”
<p>Personal quality assessment criteria</p>	
<p>Does the writer show openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking?</p> <p>Openness: Yes</p> <p>Flexibility: Yes</p> <p>Emotional regulation: Yes</p> <p>Critical thinking: The writer did not reflect on his own action</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples of openness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Even after my cordial requests...” <p>Examples of flexibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If arranging a single room is not possible, I would like any room that is peaceful.” <p>Examples of emotional regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses nouns, verbs, adjective and adverbs with neutral connotations in a conflict situation
<p>Communication goal achievement mark: 8 Personal quality assessment mark: +0 Total mark (sociocultural communicative competence): 8</p>	
<p>Coherence and cohesion</p>	
<p>To what extent does the writing show coherence?</p> <p>Uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The writer states the communication goals at the start of the letter. Explains a number of reasons in the middle of the letter. Then further clarifies his specific expectations of the communication goal at the end of the letter.</p>
<p>To what extent does the writing show cohesion?</p> <p>Skillfully manages paragraphing</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would like to...” • “I am hoping that...” • “However, ...” • “To make things worse, ...” • “Even after ...” • “I want to...” • “I would prefer...” • “If...not possible, I would like...”
<p>Coherence and cohesion mark: 9</p>	

Lexical resource	
<p>To what extent does the writer use vocabulary?</p> <p>Uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Natural and sophisticated control of lexical features.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<u>irrational</u> behaviours” • “<u>bring</u> my accommodation issues...<u>to your immediate attention</u>” • “...find it <u>unbearable</u>...” • “He refuses to <u>collaborate</u> with me...”
<p>To what extent does the writer make errors in lexical resource?</p> <p>Rare minor errors occur only as “slips”</p>	<p>Comments</p>
<p>Lexical resource mark: 9</p>	
Grammatical range and accuracy	
<p>To what extent does the writer use structures with flexibility and accuracy?</p> <p>Uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would like to bring my accommodation issues, created specifically due to my roommate’s irrational behaviours, to your immediate attention.” • “I cannot concentrate on my studies and find it unbearable to live with such a housemate.” • “I am hoping that you allow me to shift into another room soon.” • “My previous roommate was extremely cooperative and friendly.”
<p>To what extent does the writer make grammatical errors?</p> <p>Rare minor errors occur only as “slips”</p>	<p>Comments</p>
<p>Grammatical range and accuracy mark: 9</p>	
<p>Overall score: 8.5</p>	

Appendix XX: Writing task sample scripts and assessment sheet for the sample script 2

Sample script 2:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a student who is studying in this university and sharing one room with other students. As you can see , before coming here , we lived with parents and never lived with other people ,so our living custom may be different. That is the root of many problems.

Talking about me as an example, I get well with my roommates and most time we live a happy life, but there still some problems that bring unpleasantness. When studying come across playing computer games ,problems are undeniable. When I step in this school, I have a prospect at learning lots of knowledge which will benefits myself and the world in the future, so I spend lots of my time studying. But when I am studying ,others are playing games which product loud and mass noise. It Really influences me and distract me. But after many communications I learnt that they play games with a loud and mass noise is their hobbies and they thought a person who don't play games is strange. So ask them to stop is unpractical. What should I do?

In my personal view, I prefer accommodation which I can live with who have the same hobbies with me. For example I'd like to live with one of my classmate who also like computer science and computer programming just like me. Thus we can learn from each other , make progress together and spend our 4 years life in collage with pleasure and beautiful memory.

Best wishes

Writing task	
Number of student: <i>Sample Script 2</i>	
Sociocultural competence	
Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer identify communication goal clearly?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>If so, is the communication goal appropriate to the task?</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Communication goal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I prefer accommodation which I can live with who have the same hobbies with me. For example I'd like to live with one of my classmate who also like computer science and computer programming just like me. Thus we can learn from each other, make progress together and spend our 4 years life in college with pleasure and beautiful memory." <p>If the writer had only asked the accommodation officer to find another roommate who has a similar hobby as the writer, it would be more difficult for the accommodation officer to do so. However, the writer recommends a specific roommate who is her classmate, which makes the job easier, although further arrangements still need to be made.</p>
<p>Are the supporting arguments appropriate enough to be convincing?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>If so, to what extent?</p> <p>Considerably convincing and appropriate</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The main problem is the loud noise made by the writer's roommates when they were playing games.</p> <p>The writer has attempted to communicate with his/her roommates many times but there is no solution.</p> <p>The roommates regards the writer as "strange" because he/she did not play games. The writer asks "what should I do?", which draws the sympathy of the reader for the writer.</p>
<p>To what extent is the writing format appropriate to the context?</p> <p>Uses right register of words, as well as sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question, to a considerably high level</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Uses formal language throughout the letter. Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Dear Sir or Madam" • "As you can see..." • "In my personal views..."

Personal quality assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer show openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking?</p> <p>Openness: Yes</p> <p>Flexibility: No</p> <p>Emotional regulation: Yes</p> <p>Critical thinking: Yes</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples of openness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “But after many communications I learnt that they play games with a loud and mass noise is their hobbies...” <p>Examples of emotional regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I get well with my roommates and most time we live a happy life...” • “...So ask them to stop is unpractical. What should I do?” <p>Examples of critical thinking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As you can see, before coming here, we live with parents and never lived with other people, so our living custom may be different. That is the root of many problems.”
<p>Communication goal achievement mark: 7</p> <p>Personal quality assessment mark: 0.5</p> <p>Total mark (sociocultural communicative competence): 7.5</p>	
Coherence and cohesion	
<p>To what extent does the writing show coherence?</p> <p>Arranges information and ideas coherently and there is clear overall progression</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The overall progression towards the communication goal is clear. However, it would be better if the communication goal were identified at the beginning of the letter to avoid the reader having to wait too long before understanding the communication purpose of the letter.</p>
<p>To what extent does the writing show cohesion?</p> <p>Uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical</p> <p>May not always use referencing clearly or appropriately</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Uses cohesive devices effectively.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As you can see, ...” • “For example...” • “Thus...” <p>Faulty or mechanical cohesive devices/non-clear or inappropriate referencing.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<u>Talking about</u> me as an example...” • “<u>So</u> asking them to stop is unpractical.” • “In my <u>personal</u> view...”
<p>Coherence and cohesion mark: 6</p>	

Lexical resource	
<p>To what extent does the writer use vocabulary?</p> <p>Uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task</p> <p>Attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...so our living <u>custom</u> may be different.” • “When studying come across playing computer games, problems are <u>undeniable</u>.” • “When I step in this school, I have a <u>prospect</u> at learning lots of knowledge ...” • “But when I am studying, others are playing games which produce loud and <u>mass</u> noise.”
<p>To what extent does the writer make errors in lexical resource?</p> <p>Makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...which will <u>benefits</u> myself...” • “It <u>Really</u> influences me and <u>distract</u> me.” • “they play games with a loud and <u>mass</u> noise is their hobbies and they thought a person who don’t play games is strange.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “make progress together and spend our <u>4</u> years life in <u>collage</u> with pleasure and beautiful memory.”
Lexical resource mark: 6	
Grammatical range and accuracy	
<p>To what extent does the writer use structures with flexibility and accuracy?</p> <p>Uses a mixture of simple and complex sentence forms</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am a student who is studying in this university and sharing one room with other students.” • “As you can see, before coming here, we lived with parents and never lived with other people...” • “This is the root of many problmes.” • “So ask them to stop is unpractical.”
<p>To what extent does the writer make grammatical errors?</p> <p>Makes some errors in grammar and punctuation but they rarely reduce communication</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...but <u>there still</u> some problems that bring unpleasantness.” • “they play games with a loud and mass noise is their <u>hobbies</u> and they <u>thought</u> a person who don’t play games is strange.”
Grammatical range and accuracy mark: 6	
Overall score: 6.5	

Appendix XXI: Writing task sample scripts and assessment sheet for the sample script 3

Sample script 3:

Dear Madam,

How are you?

I am a student in our college. I am happy to share a dormitory with my roommate. But she has some habits and customs which I can not accept. Such as, my sack time always before 11pm, but she stay up late watching TV plays often influence me a lot. Due to the voice, I can not fall asleep, so I often feel laziness during the study time. Though I have communicate with her many times, but she never change. I feel so helpless.

I know you are an understanding accommodation officer, I hope you may have a time, talk to my roommate, weather if she would like to change her sack time, or I would prefer change my dormitory.

Thank you!

Yours,
Diana

Writing task	
Number of student: <i>Sample Script 3</i>	
Sociocultural competence	
Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer identify communication goal clearly?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>If so, is the communication goal appropriate to the task?</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Communication goal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I hope you may have time, talk to my roommate, weather if she would like to change her sack time, or I would prefer change my dormitory." <p>The communication goals are formed of two options, which are both reasonable and appropriate.</p>
<p>Are the supporting arguments appropriate enough to be convincing?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>If so, to what extent?</p> <p>Moderate</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The arguments are relevant and convincing.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roommate stayed up late "watching TV" and the noise of the TV meant the writer could not fall asleep, which also caused a problem for the next day's study. • The writer points out that she tried to "communicate" with her roommate "many times", but her roommate never changed. <p>After the writer's own effort of trying to solve the conflict problem, asking for help from the accommodation officer is appropriate.</p> <p>However, one example of conflict is not strong enough.</p>
<p>To what extent is the writing format appropriate to the context?</p> <p>Considerably inappropriate</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The writer uses a considerably inappropriate register of words or epxressions, which does not reflect the sociocultural sensitivity.</p> <p>The format of the letter is informal, which is inappropriate to the context of wrting a complaint letter to an accommodation officer.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using lower case I ("i") repetitively • "Dear Madam" (should be "Dear Sir or Madam") • "How are you?" (informal) • "Thank you!" (informal) • "Yours" (should use "Yours faithfully" to end a letter here).

Personal quality assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer show openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking?</p> <p>Openness: Yes</p> <p>Flexibility: Yes</p> <p>Emotional regulation: Yes</p> <p>Critical thinking: No</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples of openness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I am happy to share a dormitory with my roommate."; • "I have communicate with her many times" <p>Examples of flexibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writer suggests that the accommodation officer talk to her roommate. If her roommate is willing to change, the writer is also willing to change her perception of her roommate and continue sharing the room with her. <p>Examples of emotional regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I am happy to share a dormitory with my roommate." • "I know you are an understanding accommodation officer..."
<p>Communication goal achievement mark: 5.5</p> <p>Personal quality assessment mark: 0.5</p> <p>Total mark (sociocultural communicative competence): 6</p>	
Coherence and cohesion	
<p>To what extent does the writing show coherence?</p> <p>Arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression</p>	<p>Comments</p>
<p>To what extent does the writing show cohesion?</p> <p>Makes inadequate and inaccurate use of cohesive devices</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Adequate use or accurate use of cohesive devices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Due to..." <p>Inadequate or inaccurate use of cohesive devices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "But..." • "so..." • "Though..."
<p>Coherence and cohesion mark: 5.5</p>	
Lexical resource	
<p>To what extent does the writer use vocabulary?</p> <p>Uses a limited range of vocabulary, but this is minimally adequate for the task</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "...often influence me <u>a lot</u>".

<p>To what extent does the writer make errors in lexical resource?</p> <p>Has limited control of word formation and spelling</p> <p>Errors cause a strain for the reader</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples: Limited control of word formation and spelling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “i” • “laziness” • “Due to the <u>voice</u>...” • “<u>understanding</u> accommodation officer” • “I feel so <u>helpless</u>.” <p>Errors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “she has some habits and <u>customs</u>...” • “<u>weather</u> if she would like to change her <u>sack</u> time...” • “I would <u>prefer</u> change my dormitory.”
<p>Lexical resource mark: 4</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Grammatical range and accuracy</p>	
<p>To what extent does the writer use structures with flexibility and accuracy?</p> <p>Uses a limited range of structures</p> <p>Attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Such as ,<u>my sack time always before</u> 11pm,<u>but</u> she <u>stay</u> up late watching TV <u>plays often influences</u> me a lot.” • “Though I <u>have</u> <u>communicate</u> with her many times,<u>but</u> she never <u>change</u>.” • “I know you are an understanding accommodation officer,i hope you may have a time ,talk to my roommate,weather if she would like to change her sack time,or I would prefer change my dormitory.”
<p>To what extent does the writer make grammatical errors?</p> <p>Errors predominate and punctuation is often faulty</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>There is often no space between the punctuation and the next (part of) the sentence.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Such as ,<u>my sack time always before</u> 11pm,<u>but</u> she <u>stay</u> up late watching TV <u>plays often influence</u> me a lot.” • “I know you are an understanding accommodation officer,<u>i</u> hope you may have a <u>time</u> ,<u>talk</u> to my roommate,<u>weather</u> if she would like to change her sack time,<u>or</u> I would prefer change my dormitory.”
<p>Grammatical range and accuracy mark: 4.5</p>	
<p>Overall score: 5.5</p>	

Appendix XXII: Writing task sample scripts and assessment sheet for the sample script 4

Sample script 4:

Dear Sir:

I am an ordinary student in the dormitory, but I have some problems when I share my dormitory with another students.

When I talk with other people, I feel embarrassed. You know most people enjoy quiet when they rest in bedroom, but I have many words share with my friend, my family by using phone. Although I know it is arbitrary, and it is unethical, I always do that to hurt my roommates.

Dear Sir, I can not change my disadvantages, but I'm feeling sorry to affect my bedrooms. So I want to share dormitory with someone like me. Please help me. If you would like to do that, my roommates and I will have a better life.

Thank you!

Writing task	
Number of student: <i>Sample Script 4</i>	
Sociocultural competence	
Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer identify communication goal clearly?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>If so, is the communication goal appropriate to the task?</p> <p>Partially</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Communication goal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I want to share dormitory with someone like me. Please help me. If you would like to do that, my roommates and I will have a better life.”
<p>Are the supporting arguments appropriate enough to be convincing?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>If so, to what extent?</p> <p>Considerably inappropriate</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The reason for the above communication goal was that the writer felt his/her talking with his/her friend or family on the phone was a disruption to his/her roommate.</p> <p>However, this problem could be solved by making the phone call outside the dormitory. Therefore, the argument is not convincing.</p>
<p>To what extent is the writing format appropriate to the context?</p> <p>Uses a considerably inappropriate register of words, as well as sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question, to the highest level</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The writer used informal language in a formal letter, which is inappropriate.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Dear Sir” • “Dear Sir, I can not change my disadvantages, but I’m feeling sorry to affect my bedrooms.” • “Please help me.” • “Thank you!”
Personal quality assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer show openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking?</p> <p>Openness: Yes</p> <p>Flexibility: No</p> <p>Emotional regulation: Yes</p> <p>Critical thinking: Yes</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples of openness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You know most people enjoy quiet when they rest in bedroom, but I have many words with my friend, my family by using phone.” <p>Examples of emotional regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I can not change my diadvantages, but I'm feeling sorry to affect my bedrooms.” • “Please help me. If you would like to do

	<p>that, my roommates and I will have a better life.”</p> <p>Examples of critical thinking: The writer has been constantly reflecting on the negative impact of his/her own actions (making phone calls in the dormitory) on his/her roommate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Although I know it is arbitrary, and it is unethical, I always do that to hurt my roommates.”
<p>Communication goal achievement mark: 5 Personal quality assessment mark: 0.5</p> <p>Total mark (sociocultural communicative competence): 5.5</p>	
Coherence and cohesion	
<p>To what extent does the writing show coherence? Presents information with some organisation, but there may be a lack of overall progression</p>	<p>Comments The progression is weak. Starting with unclear starting paragraph. Followed by loose supporting paragraphs.</p>
<p>To what extent does the writing show cohesion? Uses some basic cohesive devices, but these may be inaccurate or repetitive</p>	<p>Comments Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Although...” • “but...” • “When...”
Coherence and cohesion mark: 4.5	
Lexical resource	
<p>To what extent does the writer use vocabulary? Uses only basic vocabulary, which may be inappropriate for the task</p>	<p>Comments Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am an <u>ordinary</u> student in the dormitory.” • “You know most people enjoy quiet when they <u>rest</u> in bedroom, but I have many <u>words</u> share with my friend, my family by using phone.” • “Although I know it is <u>arbitrary</u>, and it is unethical, I always do that to <u>hurt</u> my roommates.” • “Dear Sir, I can not change my <u>disadvantages</u>, but I’m feeling sorry to affect <u>my bedrooms</u>.”
To what extent does the writer make	Comments

<p>errors in lexical resource?</p> <p>Makes noticeable errors in spelling and/or word formation that may cause some difficulty for the reader</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “but I have some problems when I share my dormitory with <u>another students.</u>” • “You know most people enjoy <u>quiet</u> when they rest in bedroom...”
<p>Lexical resource mark: 4.5</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Grammatical range and accuracy</p>	
<p>To what extent does the writer use structures with flexibility and accuracy?</p> <p>Uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms</p> <p>Attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<u>I am an ordinary student in the dormitory, but I have some problems</u> when I share my dormitory with another students.” • “<u>Dear Sir,</u> I can not change my disadvantages, but I’m feeling sorry to affect my bedrooms.”
<p>To what extent does the writer make grammatical errors?</p> <p>Makes frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty</p> <p>Errors can cause some difficulty for the reader</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am an ordinary student in the dormitory, but I have some problems when I share my dormitory with <u>another students.</u>” • “You know most people enjoy quiet when they rest in bedroom, but I have many words share with <u>my friend, my family</u> by using phone.” • “Although I know <u>it is arbitrary, and it is unethical,</u> I always do that to hurt my roommates.”
<p>Grammatical range and accuracy mark: 5</p>	
<p>Overall score: 5</p>	

Appendix XXIII: Writing task sample scripts and assessment sheet for the sample script 5

Sample script 5:

Dear Sir or Madam

I'm a freshman of our college, now, I meet some problems because of the arrangement your made. I live with some strange people. One roommate like studying in night, and the light will influence me. So, I can't sleep well. The another one is crazy, she like watch movie made by American. The most important thing is her laughter . She often laugh loudly when she watch TV. I have communicated with them, but made no sense. I can't stand them, because they made me can't study well and rest well. So ,I hope you can help me and solve this problem. I replay to exhcnage my room. I wish I can live a room which is offer for just two student. I would appreciated it if you agree my application.

Writing task	
Number of student: <i>Sample Script 5</i>	
Sociocultural competence	
Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer identify communication goal clearly?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>If so, is the communication goal appropriate to the task?</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Communication goal (at the end of the letter):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I hope you can help me and solve this problem. I replay to exchange my room. I wish I can live a room which is offer for just two student. I would appreciated it if you agree my application".
<p>Are the supporting arguments appropriate enough to be convincing/appropriate?</p> <p>No</p> <p>If so, to what extent?</p> <p>Wide-ranging, not convincing and inappropriate</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The arguments proposed by the writer are mostly not convincing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "One roommate like studying in night, and the light will influence me. So, I can't sleep well." • "The another one is crazy, she like watch movie made by American." • "The most important thing is her laughter. She often laugh loudly when she watch TV." • "I have communicated with them, but made no sense. I can't stand them, because they made me can't study well and rest well." <p>The first reason is relevant but not convincing. This problem could be solved by wearing a sleeping eye mask or hanging a thicker cover on the bedspread.</p> <p>The second reason is irrelevant and not convincing. It is very inappropriate to emphasise American movies here, which may be perceived as offensive to American people, but it also shows that the writer is not open-minded.</p> <p>The third reason is relevant and comparatively convincing.</p> <p>The fourth reason is convincing. The writer has tried to "communicated with" his/her classmates, but did not have any success in changing the situation, which affects his study and rest.</p>

	<p>However, at the beginning of the letter, the writer complains about the accommodation officer, which is very unwise and inappropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I meet some problems because of the arrangement your made."
<p>To what extent is the writing format appropriate to the context?</p> <p>Uses wide-ranging inappropriate register of words, as well as sociocultural sensitivity for the context in question</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The writer uses informal language in a formal letter, which is inappropriate. There is no appropriate ending of the letter.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "<u>I</u>m a freshman of our college, <u>now</u>, I <u>meet</u> some problems because of the arrangement <u>your</u> made." • "I live with some <u>strange</u> people." • "The another one is <u>crazy</u>." • "So, I <u>can</u>'t sleep well." <p>It is very inappropriate to end a letter with "I would appreciated it if you agree my application", as it may sound rude to the accommodation officer. According to the writer, if the accommodation does not agree with the writer's suggestion, the writer will not be grateful to the accommodation officer.</p>
<p>Personal quality assessment criteria</p>	
<p>Does the writer show openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking?</p> <p>Openness: Yes</p> <p>Flexibility: No</p> <p>Emotional regulation: No</p> <p>Critical thinking: No</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples of openness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I have communicated with them, but made no sense. I can't stand them, because they made me can't study well and rest well."
<p>Communication goal achievement mark: 4</p> <p>Personal quality assessment mark: 0</p> <p>Total mark (sociocultural communicative competence): 4</p>	

Coherence and cohesion	
<p>To what extent does the writing show coherence?</p> <p>Presents information and ideas but these are not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression in the response</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The majority of the arguments are either irrelevant or not convincing. Therefore, there is no clear progression in responding to the communication goal.</p>
<p>To what extent does the writing show cohesion?</p> <p>Uses some basic cohesive devices but these may be inaccurate or repetitive</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Inaccurate cohesive devices examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’m a freshman of our college, <u>now</u>, I meet some problems because of the arrangement your made.” • “One roommate like studying in night, <u>and</u> the light will influence me.” • “<u>So</u>, I can’t sleep well.” • “<u>The another one is crazy, she like</u> watch movie made by American.” • “<u>So</u>, I hope you can help me and solve this problem.”
<p>Coherence and cohesion mark: 4</p>	
Lexical resource	
<p>To what extent does the writer use vocabulary?</p> <p>Uses only basic vocabulary, which may be used repetitively or may be inappropriate for the task</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I live with some <u>strange</u> people.” • “I am a freshman of our college, now, I <u>meet</u> some problems because of the arrangement your made.” • “...she like watch movie <u>made by</u> American.” • “The most important <u>thing</u> is her laughter.” • “The another one is <u>crazy</u>...” • “I have communicated with them, but <u>made no sense</u>.” • “I can’t <u>stand</u> them.” • “So ,I hope you can help me <u>and</u> solve this problem.” • “I wish I can live a room which is offer for <u>just</u> two student.”
<p>To what extent does the writer make errors in lexical resource?</p> <p>Has limited control of word formation and/or spelling</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am a freshman of our college, now, I meet some problems because of the arrangement <u>your</u> made.” • “One roommate like studying <u>in night</u>...” • “<u>The another one</u> is crazy...”

Errors may cause a strain for the reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I <u>replay</u> to exchange my room.” • “I wish I can <u>live a room</u> which <u>is offer</u> <u>for</u> just two student.” • I <u>would appreciated</u> it if you <u>agree my application</u>.”
Lexical resource mark: 4	
Grammatical range and accuracy	
<p>To what extent does the writer use structures with flexibility and accuracy?</p> <p>Uses a limited range of structures</p> <p>Attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’m a freshman of our college, <u>now</u>, I meet some problems because of the arrangement your made.” • <u>The another one is crazy, she like watch movie made by American.</u>
<p>To what extent does the writer make grammatical errors?</p> <p>Makes frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty</p> <p>Some structures are accurate but errors predominate, and punctuation is often faulty</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “One roommate <u>like</u> studying in night, and the light <u>will influence</u> me.” • “...she <u>like watch</u> movie made by American.” • “She often <u>laugh</u> loudly when she <u>watch</u> TV.” • “I can’t stand them, <u>because they made me can’t study well and rest well.</u>” • “I wish I can <u>live a room</u> which <u>is offer for</u> just <u>two student</u>.” • “I <u>would appreciated</u> it if you agree my application.”
Grammatical range and accuracy mark: 4.5	
Overall score: 4	

Appendix XXIV: Writing task sample scripts and assessment sheet for the sample script 6

Sample script 6:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I'm a sophomore in this college. My roommate and I are greatly appreciated for your hard work. And I am writing to explain some problems on the arrangement of the accommodation so that you could further improve your work.

In this room, everybody has different habits. For example, somebody like absolutely quiet, but another feels crazy. So one person had very little in common with the others. With the time is going, they will have many disagreement.

I propose you should let everyone make their own decisions. Every student will have chance to choose roommate who has the same habits.

It may be a good suggestion, though we know that we should shake ourselves adaptability.

Thank you for your reading. We are supposed to your improve.

Emily,

Date

Writing task	
Number of student: <i>Sample Script 6</i>	
Sociocultural competence	
Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer identify communication goal clearly?</p> <p>Yes but vaguely</p> <p>If so, is the communication goal appropriate to the task?</p> <p>No</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Communication goal (at the beginning of the letter):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I am writing to explain some problems on the arrangement of the accommodation so that you could further improve your work." <p>Communication goal (at the end of the letter):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I propose you should let everyone make their own dicisions. Every student will have chance to choose roommate who has the same habits. It may be a good suggestion, though we know that we should make ourselves adaptability." <p>The communication goal identified at the beginning of the letter is inappropriate, as it sounds very rude to the accommodation officer.</p> <p>The communication goal identified at the end of the letter is also inappropriate, as it is not practical to let every student make decisions about their accommodation.</p> <p>What the writer is trying to suggest the accommodation officer does is general and for every student, which is very difficult for the accommodation officer to achieve. As there is no specific requirement about what the writer would like the accommodation officer to do for herself, the communication goal is vague and inappropriate.</p>

<p>Are the supporting arguments appropriate enough to be convincing?</p> <p>No</p> <p>If so, to what extent?</p> <p>Largely not convincing and inappropriate</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The supporting argument is understandable but largely not convincing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In this room, everybody has different habits. For example, somebody like absolutely quiet, but another feels crazy. So one person had very little in common with the others. With the time is going, they will have many disagreement.” <p>The argument of "everybody has different habits" is not a convincing reason for any room rearrangement. Unless the accommodation facilities can provide each student with a single room, the conflicts would always exist. In addition, living with someone with the same habits does not help students to develop the strategy and ability to form relationships with a diverse range of people.</p>
<p>To what extent is the writing format appropriate to the context?</p> <p>Uses largely inappropriate register of words, as well as sociocultural sensitivity, for the context in question</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<u>And</u> I am writing to explain some problems on the arrangement of the accommodation <u>so that you could further improve your work.</u>” • “<u>Thank you for your reading.</u> We are <u>supposed to your improve.</u>” • “Emily, Date”
<p>Personal quality assessment criteria</p>	
<p>Does the writer show openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking?</p> <p>Openness: No</p> <p>Flexibility: No</p> <p>Emotional regulation: Yes</p> <p>Critical thinking: No</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples of emotional regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “My roommate and I are greatly appreciated for your hard work.”
<p>Communication goal achievement mark: 3</p> <p>Personal quality assessment mark: 0</p> <p>Total mark (sociocultural communicative competence): 3</p>	

Coherence and cohesion	
<p>To what extent does the writing show coherence?</p> <p>Presents information and ideas but these are not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression in the response</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The arguments are largely not convincing. There is no clear progression in responding to the communication goal.</p>
<p>To what extent does the writing show cohesion?</p> <p>Uses some basic cohesive devices but these may be inaccurate or repetitive</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Inaccurate cohesive devices examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<u>And</u> I am writing to explain some problems on the arrangement of the accommodation so that you could further improve your work.” • “<u>So</u> one person had very little in common with the others.” • “I may be a good suggestion,<u>though</u> we know that we should make ourselves adaptability.”
<p>Coherence and cohesion mark: 4</p>	
Lexical resource	
<p>To what extent does the writer use vocabulary?</p> <p>Uses only basic vocabulary, which may be used repetitively or may be inappropriate for the task</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I <u>propose</u> you should let everyone make their own dicisions.” • “We are <u>supposed</u> to your improve.”
<p>To what extent does the writer make errors in lexical resource?</p> <p>Has limited control of word formation and/or spelling</p> <p>Errors may cause a strain for the reader</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “For example,<u>somebody</u> like <u>absolutely quiet</u>,but another feels <u>creazy</u>.” • “I propose you should let everyone make their own <u>dicisions</u>.” • “It may be a good suggestion,<u>though</u> we know that we should make ourselves <u>adaptability</u>.” • “We are supposed to your <u>improve</u>.”
<p>Lexical resource mark: 4</p>	
Grammatical range and accuracy	

<p>To what extent does the writer use structures with flexibility and accuracy?</p> <p>Uses a limited range of structures (5)</p> <p>Attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences (5)</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<u>And</u> I am writing to explain some problems on the arrangement of the accommodation so that you could further improve your work.” • “Every student will have chance to choose roommate who has the same habits.” • “It may be a good suggestion,<u>though</u> we know that we should make ourselves adaptability.”
<p>To what extent does the writer make grammatical errors?</p> <p>Makes frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty (5)</p> <p>Some structures are accurate but errors predominate, and punctuation is often faulty (4)</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “For example,somebody <u>like</u> absolutely quiet,but another feels crazy.” • “<u>With the time is going,they will</u> have many disagreement.” • I propose you <u>should</u> let everyone make their own <u>dicisions</u>.” • “Every student <u>will</u> have <u>chance</u> to choose roommate who has the same habits.
<p>Grammatical range and accuracy mark:</p>	<p>4.5</p>
<p>Overall score: 3.5</p>	

Appendix XXV: Writing task sample scripts and assessment sheet for the sample script 7

Sample script 7:

Dear accommodation officer:

I am writing to tell you something in my living room in college.

First, it was about half a year since I entered in the university and I have a well time living with my roommates. It is a ~~4-room~~ 4-person room. The other three all like the guitar. They talk about guitar in their free time. As for me, I don't like playing guitar but listening to them.

However, there are also some problems. Firstly, we ~~are staying~~ ^{stay} up more and more. In every nights, some of us are willing to stay up to play game, doing homework, etc. ~~Which~~ ^{It} causes another problem that, we can't get up in the correct time.

Writing task	
Number of student: <i>Sample Script 7</i>	
Sociocultural competence	
Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer identify the communication goal clearly?</p> <p>No</p> <p>If so, is the communication goal appropriate to the task?</p> <p>N/A</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The writer does not identify the communication goal clearly. However, the reader can see that the context of the communication is between the writer as a student and the accommodation officer.</p>
<p>Are the supporting arguments appropriate enough to be convincing?</p> <p>No</p> <p>If so, to what extent?</p> <p>N/A</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The writer provides some inappropriate reasons to support the arguments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The other three all like the guitar. They talk about guitar in their free time. As for me, I don't like playing guitar but listening to them." <p>The other three roommates like the guitar, which is different from the writer, who does not seem to have an appropriate reason to make any request to the accommodation officer.</p>
<p>To what extent is the writing format appropriate to the context?</p> <p>N/A</p>	<p>Comments</p>
Personal quality assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer show openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking?</p> <p>Openness: No</p> <p>Flexibility: No</p> <p>Emotional regulation: Yes</p> <p>Critical thinking: No</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples of emotional regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "First, it was about half a year since I entered in the university and I have a well time living with my roommates."
<p>Communication goal achievement mark: 2</p> <p>Personal quality assessment mark: 0</p>	
<p>Total mark (sociocultural communicative competence): 2</p>	

Coherence and cohesion	
<p>To what extent does the writing show coherence?</p> <p>Does not organise ideas logically</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Although the writer identifies that “I am writing to tell you something in my living room in a collage”, and lists two issues, there is no summary at the end of the writing.</p>
<p>To what extent does the writing show cohesion?</p> <p>May use a very limited range of cohesive devices, and those used may not indicate a logical relationship between ideas</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<u>First</u>,...” • “However, there are also some problems. <u>Firstly</u>, ...” <p>Two first(ly) in one text is confusing.</p>
<p>Coherence and cohesion mark: 2.5</p>	
Lexical resource	
<p>To what extent does the writer use vocabulary?</p> <p>Uses only basic vocabulary, which may be used repetitively or may be inappropriate for the task</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “First, it was about half a year since I <u>entered</u> in the university and I have a <u>well</u> time living with my roommates.” • “It causes another problem that, we can’t get up <u>in</u> the <u>correct</u> time.”
<p>To what extent does the writer make errors in lexical resource?</p> <p>Has limited control of word formation and/or spelling</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am writing to tell you something in my living room in <u>colleage</u>.” • “<u>In</u> every <u>nighties</u>, some of us <u>are willing to</u> stay up to play game, doing homework, etc.” • “It is a <u>4-person</u> room.”
<p>Lexical resource mark: 4</p>	
Grammatical range and accuracy	
<p>To what extent does the writer use structures with flexibility and accuracy?</p> <p>Uses a very limited range of structures, with only rare use of subordinate clauses</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am writing to tell you something in my living room in collage.” • “First, it was about half a year since I entered in the university and I have a well time living with my roommates.”
<p>To what extent does the writer make</p>	<p>Comments</p>

<p>grammatical errors?</p> <p>Some structures are accurate but errors predominate</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “First, it <u>was about</u> half a year <u>since</u> I entered in the university <u>and</u> I <u>have a</u> well time living with my roommates.” • “As for me, I don’t like playing guitar but <u>listening to them.</u>” • “However, there are also some problems. Firstly, we stay up more and more. In every <u>nighties</u>, some of us are willing to stay up to play <u>game, doing</u> homework ,etc.”
<p>Grammatical range and accuracy mark:</p>	<p>4</p>
<p>Overall score:</p>	<p>3</p>

Appendix XXVI: Writing task sample scripts and assessment sheet for the sample script 8

Sample script 8:

There were many situations in my daily life ~~and~~. One is easy to deal with, but the majority of the other is difficult to work. When the term ~~was~~ was beginning, we can get along well with in life. But as time goes by, ~~we~~ I find it very hard to live with them.

As for as I am concerned, the problem: accounting for myself. There is no doubt that every coin has two sides. So each individuals must be distinctive. Different personality cause the problem and finally we cannot deal well with it.

In a word, I can get all with ~~from~~ roommates peacefully. This is very ~~and~~ essential.

Writing task	
Number of student: <i>Sample Script 8</i>	
Sociocultural competence	
Communication goal achievement assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer identify communication goal clearly?</p> <p>No</p> <p>If so, is the communication goal appropriate to the task?</p> <p>N/A</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>The communication goal is not identified and the context of the communication is not clarified.</p>
<p>Are the supporting arguments appropriate enough to be convincing?</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>If so, to what extent?</p> <p>N/A</p>	<p>Comments</p>
<p>To what extent is the writing format appropriate to the context?</p> <p>N/A</p>	<p>Comments</p>
Personal quality assessment criteria	
<p>Does the writer show openness, flexibility, emotional regulation and critical thinking?</p> <p>Openness: Yes</p> <p>Flexibility: No</p> <p>Emotional regulation: No</p> <p>Critical thinking: No</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Examples of openness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I can get all with roommates peacefully. This is very essential.”
<p>Communication goal achievement mark: 1</p> <p>Personal quality assessment mark: 0</p> <p>Total score (sociocultural communicative competence): 1</p>	

Coherence and cohesion	
To what extent does the writing show coherence? Fails to communicate any message	Comments
To what extent does the writing show cohesion? Uses a very limited range of cohesive devices, and those used may not indicate a logical relationship between ideas	Comments Examples: • “but...” • “So...” • “In a word...”
Coherence and cohesion mark: 1.5	
Lexical resource	
To what extent does the writer use vocabulary? Uses a limited range of vocabulary, but this is minimally adequate for the task	Comments Examples: • “There were many <u>situations</u> in my daily life. <u>One</u> is easy to deal with, but the majority of the other is difficult to <u>work</u> .”
To what extent does the writer make errors in lexical resource? Has limited control of word formation and/or spelling Errors may cause a strain for the reader	Comments Examples: • “When <u>the term was beginning</u> , <u>We</u> can get along well with in life.” • “As far as I am concerned, the problem <u>accounting</u> for myself.” • “Different <u>personality</u> <u>cause</u> the problem...” Errors: • “In a word, I can get <u>all</u> with roommates peacefully.”
Lexical resource mark: 4.5	
Grammatical range and accuracy	
To what extent does the writer use structures with flexibility and accuracy? Uses a limited range of structures Attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences	Comments Examples: • “When <u>the term was beginning</u> , <u>We</u> can get along with <u>in life</u> .” • “As far as I am concerned, <u>the problem accounting</u> for myself.”
To what extent does the writer make grammatical errors? Makes frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty Errors can cause some difficulty for the reader	Comments Examples: • “When the term <u>was beginning</u> , <u>We</u> can get along well with in life.” • “As far as I am concerned, the problem <u>accounting</u> for myself.” • “Different <u>personality</u> <u>cause</u> the problem...”
Grammatical range and accuracy mark: 5	
Overall score: 3	

Appendix XXVII: A sample of students' essays for the assignment project in RC2

Winter Holiday Project

1. Choose two British luxury brands and write an essay about them.
Word Count: 500–1,500 words.
2. Create a PowerPoint and prepare for the presentation.
3. Work in pairs.



**The Effect of Clothing Style
on Choosing Marketing Orientation**

Brief Introduction

Alexander McQueen

Alexander McQueen is a renowned British brand, established by a British fashion designer and couturier in the late 1990s.

In terms of designer, although Lee Alexander McQueen was a gay, however we cannot deny his incredible innovation and talent. His achievements in fashion earned him four British Designer of the Year awards (1996, 1997, 2001 and 2003), as well as the CFDA's International Designer of the Year award in 2003. In conclusion, he was regarded as the fashion godfather of Britain.

Normally, the colour of the clothing he designed seems could seem a little strange and inspired by nature. As far as we can see, the clothing of Alexander McQueen looks quite different with other clothings. Natural elements were the his source of inspiration, such as the wings of a bird, the skin of fish, the scene of a flower. In addition to that, he can could always combine two quite different things elements into one product: soft, morbidezza and unyielding, tradition and modernity. Because of this, for this reason, it attracts a large number of international superstars. For example, the pop singer, Lady Gaga, is really fond of the his donkey hoof shoes.

Paul Smith

Paul Smith, another British luxury brand, is renowned for its creative spirit, which combines tradition and modernity. It is good at making an inventive use of traditional craftsmanship and cutting-edge design to create beautifully made, desirable, modern pieces. As for the style, the clothing makes people feel quite refreshing because you, normally, they can find some funny, attractive and innovative details if observed carefully.

Sir Paul Smith, the founder of Paul Smith, is an English fashion guru and foremost designer, whose business and reputation is founded upon his menswear. Many people regard him as a leader of British and international design trends.

Method and Result

In order to analyse the effect of clothing style on choosing marketing orientation, we designed a simple investigation, using three series of pictures with different styles to collect the statistics that about which one is seen as the most attractive and what which is the most commonly used.

The questions are as following:

1. Please choose two out of three that attract you most and you are curious about.
2. Please choose two out of three that you would like to know more about.

3. If you can could get one to wear for free, which one would you would like to choose?



Amanda George
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Amanda George
Is it okay to say this? Does this not carry a level of judgement about his sexual orientation? Perhaps you could say, 'In terms of design, Lee... McQueen, who is gay, is known for his incredible innovation and talent.'

Amanda George
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Amanda George
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Amanda George
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Amanda George
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At last, in the end, we got collected 32 reviews in total. According to the results of our survey, most people are curious about the first one (the style of Alexander, which occupies 33%) and the third one (Paul Smith, which occupies 47%). And there is the a similar percentage of those who would like to know more about these brands. However, on the contrary, only approximately 4 per cent% would like to wear the clothing of Alexander for free. And it is also something interesting to note is that both the second one and the third one occupy 48 per cent%.

There are some interesting statistics that can be seen from the results. Normally, the fashionable fashion creations and special clothing seem rather more strange, which tends to motivate the curiosity of people and attract much more attention. But it seems they are just for appreciating them rather than actually wishing to wear them. However, those seeming more common are expected to be much more easier for in terms of acceptance, especially, in some conservative countries such as China, Japan and North Korea.

As far as we can see from the analysis above, we can draw some conclusions. Because of the strong attraction of visual impact, the enterprise, which hopes its brand to will become a famous one, would like to choose some innovative and creative schemes to help the brand impress everybody much at the first time initially. On the next point, if the marketing strategy is led by sales, much too much emphasis on fashion will cause result in less fewer customers because the conformity makes everybody do not want to be regarded as a strange guy. In addition to that, these two marketing orientations are called brand orientation and sales orientation respectively in marketing. However, there are still some other factors that interact with the fashion style, to be more specific, the gender, the age, the level of consumption, the cultural background, and so on.

Appendix XXVIII: A sample of students' writing for the IELTS Academic Writing Task II in RC2

Pre test:

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Is freedom of speech necessary in a free society?

Give reasons for your answer.

Write at least 250 words.

Over the past few years, with the rapid pace of information development, there are more and more mobile terminals coming out, which provide much more approaches for communication among everybody in anytime and anywhere. Actually, it also bring some arguement to our humankind, whether freedom of speech is necessary in a free society.

Some people stand the point that freedom of speech is absolutely significant in our daily life. On the one hand, it can give us a better approaches to share current affairs around us, quickly, efficientlt and straightly, which could allow everybody take the action in the first time for much more benefit or for less lose. On the other hand, freedom of speech can make the government more apparent, just like the acient Athens, which gives the power to the people to supervise their country.

However I stand on the completely opposite stage , freedom of speech should be banned .In the first place, as far as I can see, the so-called democracy of Athens is actually not appropriate as what it is we acknowledge usually . And as one of the Greek, the Great philosopher, Plato, believed the democracy should be abolished as the death of his teacher, Socrates. In the second place, peace is always a symble of wellbeing, without of limitation in speech freedom on twitter, Ukraine's civil revolution broke out. In addition to that, what should not be forgotten to emphasize is the bullwhip effect. Usually, the information is expected to be expanded, which will bring some serious result and leads to butterfly effect finally.

Overall, I believe freedom of speech in a free society is expect to bring much more disadvantages than advantages, so it seems not significant in our daily life.

Post test:

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Nowadays many students have the opportunity to study for part or all of their courses in foreign countries.

While studying abroad brings many benefits to individual students, it also has a number of disadvantages.

Do you agree or disagree?

Write at least 250 words.

Over the past decades, with the rapid pace of globalization, an increase number of people prefer to go abroad for further study for part or all of their courses because there seems much less barriers . However, following that, a fierce debate came out. If its advantages overweight the disadvantages.

There are a large number of people hold the belief that disadvantages are more than advantages. In the first place, the separation is the most common factor. Just like most Chinese parents, they must experienced fierce emotional conflict to make a decision to send their children abroad. In the second place, the different cultural background is supposed to be another disadvantage. It makes a freshman find really hard to adapt to it. However I completely disagree about this idea.

As far as I can see, going abroad for further study benefits much. Firstly, it can help us broaden our horizon. We can get a better understanding of the diversity word if we study in another place which is far from our mother land. Secondly, the educational infrastructure is completely different as well. Due to the large population of China and limited number of facilities, it seems much more scarce, compared with that in other developed countries. Finally, the academic atmosphere is serious as well. In my opinion, in China, a large number of students study just for a ideal job. However, in some certain countries, the students choose further study to explore the unknown fields.

Overall, though there are some disadvantages, however, I believe advantages of going abroad for further study benefit much.

Appendix XXIX: Application and consent form of the intervention group of the EEC course

**英语延伸课程实验班
EEC Course intervention class**

申请和同意参与研究表

Application and Consent Form

姓名 Chinese name		英文名 English name		性别 Gender	
学校 University/School					
专业 Major					
年级 Year group					
座机/手机 Landline/Mobile			邮箱 Email		
QQ号 QQ Account			出生年月日 Date of Birth		
<p>你学习英文希望达到什么目标？（请尽量详细填写，以便我们的课程更有针对性） What do you intend to achieve after learning English? (Please describe this in as much detail as possible so that we can design a more meaningful course for you.)</p>					

请仔细阅读以下参加剑桥英语延伸课程的基本要求。若你认为自己能达到下面的要求，请在其后指定的位置签字。

Please read the requirements for participating in the EEC course and the study. If you agree with all the requirements below, please sign your name in the indicated place.

1. 我明白我需要参加面试，通过录取后才能参加该课程。

I understand that I need to attend the admission interview before I join the EEC course and its study.

2. 我能在该课程上课时间内上网，网速不低于 2M，并备有耳麦和网络视频。

I understand that I need to make sure I can access the Internet with a bandwidth of faster than 2M during the lesson time of the EEC course. I should have headphones and a web-cam to attend the course.

3. 我能按时上课；没有极特殊的原因，不会缺课或早退。

I can attend the EEC lessons on time. I will not be absent, late or leave the lesson early without a valid reason.

4. 我能主动完成学习任务，包括上课期间积极与老师、同学交流，按时完成作文和课前、课后练习等。

I will complete the tasks set by the EEC course, including actively participating in the conversations with teachers and classmates and completing home tasks.

5. 我愿意完成英语延伸课程开课前和课程结束后的英语测试。

I will complete the pre- and post-tests of the EEC course.

6. 我明白并同意作为英语延伸课程研究的参与者，并完成相关的研究调查问卷和访谈等。

I understand and will complete the questionnaires and undertake the interviews as a participant of the EEC course and its study.

7. 我明白并允许我在参加英语延伸课程的课前课后测试、上课表现、调查问卷和访谈的信息用于关于英语延伸课的研究和发表。

I understand and allow all my data produced in the pre-test, post-test, lessons, the questionnaires, and interviews to be used in the study of the EEC course or be published for the research purpose.

8. 我保证不将参加该课程的任何资料或截图传给任何其它人。

I will not pass any materials, content or information of the EEC course and its study to any third parties.

姓名（打印体）：

签名：

Full name (Printed):

Signature:

Date:

日期：