Cognition of Mediation among Secondary School EFL Teachers in China

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Abstract

This paper raises concerns about secondary school English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' knowledge of mediation. A methodological triangulation (i.e., questionnaire and interviewing) was employed for the data collection in terms of teachers' cognition of mediation. The findings indicate that most secondary school EFL teachers in China have no knowledge of mediation and are thus unable to mediate students' learning in the language classroom. Hopefully, this research attempts to provide meaningful implications and practical demonstrations for teacher practitioners, policy makers, and curriculum developers.

Keywords: Cognition, mediation, secondary school, EFL teacher

1. Introduction

Mediation, located within the framework of social-constructivism, views that all language users begin from birth to build relationships with people around them (Williams & Burden, 2000). Through constant interactions with others, they learn to use language and make sense of the world (Vygotsky, 1978). People around learners thus act as mediators who "may be the parent, facilitator, teacher, or some significant other who plays the intentional role of explaining, emphasizing, interpreting, or extending the environment so that the learner builds up a meaningful internal model of the context or the world experienced" (Seng, Pou, & Tan, 2003, p. 11). When this occurs in the language classroom, the teacher interacts with learners and helps them apply the language themselves instead of providing them with the language knowledge only (Fisher, 2005). With the emphasis on facilitating learner autonomy and lifelong education in recent reforms in China, it seems important that students learn to control their own learning and become active thinkers and problem-solvers (Ye, 2007). To ensure learner-centered EFL instruction, therefore, teachers are required to enhance the development of learners' independence and autonomy by re-orienting their roles (Ministry of Education of China [MOE], 2001). Current education reforms imply that it seems indispensable for teachers to implement the teacher role as mediator instead of that of disseminator as the value of adult mediation in children's learning can never be overstressed (Seng et al., 2003).

2. Statement of the Problem

China's *National Standards of English Curriculum for Basic Education* (hereafter referred to as *Standards*) was generated on the basis of multiple intelligences theory and social-constructivism (Fu, 2003; Gardner, 1993; MOE, 2001; Tang, 2009). Multiple intelligences hold that "learners individually possess diverse learning styles and intelligences" (Ediger, 2000, p. 35), and social-constructivism "provides various ways to access the students' multiple intelligences" (Teague, 2000, p. 9). Now, the *Standards* is being implemented throughout China before another circle of curriculum reforms is made known.

The *Standards* contends that the teacher should no longer be authoritative but become the co-constructor of knowledge with learners (MOE, 2001). Under the *Standards* where the new educational beliefs of humanism and all students' lifelong development are advocated, teachers are considered as the key to the reform (Tang, 2009). Teachers need to care more about the teaching process rather than learning results, to help students know how to learn instead of only what to learn, and to help students establish creative learning instead of adaptive learning (MOE, 2001).

While the MOE decides goals, objectives, curricula, syllabi, and textbooks throughout China whose education system is featured by high centralization (Yu, 2001), researchers and educators tend to focus on teacher role shifts under the *Standards* from theoretical perspectives (e.g., Fu, 2003; Peng, 2005; Tang, 2009; Yu, 2005). They assert that teacher roles by the *Standards* are assessors, helpers, researchers, organizers, participants, tutors, facilitators, and prompters (Harmer, 2001; MOE, 2001). This kind of shift from the traditional knowledge-giver to these roles foregrounds the role of mediator whose functions encompass those of the said *Standards*-based roles (Feuerstein, 1980; Sun, 2005). This study tries to bridge the gap in the existing literature on the extent of teachers' adherence to MOE requirements in EFL instruction.

3. Question

To explore the unpopularity of mediative classrooms in China and what can be done to make a classroom more mediative, one question that follows to be addressed is proposed:

What knowledge about mediation do China's secondary school EFL teachers hold?

4. Literature Review

People are accustomed to talking about constructivism in two forms: individual constructivism and social constructivism (Woolfolk, 2004). Individual constructivist approaches are related to how individuals establish elements respecting their cognition and affection derived from their psychological organ (Phillips, 1997). Thus, individual constructivism is known as psychological constructivism, of which Piaget is a preeminent representative (Paris et al., 2001). By contrast, social constructivism concerns the formation of communal knowledge of distinct schools and how the process of people's common cognition about the world is conveyed to other individuals of a socio-cultural community (Woolfolk, 2004). Vygotsky and Feuerstein are two dominant figures in the school of social constructivism (Palincsar, 1998). As such, this review surveys the body of literature informing the research question, introducing the conceptual structure regarding Feuerstein's 12 mediated learning experience (MLE) features incorporated into Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD).

4.1 Vygotsky's Social-constructivism

Vygotsky's ZPD is conceptualized as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and level of potential development as determined through solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Teaching in the ZPD offers learners adequate interactive opportunities for their development through the zone with the aid guided which is provided by a tutor to a tutee during a task involvement (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). At the outset of a learning process, the teacher undertakes most of the task prior to assuming the collaborative responsibility with learners (Schunk, 2000). The teacher reduces help gradually until learners are able to conduct learning tasks alone since they become more capable (Campione et al., 1984).

4.2 Feuerstein's Mediation

Since not every interaction with a task, learner, and mediator involved has a quality of MLE, as per Feuerstein (1980), a system of 12 MLE parameters is developed to distinguish different levels of mediation performance as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Representation of Feuerstein's MLE Criteria

Parameter	Conceptualization
1. Significance	The teacher makes students realize the importance of a 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 for the time being only.
3. Shared intention	In presenting a task, the teacher must make instructions clear and ensure the intention is understood and reciprocated by learners.
4. A sense of competence	Fosters learners' feelings of competence and capability of learning.
5. Control of own behavior	Encourages students to become autonomous learners by self-controlling their learning procedure.
6. Goal-setting	Teaches learners how to establish achievable targets and to locate approaches for the purpose of 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	Stimulates learners to monitor changes in themselves and to understand the fact that humans are changeable all the time.
9. A belief in positive outcomes	Urges 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 and collaboration among themselves and to perceive that it is advisable for some problems to be addressed collaboratively.
11. Individuality	Helps learners realize individual characteristics respecting their unique aspects.
12. A sense of belonging	Aids learners to establish a consciousness of pertaining to the whole class community in the process of the completion of the task.

Note. Adapted from *Instrumental enrichment: An intervention program for cognitive modifiability* by Feuerstein (1980).

Feuerstein (1980) perceives that teachers can "mediate" in numbers of different ways. The 12 MLE criteria represent 12 ways of mediation for the teacher to conduct (Seng et al., 2003). 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 et al., 2003, p. 36). By contrast, "the remaining nine criteria are considered responsible for the process of diversification of humankind in terms of cognitive styles, need systems, types of skills mastered, and the structure of knowledge", and "are also 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 criteria and the remaining nine respectively.

Vygotsky and Feuerstein seem to complement each other since the ZPD focuses on an arena where social forms of mediation are performed and realized (Lantolf, 2000). Feuerstein's (1980) MLE describes what happens within the ZPD, which centers on a mediator's helping learners get through this special zone and obtain their competence development in it. Vygotsky (1978) perceives that human "higher mental processes are functions of mediated activity" (cited in Seng et al., 2003, p. 6), but even then " the role of the human mediator is not fully elaborated within [Vygotsky's] theoretical framework", so the gap is hopefully filled with the help of "Feuerstein's (1990) theory of mediated learning, which assigns the major role to a human mediator"(Kozulin, 1994, p. 284, cited in Seng et al., 2003, p. 7). At this point, it seems meaningful for the ZPD and mediation theory to be adopted together for the most persuasive justifications of this study.

5. *Data Collection*

The data sources of this study were derived from the survey and case studies in the form of two-round semi-structured interviews with five self-claimed teachers, who asserted that they were playing the mediator role.

5.1 Questionnaire

To obtain data to address the question, a mediation questionnaire was established as per Feuerstein's 12 MLE features, with reference to Liao's *Communicative Language Teaching Questionnaire* (2003). The questionnaire (see Appendix A) contains four items summarized as shown in Table 2. In view of potential linguistic biases from EFL, a Chinese version questionnaire was employed, subject to a panel of experts in the Chinese language.

Table 2: Questionnaire Items and Scopes

Question	Main Content	Category	Focused Area
Item 1	Asking teachers whether they know mediation.	Open-ended	Cognition
Item 2	Asking teachers to describe factors related to teaching roles like methods, activities, student roles, and teaching processes. Allowing individuals to take a lesson they have taught for example.	Open-ended	Cognition
Item 3	Asking teachers to identify mediators and instructors.	Open-ended	Cognition
Item 4	Collecting EFL teachers' demographic data.	Closed-ended	Background

5.2 In-depth Interviews

Five EFL teachers were selected for interviews in accordance with their claim in the answered questionnaire sheets that they possessed the knowledge of mediation in addition to their demographic information. The interview was viewed as an opportunity for teachers to utter opinions on issues related to their profession (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007). A face-to-face semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B) was guided by a set of open-ended questions to elicit the answer to the predetermined question (Creswell, 2005). To facilitate communication and eliminate any barrier generated by EFL, the participants were interviewed in the Chinese language which is the mother tongue of both the interviewee and the interviewer. All the interviews were video-recorded and then partially transcribed to foreground important themes associated with the purpose of this study.

5.3 Subjects

This study was conducted in Henan province located in eastern central China for the accessible population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007). Totally, 350 teachers were randomly chosen from 350 secondary schools in Henan. A vital difficulty with the survey is that a small percentage of the pre-sampled respondents tend to answer the questionnaire (Liao, 2003), and 152 effective sheets (43.4 %) were returned, but "power is not an issue" since the sample size is large with 100 or more subjects (Stevens, 1996, p. 6, cited in Pallant, 2007, p. 205). In the case study, purposeful sampling seems an ideal alternative since generalization is not the ultimate target to pursue (Stake, 1995). Five self-claimed teachers as mediators with respective pseudonyms---Huang, Jiang, Lv, Zeng, and Zhang were sampled purposively for interviewing.

6. Findings

6.1 Results from the Survey

The data for the study originated from the 152 participating teachers' answered questionnaire sheets and the interviews with five of them. The first item of the questionnaire was to explore EFL teachers' knowledge of mediation by requiring their comprehension of "mediator". As shown in Table 3, 92.8% of the 152 teacher respondents ($n = 141$) answered Item 1 "Do you have any idea of the term 'mediator' in EFL teaching?" Of these, 58.9% of the teachers (83 out of 141) answered *Yes*, while 41.1% of the teachers ($n = 58$) reported that they did not know the conception of "mediator" by answering *No*. This item examined the knowledge of mediation among these 83 teachers who answered *Yes*.

Table 3: Frequency of Respondents and Non-respondents

	N (%)	Do you know the term "mediator" in EFL teaching?		
		Yes *n (%)*	No *n (%)*	Total *n (%)*
Respondents	141 (92.8%)	83(58.9%)	58(41.1%)	141(100%)
Non-respondents	11 (7.2%)			
Total	152 (100%)			

The respondents answered the questionnaire sheets in Chinese, so it was necessary to change the role terms that they described into English with the help of the teacher role framework by Harmer (2001) and Karavas-Dukas's *Teacher Role Categories* (1995, cited from Hedge, 2002). The translated teacher roles in Table 4 might deviate from the cited terms as regards the role characteristics that the respondents illustrated. It seemed a tough challenge to locate absolute equivalents in English in the case of the definitions of the teacher roles that the respondents articulated in Chinese.

As per Creswell (2005), however, this would not influence the analysis since qualitative research is "interpretive" in which "a personal assessment" can be made "as to a description that fits the situation or themes that capture the major categories of information" (p. 232).

Table 4: Teachers' Definition of the Mediator

Role (*Chinese*)	Main Characteristics	*N* of cases	Ranking
1. Designer (*Shejishi*)	Class activities, teaching methods, and teaching materials	9	7th
2. Transmitter (*Chuandizhe*)	Knowledge, cultures, learning strategies, and learning how to be	25	1st
3. Facilitator (*Cujinzhe*)[a]	Students' *autonomous learning*, mediated learning background, and the *formation of students' personality*	20	2nd
4. Assessor (*Pingjiazhe*)	Students' performance	2	12th
5. Supervisor (*Jianduzhe*)[a]	Students' *co-operation*	3	11th
6. Participant (*Canyuzhe*)	Task completion	9	8th
7. Director (*Daoyan*)	Task presentations	15	4th
8. Affection exchanger (*Qinggan jiaoliuzhe*)	Between the teacher and students or among students	5	10th
9. Explorer (*Tanjiuzhe*)	EFL curriculum	1	14th
10. Demonstrator (*Shifanzhe*)	Students' presentations	2	13th
11. Trainer (*Xunlianyuan*)[a]	Students' initiatives, *confidence*, and *confronting challenges*	15	5th
12. Organizer (*Zuzhizhe*)	Execution of tasks and language knowledge	19	3rd
13. Onlooker (*Pangguanzhe*)	Students' acquisition of knowledge rather than a knowledge-giver	1	15th
14. Administrator (*Guanlizhe*)	Class task progression and class order	6	9th
15. Go-between (*Zhongjianren*)	Between students and teaching materials, between the school and students, or between parents and students	15	6th
Total		147	

Note. [a] The function of the role is close to mediation.

Most of the 83 teacher participants' responses incorporated more than one teaching role. There were 147 cases of teaching roles (*n* = 147) provided by the 83 teachers. The respondents conceptualized "mediator" as three roles whose functions were close to mediation (indicated with a superscript letter [a] in Table 4) in a minority of cases (*n* = 38) concerning five situational mediation techniques: (a) control of own behavior (*autonomous learning*), (b) challenge (*confronting challenges*), (c) a belief in positive outcomes (*confidence*), (d) sharing (*co-operation*), and (e) individuality (*formation of students' personality*). None of them identified what universal mediative techniques were (see Table 1). Nonetheless, 12 roles in Table 4 seem unrelated to "mediator" as the respondents, in most cases (*n* = 109), touched on traditional teaching roles, for example, (a) the "transmitter" (1st) of knowledge, cultures, learning strategies, and learning how to be, (b) the "organizer" (3rd) of the implementation of activities and knowledge, (c) the "director" (4th) of task presentations, and (d) the "go-between" (6th) between students and teaching materials, between the school and students, or between parents and students.

From Tables 3 and 4, it is found that the teacher participants had no knowledge of universal mediation and that most of them had knowledge of five situational mediation strategies: (a) control of own behavior, (b) challenge, (c) a belief in positive outcomes, (d) sharing, and (e) individuality (see Table 1).

Item 2 of the questionnaire required the respondents to illustrate a typical lesson respecting teaching aims, activities, teacher and student roles, and the teaching procedure design to further identify their knowledge of mediation. Totally, 68% of the participating teachers (*n* = 103) wrote down their answers, and 32% (*n* = 49) either left this question item blank or digressed from the topic wanted. The responses fall into 6 categories with reference to Harmer and Karavas-Dukas as shown in Table 5. Most of the respondents described more than one feature, with 306 cases concerned by the 103 respondents.

Table 5: Teacher Participants' Description of a Mediative Lesson

Category	Main Functions	*N* of Cases	Ranking
Teaching aims	1. Focusing on language functions	36	2nd
	2. Practicing language in situations	14	6th
	3. Underscoring speaking skills	11	8th
	4. Theme discussion	12	7th
Teaching properties	5. Pictures and objects	10	11th
	6. Videos and tape-recorders	10	12th
	7. Multi-media	3	25th
Classroom activities	8. Activities in pairs/groups	22	3rd
	9. Activities for discussion	11	9th
	10. Activities for competition	5	20th
	11. Assignment of homework	4	24th
	12. Class duty reports	2	29th
	13. Role-playing	11	10th
	14. Presentations of activity outputs	5	21st
Teacher roles	15. Director	21	4th
	16. *Mediator*	9	14th
	17. Trainer	10	13th
	18. Assessor	7	16th
	19. Participant	3	26th
	20. Organizer	5	22nd
	21. Facilitator	2	30th
	22. Conductor	1	31st
	23. Judge	1	32nd
Student roles	24. Learner-centeredness	8	15th
	25. Imitating the teacher	5	23rd
	26. Autonomous learner	3	27th
	27. Explorer	6	19th
	28. Actor/actress	3	28th
	29. Co-operator	7	17th
Teaching procedures	30. PPP procedure (presentation, practice, and production)	37	1st
	31. Five-stage (revision, leading-in, presentation, practice, and production)	15	5th
	32. TBLT procedure (pre-task, while-task, and post- task)	7	18th
Total		306	

Note. Adapted from Liao (2003).

As seen from Table 5, the first function item in each of the categories is ranked highest as per the number of each case. They are respectively "focusing on language functions" (2nd), "pictures and objects" (11th), "activities in pairs/groups" (3rd), "director" (4th), "learner-centeredness" (15th), and "PPP procedure" (1st). As far as most of the participants were concerned, a typical lesson seemed to be characterized by the above traits. That is, a mediative lesson would be student-centered with classroom activities done by students in pairs/groups directed by the teacher who should focus the teaching aim on language functions by applying the PPP procedure. Nonetheless, a mediative class never occurs without the intervention of mediative techniques (Seng et al., 2003). Only 9 (out of 103) respondents (8.7%) regarded themselves as mediators, but none of them described in detail what real mediators should do.

Items 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 of the questionnaire required the participants to identify the roles of the teachers in the four scenarios. According to the given literature, Teacher A was a universal mediator conducting the first three universal mediation functions, and both Teachers B and C were situational mediators implementing the remaining nine situational mediative techniques. Teacher D was a traditional instructor following the grammar-based PPP procedure. Each of the 152 participants answered the items concerned whose identification of the four teachers' roles was presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Participants' Identification of Teacher Roles in Four Scenarios

Sub-questions in the Questionnaire	Yes *N (%)*	No *N (%)*	Not Sure *N (%)*	Total *N (%)*
3.1. Is Teacher A playing the mediator?	61 (40%)	57 (37%)	34 (23%)	152 (100%)
3.3. Is Teacher B playing the mediator?	112 (73.7%)	7 (4.6%)	33 (21.7%)	152 (100%)
3.5. Is Teacher C playing the mediator?	112 (73.7%)	12 (7.9%)	28 (18.4%)	152 (100%)
3.7. Is Teacher D playing the mediator?	56 (36.8%)	52 (34.2%)	44 (29%)	152 (100%)

As can be noted in Table 6, 40% of the teachers (*n* = 61) correctly considered Teacher A as a mediator. The participating teachers to the same number of 112 correctly viewed Teachers B and C as mediators. Only a small number of teachers (*n* = 34, 33, 28) were "not sure" about their decisions. The teacher participants were more confident of situational mediation than universal mediation. However, 36.8% of the respondents (*n* = 56) failed to identify the traditional teaching role in the PPP procedure due to incorrectly considering Teacher D as a mediator, and 34.2% (*n* = 52) correctly regarded Teacher D as traditional with 29% (*n* = 44) saying "not sure".

On balance, the responses to the first three questionnaire items implied that the respondents' understanding of mediation was limited to the fuzzy cognition of situational mediation functions. None of them really held the knowledge of universal mediation. Without reference information provided by the scenarios, most of them were unable to separate the mediators from the traditional instructor. Their formulations in terms of the definition of "mediator" and so-called mediative lessons lacked theoretical support. So most of the participants failed to explore the implications of mediation since their understanding of mediation was uncultured.

6.2 Results from the Case Studies

While interviewing the five self-claimed teachers, only one teacher (i.e., Huang) had a clear concept about situational mediation. Nevertheless, the other four possessed incomplete knowledge of situational mediation, among whom Zhang had no conception of mediation since she conceptualized the role of mediator as the transmitter only.

6.2.1 Huang's correct knowledge of mediation

Huang had a clear command of knowledge of mediation except "significance", formulating the vital differences between traditional teacher roles and mediators. Of the five teachers, only Huang claimed that the new *Standards* encourages EFL teachers to execute the role of mediator and could correctly identify all the four teacher roles in Item 3. She interpreted the rationale of the new *Standards* regarding its requirements of teacher roles, which likely contributed to her mediating the students. Furthermore, Huang was widely exposed to reference materials on mediation and contributed relevant articles to journals. This appeared to help her gain a good grasp of mediation to implement a situational mediator.

6.2.2 Poor knowledge of mediation of Jiang, Lv, and Zeng

From Jiang's description of mediation definition and a mediative lesson plan that she assumed, Jiang had some idea of "control of own behavior", "sharing", "a sense of belonging", and "individuality". Jiang played the role of traditional instructor due to trivial cognition of mediative knowledge and situational constraints that she encountered. Mediative tools such as "control of own behavior, "goal-setting", and "sharing" seemed familiar to Lv who could identify universal and situational mediators but mistook a grammar-translation EFL teacher for a mediator. Lv was therefore puzzled at the difference between a mediator and an instructor as she asserted that the PPP procedure in a grammar lesson was characterized by learner-centeredness. Lv even misperceived her directions for the students' exchange of learning strategies as mediative.

Zeng also delineated the mediative functions of "control of own behaviour", "sharing", and "goal-setting". However, he retrieved information about mediation online before answering the questionnaire, which meant that he might have no reliable knowledge of mediation. He was unable to distinguish a mediator from a traditional teacher as he contended that the mediator was like the builder of the bridge between students and knowledge or between learners and regulatory activities. In his opinion, a mediator should act as a knowledge-transmitter, which was similar to the case of Zhang. So Zeng did not comprehend mediation functions adequately, which was an influential factor to keep him from being a mediator.   In brief, the insufficient mediative knowledge of Jiang, Lv, and Zeng summarized in Table 7 stopped them from implementing mediation.

Table 7: Incomplete Mediation Knowledge of Jiang, Lv, and Zeng

Mediation Function	Teacher(s) (Who?)
Control of own behavior	Jiang, Lv, Zeng
Goal-setting	Lv, Zeng
Sharing	Jiang, Lv, Zeng
Individuality	Jiang
A sense of belonging	Jiang

6.2.3 Zhang's misconception about mediation

Among the five cases of teachers identified, Zhang seemed to hold the minimum knowledge of mediation. She perceived that teachers might play mediation functions to the utmost should they transmit knowledge to students in whatever way. While she had never heard of mediation nor been exposed to any training associated with the teacher role as mediator prior to this study, she trusted her intuition and experience in conducting her lessons. Even though she was able to identify the role of two situational mediators, she based the functions of situational mediation on how to transmit to students knowledge and the ethics of becoming perfect humans. Zhang was viewed as a traditional instructor due to her misconception of mediation.

7. Discussion

The survey findings indicate that the teacher participants had misconceptions and inadequate knowledge of mediation. Most of the teachers incorrectly regarded the role of mediator as the "transmitter" of knowledge from the teacher to students, the "organizer" of classroom activities, and the "go-between" between students and teaching materials. Around one third of the participants failed to identify the teacher role in the PPP procedure and mistook the traditional instructor for the role of mediator. Given the four teacher scenarios concerning different teaching roles, the small minority of the teachers seemed clearer about the knowledge of situational mediation than of universal mediation. They claimed to make better sense of situational mediation functions like "control of own behavior", "challenge", "a belief in positive outcomes", "sharing", and "individuality", but they had a poor command of "a sense of competence", "awareness of change", "goal-setting", and "a sense of belonging". Teachers seemed sensitive to situational mediative functions likely because they were more familiar with educational situations as educators.

The function of the transmitter is to bring knowledge to students directly without interactions or activities, and the teacher takes charge of the output of knowledge making students the container of knowledge (Hird, 1995). This kind of role is identical with "instructor" like a Chinese equivalent *jiao (1) shu (1) jiang (4)*, in which *jiao (1) shu (1)* represents "instruction" with *jiang (4)* meaning "craftsman". In addition, the survey showed that some of the subjects referred to the mediator role as a "go-between" who acted as a matchmaker between students and instructional materials. The said role of "go-between" is irrelated to "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" (Feuerstein, 1980, cited in Williams & Burden, 2000, p. 68). The participants were likely influenced by the Chinese equivalent *zhong (1) jie (4)*, in which *zhong (1)* means "in-between" with *jie (4)* implying "medium".

The PPP procedure is characterized by teacher-centeredness and instruction for accurate language functions, during which the teacher controls the instructional pace entirely with students as organisms guided by skilled training techniques to generate correct responses (Nunan, 1989). In particular, the final stage *production* provides real situations for students to produce various forms of spoken and written language products for the free use of language (Ellis, 1992). However, the teacher role in this procedure is still conceptualized as "instructor" since the class is teacher-centered. Many of the participants wrongly viewed the traditional instructor in the PPP procedure as a mediator, which could be attributed to their insufficient cognition of the PPP.

In the case studies, Huang was able to implement situational mediation based on correct knowledge of situational mediation and the absence of situational constraints (Oskamp, 1991). Zhang encountered far fewer constraints compared with Jiang, Lv, and Zeng, but she was unable to refrain from playing the traditional role of instructor due to the incorrect knowledge of mediation. Jiang, Lv, and Zeng possessed partial knowledge of mediation, but they were traditional instructors on account of situational constraints that they came across.

As such, the five teachers' possessing distinct levels of mediative knowledge influenced their behaviors differently since cognition was one of the fundamentals for their implementation of mediation (Mueller, 1986).

8. *Conclusion and Implications*

Relying on the findings, a conclusion is drawn that most EFL teachers possess no knowledge of mediation, resulting in failing to execute the mediator role. Many experts on mediation claim that the execution of the mediator is extremely challenging to educators (e.g., Bligh, 1971; Feuerstein, 1980; Higgins, 2003; Seng et al., 2003). As Seng et al. (2003) put it,

> The roles of teachers will have to change dramatically if they are to remain relevant to a new generation of students. The challenge is indeed for educators to design new learning environments and curricula that really encourage motivation and independence to equip students with learning, thinking, and problem-solving skills through good mediation. (p. 17)

EFL teachers thus have to obtain professional training on mediation in order to perform as real mediators. Updating teachers' knowledge of mediation seems to hold great importance.

In China's educational setting, "it is not only necessary but also crucial in language teacher education programs to be conducted in the EFL context to achieve an understanding of language teachers' knowledge base to get a sense of where they are, to comprehend their teaching context, and to know their professional development needs" (Cheng & Wang, 2004, p. 4). According to Fisher (2005, p. 144), "pedagogical knowledge" on the implementation of mediation seems underscored in the case of teachers' re-training programs at issue. Seng et al. (2003) believe that the research on MLE shows that teachers will turn reflective and efficient regarding the implementation of the mediator role if they possess a good command of Feuerstein's (1980) 12 MLE tools which contribute to teachers re-examining their roles as:

- facilitators for learning content knowledge
- facilitators for learning the process, heuristics, and strategies of learning a particular knowledge field
- mediators of knowledge sources
- mediators of lifelong learning
- mediators of life-wide learning
- designers of the learning environment (p. 16)

At this point, the challenge for teachers is to use good mediation to design new learning environments to qualify students for learning strategies, thinking skills, and problem-solving techniques since "as designers of the learning environment, teachers engage students in learning beyond the boundary of the classroom and the immediate human interactions, thus fostering in them independence and a higher level of interdependence" (Seng et al. 2003, pp. 16-17).

Huang's case indicates that there are other accessible approaches to teacher development besides attending teacher-training courses. Huang acquired the knowledge of mediation by reading and engaging in relative research, and conducting the hands-on implementation of mediation under theoretical guidance. As Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995, cited in Liao, 2003) argue,

> Teachers learn by doing, reading, and reflecting (just as students do); by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see. This kind of learning enables teachers to make the leap from theory to accomplished practice. (p. 191)

Thus, the findings are expected to provide implications for EFL teachers' upgrading of the professional challenges they are confronted with as far as the implementation of mediation is concerned.

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Appendix A

Mediation Questionnaire

Dear participants**,**
I am conducting research on "Cognition of mediation among secondary school EFL teachers in China". Your responses will be utilized for research purposes and kept confidential. No participants will be named in the research. Thanks for your cooperation.

Question 1: Do you have any idea of the term "mediator" in EFL teaching? Yes   No   ____. Please tick one choice between "YES" and "NO" first, and then define or explain it if you answered "YES".
_____
_____
_____

Question 2: Please describe a typical lesson that you consider as mediative. You can talk about teaching aims, activity types, the roles of teacher and students as well as the teaching procedure. You can use a lesson you have taught as an example.
_____
_____
_____

Question 3: Please read the following accounts on four teachers' roles. Answer the questions that follow each account.

Teacher A thinks the teacher should make learners realize the significance of a learning task so that they can see the value of the task to their own. Learners should know how to conduct a learning activity will help them beyond the immediate time and place. In presenting a task, he makes instructions clear and ensures the intention is understood by the learners.

3.1. Is this teacher playing the role of mediator in his class?

Yes_____ No_____ Not sure _____

Teacher B argues that she fosters the learners' feelings of competence by encouraging them to control their own learning, thinking, and actions. She teaches the learners how to set realistic goals and to locate approaches of achieving them. Helping the learners develop an internal need to confront challenges and then seek for new ones, she makes them monitor the changes in themselves, and understand human beings are constantly changing. During the activity, the learners' optimistic awareness is developed so that they realize the task is not as difficult as it seems to be.

3.2. Is this teacher playing the role of mediator in her class?
Yes_____ No_____ Not sure _____

Teacher C believes it important to make his students recognize that some problems are better solved by inviting them to share behaviors and co-operation among themselves on the basis of their own personality and the awareness of their own individuality and uniqueness. He also helps them establish a sense of belonging to the whole class during the completion of the task.
3.3. Is this teacher playing the role of mediator in his class?
Yes_____ No_____ Not sure _____

Teacher D regards language as a system of grammatical structures. She teaches EFL basically to ensure that the students can use EFL correctly. Materials that she uses rely on teaching a list of grammatical structures. In her class, she follows the PPP procedure (i.e. presentation, practice, and production) for drilling new grammatical structures. Namely, she first presents a new structure, then directs her students to practice the structure in a controlled way, and finally asks them to use it in a free production activity.
3.4. Is this teacher playing the role of mediator in her class?
Yes_____ No_____ Not sure _____

Question 4: Please complete the following demographic information as appropriate.
Name: _____ Gender: _____
Age: _____ Year(s) of teaching EFL: _____
Educational qualifications attained:
      ------Bachelor's Degree   ------Two-Year Certificate
      ------Secondary School Certificate   ------Others
The grade you are teaching in:
      -------Junior Grade One   ------Junior Grade Two
      -------Junior Grade Three   -------Senior Grade One
      -------Senior Grade Two   -------Senior Grade Three
The average number of the students in your class: _____
Your contact address and phone number (if applicable):

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Protocol

Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me the teaching role that you like to play in your most lessons.
2. Do you have any theoretical base when you tend to play a certain teaching role in the classroom?
3. Have you received any particular training that supports you to acquire sufficient knowledge of mediation? Could you describe it more accurately?
4. 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.
5. 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?
6. Could you tell me any difficulties which you think prevent you from playing the mediation role in the classroom if you are not playing the mediator at present?
7. 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?