Evaluation on EFL Teacher Roles from the Perspective of Mediation: Case Studies of China's Secondary School Classroom Practices

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Abstract

This paper concerns the evaluation on China's secondary school English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' roles from the perspective of mediation. To address the proposed research question, a methodological triangulation (i.e., observations and interviews) is employed for data collection regarding teachers' mediative performance. Based on the findings, a conclusion is drawn that most EFL teachers in China's secondary schools are unable to mediate students' learning due to the misconception of mediation and the fact that most EFL learners sit passively in class receiving knowledge from the teacher rather than communicating effectively in the language. A teacher's correct knowledge of mediation plus his/her competence to overcome situational constraints might bring about the successful execution of the mediator role.

Keywords: role, secondary school, EFL teacher, mediation.

1. Introduction

Teacher roles have changed and proceed to meet new requirements as schools gradually become locations where students learn about the world of work and get prepared for successful citizenship by socializing and collaborating with others around them (Tseng, 1999). From the perspective of the facilitation of learners' education quality, this paper is expected to be significant since most of China's secondary school students are unable to express themselves orally and literally in proper English (Ye, 2007). Rather, they are exposed to limited linguistic knowledge attaching importance to grammatical forms of language (Ting, 1987). The most successful English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching programs, however, should "involve the whole learner in the experience of language as a network of relations between people, things, and events" (Chen, 2005, p. 3). Mediation provides learners with more opportunities for them to practice English in communication and render the language learning more effective (Williams & Burden, 2000). In this regard, the teacher role as mediator should take priority in language instruction (Feuerstein, 1990).

2. The Problem

China is historically an authoritarian society, and the classroom is heavily influenced by the Confucian model of the explicitly stratified social hierarchy, for which EFL instruction is teacher-centered, textbook-centered, and grammar-centered (Liao, 2003). Most of China's secondary school EFL teachers note that their students encounter numerous obstacles in speaking and writing (Kang & Wang, 2003). This phenomenon is ascribed to the insufficiency of proper instructional strategies applied in the language classroom (Ng & Tang, 1997). It seems rooted in the deficiency of research respecting teacher roles (Leng, 1997). It is assumed that this study could push the current pedagogical reform throughout China by identifying EFL teachers' implementation of mediation for theoretical verification and empirical support of students' all-round development. This conduct, for one thing, applies to the requests of China's new *National Standards of English Curriculum for Basic Education* (hereafter referred to as *Curriculum Standards*) built on the rationale that the role of school is no longer limited to instruction because teachers should undertake responsibilities and obligations in other possible aspects apart from teaching duties (Ministry of Education of China [MOE], 2001). For another, as teachers are decision-makers in handling the class process, the teacher role is viewed as a crucial issue to be addressed regardless of whatever educational settings, potentials, and problems (Brown, 2001). As such, this study attempts to bridge the gap in the existing literature on the extent of teachers' adherence to desired requirements in EFL instruction.

3. Question

This paper is aimed at exploring secondary school EFL teacher roles in China from the perspective of mediation. To fulfill this target, one question that follows to be addressed is proposed:
What are the roles of secondary school EFL teachers in China?

4. Literature

Throughout the review of the existing literature, various teacher roles could be identified, among which little research has explored the teacher role as mediator from the perspective of social constructivism. The following account seeks to distinguish the teacher as mediator and other teacher roles.

4.1 Teacher as Mediator

"Mediation theory has played a central role in social constructivist framework" (Sun, 2005, p. 6), which "is concerned with helping learners to become autonomous, to take control of their own learning, with the fundamental aim of enabling them to become independent thinkers and problem-solvers" (Williams & Burden, 2000, p. 68). As not every interaction encompassing a task, a learner, and a mediator has a quality of mediated learning experience (MLE), Feuerstein (1980) develops a system of the MLE criteria to identify mediation interaction levels as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Feuerstein's MLE criteria

Parameter	Conceptualization
1. Significance	The teacher makes students realize the importance of a learning task so that they can look at the significance of the task to their own and in a broader cultural context.
2. Purpose beyond the here and now	Explains to learners how conducting a learning activity will help them in the future beyond the moment and situation at present only.
3. Shared intention	Makes instructions clear and ensure the intention is understood and reciprocated by learners in presenting a task.
4. A sense of competence	Fosters learners' feelings of competence and capability of learning.
5. Control of own behavior	Encourages students to become autonomous by self-controlling their learning procedure.
6. Goal-setting	Teaches learners how to establish achievable targets and to locate approaches for realizing them.
7. Challenge	Helps learners to develop an internal need to confront challenges and to seek for new challenges in life.
8. Awareness of change	Urges learners to monitor changes in themselves and to understand that humans are changeable all the time.
9. A belief in positive outcomes	Stimulates learners to assume that there is always the possibility of finding a solution, even when faced with an apparently intractable problem.
10. Sharing	Invites learners to share behaviors among themselves and to perceive that it is advisable for some problems to be addressed collaboratively.
11. Individuality	Helps learners realize their individual characteristics in terms of unique aspects.
12. A sense of belonging	Aids learners to establish a consciousness of pertaining to the whole class community in the process of completing a learning task.

Feuerstein (1980) believes each of the criteria belongs to a mediation strategy. The first "three criteria are also considered *universal*, in the sense that they can be present in all races, ethnic

groups, cultural entities, and socioeconomic strata" ((Seng, Pou, & Tan, 2003, p. 36). By contrast, "the remaining nine criteria are considered *situational* because they need not always be present in every MLE" (Seng et al., 2003, p. 36). Given the need of this study, the operational definitions of *universal mediation* and *situational mediation* are drawn on, referring to the first three MLE criteria and the remaining nine respectively. Meanwhile, the operational definition of *traditional teachers* is drawn on representing non-mediators, and non-mediators' instruction is defined as teaching traditionally.

4.2 Traditional EFL Teacher Roles

In the last few decades, researchers (e.g., Cook, 2000; Hedge, 2002; Wang, 2007) have engaged in teacher role innovation, urging EFL teachers to be helpers, organizers, monitors, co-communicators, explainers, involvers, and enablers (Teachers' Role, 2007). Harmer (2001) assumes that teacher roles "may change from one activity to another, or from one stage of an activity to another" in the classroom (p. 57). He suggests a framework of teacher roles that are dependent on what students are wished to achieve as illustrated in Table 2. So "more precise terms" of teacher roles with reference to the related frameworks are expected to provide justifications for teacher roles to be happening in this study (p. 57).

Table 2: Harmer's teacher roles framework

Role	Feature
Controller	The teacher takes charge of the whole class and activities by taking the roll, telling students instructions, organizing drills, reading aloud, and manifesting the teacher-fronted approach.
Assessor	Provides students with feedback regarding their performance and grades them in distinct ways.
Corrector	Offers students correction of their linguistic errors while assessing their language learning competence.
Organizer	Organizes students to work on classroom activities.
Prompter	Prompts students so that they can proceed with learning procedure.
Resource	Acts as students' reliable resource when they encounter difficulties.
Participant	Participates in students' classroom activities.
Tutor	Works with students individually or in small groups if they undertake challenging learning programs.
Observer	Observes students' performance to offer them individual/group feedback.

Cited from *The practice of English language teaching* by J. Harmer, 2001, pp. 57-62.

Karavas-Dukas (1995) also undertook a study "with a multicultural group of experienced teachers from widely differing worldwide contexts and representing a variety of teaching approaches" and proposed a balanced framework as shown in Table 3 (cited in Hedge, 2002, p. 27).

While some of the participating teachers claimed to be mediators as seen in Table 3, the analysis of the teacher roles is restricted to their own reports unable to reflect their true performance since the teacher role is dynamic (Fisher, 2005). Teachers' being observed seems crucial for their specific roles to be identified in authentic settings, which is also one investigational tool to help achieve the goal of this study.

Table 3: Teacher roles by Karavas-Dukas

Category	Roles	Percentage
Source of expertise	Instructor, presenter, actor, and pedagogist (denoting authoritarian stance); informant, input provider, information provider, resource, and source of knowledge (denoting supportive stance)	46.4 %
Management roles	Manager, organizer, director, administrator, public relations officer, and arranger	35.7%
Source of advice	Counselor, adviser, personal tutor, psychologist, and listener	53.5%
Facilitator of learning	Learning facilitator, helper, guide, catalyst to group discussion, prompter, and ***mediator***	64.2%
Sharing roles	Negotiator, participant, student, and co-operator	17.8%
Caring roles	Friend, sister/mother, caretaker, and supporter	25%
Creator of classroom atmosphere	Entertainer, motivator, and source of inspiration	14.2%
Evaluator		10.7%
Example of behavior and hard work		3.5%

Cited from *Teaching and learning in the language classroom* by T. Hedge, 2002, pp. 28-29.

5. Instruments

5.1 Observations

A purposive sampling technique was administered in this study. Three EFL teachers were non-randomly selected for observations and informed that they would be observed twice for the recognition of what would happen in their classroom rather than performance evaluations. An observation worksheet (Appendix A) was designed identifying the extent of the teacher's execution of the 12 MLE features via the Likert-type scale. The researcher played the role of non-participant observer, and the teaching of the participants was video-recorded and fully transcribed to identify focal themes (Creswell, 2005).

5.2 Interviews

Interviewing was viewed as an opportunity for the teachers to utter opinions related to their profession, a crucial approach for the researcher to check the accuracy of the impressions he had obtained through the observation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007). In the interviewing process, whatever question prompts and suggestive answers were avoided (Liao, 2003). A semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B) was guided by open-ended questions allowing the participants more freedom to relate more of what was significant to them (Y. Li, 2004). Opinions by a panel were sought to verify the interview accuracy and appropriateness. To eliminate potential barriers by EFL, the participants were interviewed in Chinese, the mother tongue of both the interviewees and the interviewer. The interview was video-recorded and partially transcribed to highlight the main subjects of this study.

6. Participants

The target population of this study composed of all China's secondary school EFL teachers to which the researcher prefers to generalize is rarely achievable. The research was conducted in Henan province located in eastern central China for the accessible population. Generalization is not the ultimate target to pursue in case studies, so purposeful sampling seems an ideal alternative for the observations and interviewing (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007).

Qualitative research via maximum variation sampling with accounts on participants' experience "may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience" (Stake, 1978, p. 5) and insightful as "maximum variation sampling can yield detailed descriptions of each case, in addition to identifying shared patterns that cut across cases" (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 52). The selection was characterized by the rich information of three participants with respective pseudonyms---Huang, Lv, and Zhang as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Identification of three participants

Name	Gender	Degree	Age	Grade	Teaching years	Class size	School site
Huang	Female	Bachelor	44	Junior grade 1	22	70	Suburb
Lv	Female	Bachelor	32	Senior grade 2	8	61	City
Zhang	Female	Bachelor	38	Junior grade 3	17	25	City

7. Findings
7.1 Case of Huang

The text of the first observed lesson Huang taught was Section B, Topic 3, Unit 3 of *Project English* 1A for junior grade one students with the title "What would you like to drink?". The text focused on segments like "Look, listen, and say", "Pair work", and "Listen, read, and say". The text of the second lesson was Section B, Topic 2, Unit 4 of *Project English* 1A with the title "Would you like to go for a picnic?", consisting of sections with the subtitles "Listen, read, and say", "Pair work", and "Work alone".

The activities Huang conducted were the focus of interest in this case study. The observation worksheet (Appendix A) tended to detect the extent of the teachers' execution of the 12 MLE features in the form of Likert scale from *not at all* to *very much*. Possible mediative parameters manifested in Huang's lessons were analyzed subsequently except that "significance" and "purpose beyond the here and now" were not much displayed.

7.1.1 Shared Intention

Huang made her instructions clear while presenting the tasks by asking the class "Are you clear?" repeatedly. Not until the students made an affirmative answer did she continue with the contents.

7.1.2 Sense of Competence

Huang encouraged her students to participate by drawing on possible stimulating measures. The whole class as well as the teacher clapped for the volunteer respondents. By doing so, she was making the students perceive themselves as capable of learning. As Williams and Burden argue (2000),

> If learning is to be successful, it is crucial that teachers establish in their classrooms a climate where confidence is built up, where mistakes can be made without fear, where learners can use the language without embarrassment, where all contributions are valued, and where activities lead to feelings of success, not failure. (p. 73)

7.1.3 Control of Own Behavior

Huang offered her students revision summaries to develop their regulating learning abilities the moment they learnt something new. She gave them adequate opportunities to recite the dialogues promptly in the class. In this manner, Huang pushed her students to control their own learning after being exposed to new knowledge so that they became not only effective but also independent learners. In Williams and Burden's words,

> Feelings of competence are necessary but not sufficient for learning to be effective; learners also need to become competent, that is, they need to learn the necessary skills and strategies in order to take control of their own learning. (p. 73)

7.1.4 Goal-setting

Huang assisted the students in establishing short-term and long-term goals for themselves in process of conducting learning activities, like the above-mentioned short-term memory of the dialogue learnt minutes before. She likewise set goals for the backward students to catch up with the more advanced ones. Nonetheless, "children who set their own goals in any learning activity are more likely to achieve those goals than ones that are set for them" (Werkhoven, 1990, cited in Williams & Burden, 2000, p. 74). Huang may mediate her students' "goal-setting" better in the future by making them set their own goals.

7.1.5 Challenge

Huang encouraged the students to volunteer for the activities, which seemed challenging to them when there were some visitors. As was noted, it was also a challenge for Huang's students to recite the dialogue within minutes. At this point, Huang encouraged the shy and less confident students to face challenges like this:

> Who will have another try? (Pointing to one side of the class) Just now, some pairs of students on this side performed actively, and they raised hands frequently. Hence, (pointing to another side) the students on that side cannot fall behind. Be brave and voluntary to answer questions. Okay, Liu Yue and your partner, please. (Huang, Observation Video-recording 1, October 9, 2009)

From this excerpt, it seems to be deduced that the challenge of Huang's students was "within their current capabilities" since they could fulfil the tasks through efforts (Williams & Burden, 2000, p. 75). More importantly, she intended to have all the students involved by stimulating those reluctant to participate. As Williams and Burden suggest,

No matter how much information a teacher may have about a group or even individual learners, it is virtually impossible to match each learner with the right level of task without involving the learners themselves in the process. Since the ultimate goal of mediated learning experiences is to produce independent learners and problem solvers, increasing the involvement of the learners in all aspects of the learning process should be encouraged at every opportunity. (p. 75)

7.1.6 Awareness of Change

Huang focused on the students' change and attended to their self-development at all times by helping them set goals regardless of surpassing themselves or others. For this sake, she tried to present the students' changeable characteristics worth noticing as shown in the account below:

While Zhang Guangchao is hurt in the arm, he insists on studying in school. His attitudes toward studies are really positive. He is studying harder and has made greater progress recently. In the past, I praised him, but he is still worth praising as his learning spirit is praiseworthy. You should learn from him. (Huang, Observation Video-recording 2, October 29, 2009)

While mentioning Zhang Guangchao's change, Huang stressed his academic advances and learning attitudes. However, it could be better for her to help the students self-assess changes in themselves since it was viewed "as equally important to foster the ability to self-evaluate if we are to produce autonomous learners" (Williams & Burden, 2000, p. 76).

7.1.7 Belief in Positive Outcomes

Any criticism to the students from Huang was never heard since she approved any trivial progress they made, even when they gave incorrect answers. Huang was always listening to the students' responses with a smile and fixing her believing eyes on the respondents. This could empower the students with confidence. She taught them to preview the related contents ahead of the class from which they could reap due benefits. Even when the students encountered intractable problems, she convinced them that there would be positive outcomes so long as they did their best.

7.1.8 Sharing

Huang's students had many opportunities to accomplish pair and group work, during which they learnt approaches to solving problems. The interaction between the teacher and students or among the students became the soul of Huang's class. This led to the students' recognition that team work was indispensable in their future studies since "sharing and working cooperatively are a vital part of our social existence, the absence of which can result in cognitive difficulties and a very idiosyncratic view of the world" (Williams & Burden, 2000, p. 77).

7.1.9 Individuality

Huang was acquainted with her students and assessed the performance of the individuals with a clear aim. In Huang's words,

> There are 70 students different in personality in the class. I am accustomed to getting each of them involved in interactions to fulfill activities designed with reference to their personal characteristics. If they answer correctly, it will help them perform better next time. They will establish self-confidence gradually and catch up with other more advanced mates. (Huang, Interview 2, October 29, 2009)

In the first observed class, Huang required her students to discuss their likes and dislikes about food and drinks, counting as an approach for them to display their uniqueness. Huang seemed to keep in mind the file of each of her students through the frequent exposure with them in the classroom and office. She allowed each of them chances to show their uniqueness by expanding the students' participation. As Williams and Burden suggest (2000),

> The language classroom is a place where this sense of individuality can be fostered in various ways through the tasks given, the teacher's actions and the climate created. Learners can be encouraged to express their own individuality through the foreign language. (p. 79)

7.1.10 Sense of Belonging

Huang's students had a strong sense of belonging to the whole class which was observed to work as a team all the time. Huang often said "Girls, come on" or "Boys, don't fall behind" to get the whole class involved to foster their sense of belonging. She tried to encourage a sense of belonging in her students by pushing them to the accomplishment of the task. Huang, however, would mediate her students a bit better should she make the students' sense of belonging their own internal need. Williams and Burden (2000) recommend:

> It is important to remember that the impetus for a community feeling must come not only from the teacher but from the learners as well. An example might be engaging in a whole-class project like a class newspaper where everyone has a contribution to make and no one is left out. (p. 79)

In summary, Huang mediated a large class with 70 students by (a) helping the learners carry out pair/group work, (b) conducting the lesson skillfully, (c) managing the classroom effectively, (d) arousing the learners' participating enthusiasm, and (e) applying rich body language. All these made it possible for her students to cooperate actively. Huang performed better in executing "shared intention", "a sense of competence", "control of own behavior", "challenging", "a belief in positive outcomes", "sharing", and "individuality". The execution of "goal-setting", "awareness of change", and "a sense of belonging" remains to be improved. She was playing the role of situational mediator by and large.

7.2 Case of Lv

In the first class, Lv taught the "Reading" section of Unit 4, Module 5 of *New Senior English for China* for senior grade two students, titled "My First Work Assignment", telling of a journalist's conversation with his new boss who reminds the green hand of professional *dos* and *don'ts* before he can really cover news and submit articles himself. Lv tried to cover more activities and involve as many students as possible. Nevertheless, the class was too large for most of the students to participate. Lv was encouraging with a smile at all times, but her students lacked enthusiasm to cooperate as she applied the same tone and the same expressions at the same speed from beginning to end. Lv's second observed lesson centered

on the new words and inverted sentences of this text. The grammar of inversion was what the teacher and students looked to, and the students were allowed opportunities to share, confront challenges, and do the exercises on the blackboard.

In the classroom, Lv appeared to mediate her students' learning respecting "shared intention", "goal-setting", "challenge", and "a belief in positive outcomes", but she actually failed. While Lv could make herself understood when giving instructions, she talked in Chinese most of the class time. This suggested that Lv, as an EFL teacher, did not really mediate her students in the Chinese context. Two of Lv's students were allowed to act as "little teachers", which would have been a great challenge to them. Regrettably, Lv had told them how to do it beforehand, reducing the "value" of the challenge. The students were urged to go on with a bit more intractable problems, which was viewed as a positive stimulus at most since the students were not told to believe any problem could be solved.

Respecting the "goal-setting", Lv did not talk much of helping the students set short-term and long-term goals. Rather, she gave them more encouragement if they encountered difficulties. She preferred to communicate with the students concerning the establishment of their goals outside class. As Lv stated,

> I set different goals for my students with different levels in English if I talked freely with them out of class. I encouraged them to study hard and valued their progress they made over a period. However, some of them were weak in English and failed in the exams. They had strong motivating power at the beginning of my encouragement. But days later, they failed to hold on due to the lack of perseverance. (Lv, Interview 1, October 16, 2009)

Qualitatively, Lv conducted the two lessons traditionally. The following account is expected to identify the roles she played.

7.2.1 Traditional Grammar-translator

Lv's students were observed to be the receivers of grammatical rules on the basis of which she designed the exercises. Her classes correlated closely with two of the features of grammar-translation Prator and Celce-Murcia (1979) summarize: (a) "Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis" and (b) "often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue" (p. 3, cited in Brown, 2001, p. 16). Lv seemed a true practitioner in this regard as traditional grammar-translation was the core of her class.

7.2.2 Role of Director

In Lv's first lesson, two girl students were urged to be "little teachers", which was a challenge to them. Nonetheless, they had been directed by Lv on how to perform it before class. This ruined the development of their awareness of individuality as they might follow the path of Lv's directions. At this point, "the instructor is the director of a stage play in which the students are the actors" (Asher, 1977, p. 43, cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p. 93). Lv was acting like a "director" of a movie directing her "actresses". The student participants' self-confidence and autonomous learning were restrained. Lv's students seemed happy with this teaching method, but the "little teachers" were unqualified as their proficiency in English

failed to meet the classmates' needs. From this perspective, Lv was still a "director" whose implementation was constrained by the current situation. As she admitted,

> Overall, I perceive myself as an "instructor" imparting knowledge to the class, and I am playing a traditional teacher role. If I define the role I should play, I hope to act as a "director". However, in the current situation, it is tough for me to perform as a real "director", and even impossible sometimes. (Lv, Interview 1, October 16, 2009)

7.2.3 Inflexible Bilingual Speaker

Most of the time in the class, Lv spoke Chinese or translated English into Chinese. She spoke English slightly more fluently than Zhang but adopted the same tone, the same rhythm, and the same terms related to classroom English, for example, "okay/very good/well done/good job/sit down, please". Her students also spoke Chinese in the class, including the two student "teachers".

7.3 Case of Zhang

Zhang supplied two lessons by teaching with the same textbook series as in the case of Huang. The text of the first lesson was Section A, Topic 1, Unit 2 of *Project English* 3A for junior three students, entitled "Pollution is harmful to people's health". This lesson aimed to enable the students to learn *direct speech* and *indirect speech* by discussing pollution. The students were required to make sentences after the teacher's explanation on *direct speech* and *indirect speech*. Zhang was observed to show much concern and interest to the whole class, urging them to cooperate in pairs/groups, trying to involve all the students, and facilitating their learning. Zhang took over her present classes a few weeks ago (from the time of the observation), but she seemed to have established a friendly relationship with the students who liked the activities she designed and went all out to cooperate with her. The text of the second lesson was Section A, Topic 1, Unit 3, with the title "English is widely spoken throughout the world", which highlighted the students' mastery of the grammar *the simple present passive voice*. The students were asked to practice in groups the structure of *passive voice*, including picking out *passive voice* sentences from the text.

Based on the observation sheet, field notes, and transcripts, it could be noted that Zhang was trying to mediate her students' "belief in positive outcomes" as the students were impressed by her approachable manner. Likely, this would increase the students' confidence of learning. Nonetheless, she did not really tell the class to build self-confidence in the possibility of finding a solution to any problem. She failed to conduct the role of mediator but the roles of "ineffective facilitator", "experienced manipulator", and "controller" instead.

7.3.1 Ineffective Facilitator

A facilitator is "a neutral servant of the group" (Doyle & Straus, 1984, p. 85), indicating that a teacher as facilitator plays the two-sided role in learners' development (Schwarz, 1994). An effective facilitator is to help students develop a classroom atmosphere oriented toward productive learning results rather than impart learning directly, but an ineffective facilitator fails to achieve the group's goals due to ineffective handling (Schwarz, 1994).

As already noted, *Project English* seemed task-based covering the underlying functions of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (MOE, 2001). The text of each topic provided multiple task-based language items for learners to fulfill in pairs/groups. Possible forms of tasks like "Look, listen, and say", "Pair work", "Project", and "Grammar focus" were displayed in each topic, contributing to interactive instruction. Unlike the case of Huang, Zhang's class was teacher-centred since she controlled each step of the lesson as shown in the following excerpt:

> …
> T: Now, think of this question: "How do we protect our environment?"
> Ss: (silent)
> T: Well, I would like to provide you with a reminder.
> *Bu(4)yao(4)zai(4)gong(1)gong(4) chang(3)suo(3)tu(3)tan(3).* How to say it in English?
> S1: "…spit in public…"
> T: "Don't spit in public." Okay, next, *bu(4)yao(4)cai(3)ta(1)cao(3)ping(2).* How to say it in English?
> S1: "Don't walk on the grass."
> T: Then, *wo(3)menying(1)dang(1)duo(1) zhong(4)shu(4).* How to say it in English?
> S2: "We should plant more trees."
> T: Sit down, please. Good.
> (Note: T = teacher; S = student; Ss = students)
> (Zhang, Observation Video-Recording 2, October 28, 2009)

Evidently, the topic "How do we protect our environment?" should have been flexible and changeable, but Zhang intervened in the students' production in a controlled way reminding them to apply too much of what they were exposed to. Zhang's facilitation was ineffective since she focused on the completion of the teaching contents in the form of activities.

7.3.2 Experienced Manipulator

From the case study, it seemed that Zhang conducted teaching relying on her intuition and long-term teaching experience. She had taught the two classes for a short time, but all her students seemed to like her very much. She tended to behave as "a skillful manipulator, using questions, commands, and other cues to elicit correct sentences from the learners" (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p. 38).

7.3.3 Controller

Zhang insisted herself to be a "medium" or "bridge" between students and knowledge (Zhang, Interview 1, October 9, 2009). To her thinking, "when a teacher is teaching students, he/she not only imparts knowledge but also transmits the importance of how to be a nice person" (Zhang, Interview 1, October 9, 2009). In Harmer's words, "teachers who view their job as the transmission of knowledge from themselves to their students are usually very comfortable with the image of themselves as controllers" (2001, p. 58). Zhang was actually performing as a controller in the classroom.

8. Discussion

8.1 Huang's Role of Situational Mediator

Huang was experienced in managing the classroom and able to involve all the students in the tasks. She was encouraging and showed positive attitudes toward teaching her students. She played the role of mediator in many ways such as helping the students share and develop a sense of belonging and a strong belief in positive outcomes. She gave more positive feedback rather than criticisms regarding the students' performance. Even when she was correcting their errors, she could draw on more reasonable and acceptable manners. She designed the adequate tasks for the students to participate in and allowed them opportunities for collaborative learning. As well, she showed much concern for the individuals and offered them constructive suggestions and realistic goals.

Based on the correct cognition of situational mediation and no obvious situational constraints, Huang played a situational mediator better due to not mediating "significance" and "purpose beyond the here and now" perfectly. Of the 12 MLE tools, Huang mediated the students' "shared intention", "sense of competence", "control of own behavior", "challenging", "belief in positive outcomes", "sharing", and "individuality" best.

8.2 Traditional Roles of Lv and Zhang

Lv possessed partial knowledge of situational mediation, but she was a traditional instructor owing to situational constraints associated with the current education system, students, and teacher herself. Zhang's misconception of mediation and constraints made her go far beyond the execution of the role of mediator. Table 5 summarizes the traditional roles Lv and Zhang played.

Table 5: Traditional roles of Lv and Zhang

Case	Roles	Characteristics
Lv	1) Grammar translator 2) Director 3) Inflexible bilingual speaker	1) Lv focused teaching on grammar in EFL. Reciting the grammatical principles was the students' main task. 2) Lv tried to reform traditional teaching methods by directing some of the students to be "little teachers" who were unable to meet the peers' needs. 3) Lv spoke a bit of classroom English using the same tone, pace, and expressions.
Zhang	1) Ineffective facilitator 2) Experienced manipulator 3) Controller	1) Zhang was the center of the class and controlled all the activities to facilitate the completion of teaching contents. 2) Zhang relied on her long-term teaching experience to instruct her students traditionally in a skilled manner. 3) Zhang saw mediation as medium between students and knowledge.

9. Implications

Lv and Zhang complained that the large classes they taught made it impossible for them to organize activities involving all the students. They perceived students' streaming exam and

college entrance examination as the "baton" to their instruction in that the school authorities showed more concern for their students' top and average scores viewed as the criteria in assessing the teachers' achievements. Implications are offered respecting the innovation of the examination and assessment system.

The college entrance exam and the streaming exam restrict students' English learning to the memory of discrete-point grammatical principles (Yang, 2003), and the written exam is the only measure to assess student achievements (J. Li, 2004). A discrepancy exists between the curriculum objective shift "from basic education for higher learning to quality education for all" (National Curriculum, 2000, p. 22) and the current exam system "mainly based on summative knowledge and memory" (p. 19). This phenomenon could be interpreted by Hedge's words:

> The examination system, for example, is usually a heavily constraining factor, especially where examinations are gatekeepers to higher education or good employment prospects. It would be a matter of high risk for a teacher not to train students for these. (2002, pp. 25-26)

MLE is concerning dynamic assessment (DA), whose "objective is to change the individual's functioning within the test context and to consider the observed changes as indicators of future changes that may be expected if proper teaching is given" (Seng et al., 2003, pp. 175-176). In contrast, standardized tests stress static circumstances for examined learners because the goal is to compare a student with his/her classmates, and this test has no space for interposition by the examiner or questions from examinees (Seng et al., 2003). Examiner roles in DA and standardized testing seem different as the former tends to change examinees' functioning and enhance their performance through teaching strategies with the latter restricted to the execution of testing items and later to scoring and interpretations (Seng et al., 2003). It is assumed that "persons who have been examined with dynamic methods of assessment are potentially capable of higher levels of performance, learning, and logical thinking than they are currently exhibiting" (Seng et al., 2003)

 The new *Curriculum Standards* aims to facilitate the cultivation of students' lifelong learning rather than access to tertiary education or employment opportunities only (National Curriculum, 2000). It seems like a trend for the examiner to administer DA to assess students' achievements referring to the *Standards*. However, the current evaluation of students' achievements lies in the percentage examination system and ignores students' other academic categories such as records, homework, extracurricular activities, and a diagnosis of students' individual enhancement (J. Li, 2004). Regular tests are conducted after students have learnt each important chapter or main theme of the textbook, while periodic tests are administered by official regulation close to the end of the semester and session (J. Li, 2004). In the last decade, critics have claimed that the existing exam system is unable to "produce the kind of adaptable independent graduates who are able to apply their knowledge to new situations in a modern, fast-changing economy and society" (Education in China, 2005, p. 16). A reform of the examination system makes a narrowing impact on the curriculum as examinations center on only certain aspects of certain subjects (Education in China, 2005). The shift of dynamic assessment from standardized testing is expected to make contributions to the present curriculum orientation.

Conclusion

This paper probed into the implementation of the teacher role as mediator among secondary school EFL teachers in China. On the basis of the findings, a conclusion is drawn that most teachers failed to play the role of mediator in their classroom practices on account of individual situational constraints concerning the educational system, students' language proficiency, and teachers themselves. In China's current educational settings, the execution of EFL teachers' role as mediator has been theoretically acceptable and practically feasible as indicated in the case of Huang. However, China's EFL teachers still have a long way to go if they tend to mediate students' learning EFL smoothly due to the observed fact that most EFL learners are weak at language communicative competence. As a result, an EFL teacher's sufficient knowledge of mediation hopefully brings about the successful implementation of mediation in the language classroom on the strict condition that they refrain from any situational constraints.

Appendices
Appendix A Observation Worksheet

Extent of the Teacher's Execution of MLE Features

Key: A = Not at all   B = Little   C = Partly   D = Much   E = Very much

Category	Tick & Comment
1. Significance	A B C D E Comment:
2. Purpose beyond the here and now	A B C D E Comment:
3. Shared intention	A B C D E Comment:
4. A sense of competence	A B C D E Comment:
5. Control of own behavior	A B C D E Comment:
6. Goal-setting	A B C D E Comment:
7. Challenge	A B C D E Comment:
8. Awareness of change	A B C D E Comment:
9. A belief in positive outcomes	A B C D E Comment:
10. Sharing	A B C D E Comment:
11. Individuality	A B C D E Comment:
12. A sense of belonging	A B C D E Comment:

Appendix B Teacher Interview Protocol

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about the observed lesson mainly from the perspective of your own teaching role.

2. Have you received any particular training that supports you to plan in this way? Could you describe it more accurately?

3. Describe, if applicable, your teacher education program from the perspectives as follows:

    a. Any central learning that you brought with you from the program into your classroom related to teaching roles.

    b. How much of what you know, if any, concerning the mediation role that you learnt as a result of your teacher training, either pre-service or in-service.

4. If, beginning tomorrow, students in China were no longer expected to be confronted with the rigorous entrance exam competition, would you still mediate your EFL classroom, if any, or begin to do it? If so, why and how? If not, why?

5 Could you tell me any difficulties which prevent you from playing the mediation role in the classroom if you are not playing the mediator at present?

6. In what environment do you think EFL learners learn best? Could you offer me some suggestions on how to most effectively implement the role of mediation in China's settings?

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