

Reflections of English Teachers: the Quality-oriented Education Reform in China's Middle Schools

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Abstract:

Today in China, quality-oriented education reform is seen as an importance in fulfilling the potential development of all individuals. However, the current examination focus within long-term mainstream education tends to block the process of reform policy and its implementation in several ways. The purpose of this paper is to bring about philosophical foundations and documents to support this thought-provoking discussion. Through the experimental research, questions were asked to those involved in the policy reform process. The author listens to the voices from the grassroots, and explores existing challenges and corresponding solutions. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data. Specifically, the first four interviews acted as the main research process, while statistics of questionnaires were used to supplement the data. A final interview was then conducted as a summary and explanation for the research. In this investigation, teachers generally supported the quality-oriented education reform in their practice. It was found that obstacles were all important. However, with the support from educational departments, teachers have developed corresponding solutions. At the end of this paper, an overview of the whole investigation is addressed. Additionally, some practical suggestions are offered in order to make contributions to possible further development.

Keywords: Quality-oriented education, Reform implementation, Challenges, Solutions.

INTRODUCTION

Education, which on the whole is formally planned and taught to bring about learning, has become a pushing hand for social development, scientific improvement and economic advancement in international society (Pring, 2000). Education in China has been shaped by the specific history and culture and meets the Chinese diverse requirements throughout different eras. Currently, education aims to keep pace with multi-polarisation and economic globalisation. The Chinese education system has sought to improve its policies and has experienced several types of reformations. These include the broad promotion of policy, switching from the mainstream exam-oriented education mode, to being more quality-oriented.

The reason why the transformation became a national policy can be attributed to those involved in the reformation and the uniformity between the new education mode and Chinese education research. The aims of this new education mode are to enhance the literacy of citizens, to address the challenges in the traditional education methods and concretise the strategies for reviving the national economy, through science and education. In the meantime, the ultimate purpose of education is to grasp the activities and policies of learning institutions, which helps to transform the capacities of citizens in order for them to live a fuller life (Pring, 2000). Since the nature and ultimate goals of both education and the quality-oriented education are similar and relevant, conducting a changing tracks policy in China is of great importance. In 2007, the Chinese government organised the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China in which China's educational guiding principle, "giving priority to education, promoting educational equity and building up a strong country with rich and qualified human resources", was approved. At the same time, the document "The National Guidelines for Medium and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020)" was drafted and released (Gu, 2010). It is a milestone for Chinese education, as well as a guideline for quality-oriented education reformation. After several conferences and discussions, the policies have been developed and the strategies continue to improve. As a result of a collective effort, the national policy, which replaces the exam-oriented education mode with the quality-oriented education, has been deeply rooted in China's society.

Either under the new quality-oriented education or in traditional exam-oriented education in last decades, the English educational curriculum has been of paramount importance in China. Proficiency in English has been regarded as both a national and personal asset (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Adamson, 2001; Hu, 2002; Jin & Cortazzi, 2003; Hu, 2005). For the nation, the English education has been considered as a method of speeding up national modernisation and development (Ross, 1992; Adamson & Morris, 1997; Hu, 2005). No matter how the rationales of English reform have changed in these years, the significance of national proficiency in the English curriculum has never been called into question (Hu, 2005). For individuals, English ability leads to more economic, social and educational opportunities in the global village, especially after China took part in the WTO (World Trade Organisation). So the English

capacity provides the Chinese both material resources and a betterment of personal well-being (Bourdieu, 1991). Therefore, pursuing prominence and meeting demands of English proficiency, China's government and citizens have kept contributing efforts to English education, especially in today's quality-oriented education era (Niu & Wolff, 2003; Hu, 2005). In addition, acting as the research objects, English teachers can communicate freely in English. They can, therefore, witness the whole research process and understand the language of this paper. As a result, the validity and authenticity of this research are protected.

The significance of this thesis is both theoretical and practical. In terms of theory, the reviewing of the relative theoretical foundation of the traditional education mode and the quality-oriented education mode will be presented. Combined with the status quo in China, not only can the theories be understood intensively, the implementation of theories on practice will be unimpeded. In directing practice, the English teachers' voices can be heard, providing suggestions for educational reformation, as well as an alarm bell for current policy conduction. The majority of documents are reported by authorities to hold positive opinions on this new mode, the problems raised in this research will draw the attention of education organisers, so that the issues can be solved easily. Finally, the research will be carried out in a less developed city, Nanning. It is of value to test the practice of education policy here, since this paper is one of the first to deal with topics in this area. In summary, the research will have different meanings for different groups of individuals. After the abstract and introduction parts in which the causes of the topic, the potential value of the research, and the situation of the research process are listed, the main body of this paper will be divided into four parts:

a) The literature review collects the original documents and academic papers about the exam-oriented education and the quality-oriented education. It is retrospective to the theoretical foundations for forming the modes and epitomising the pros and cons of both of them. More importantly, it introduces specific movements in the quality-oriented education reformation, China's New National Curriculum Reform, the reformation of National College Entrance Examination, the reformation of teachers' education, and the augmentation of international cooperation, exchange and policy-learning in education field. On the basis of all of these discussions, the readers will be able to examine the reform process in real circumstances. In the next step the researcher will present detailed research on the reform implementation.

b) The research questions will be raised in the methodology part: "Do teachers support the reform policy of changing the education mode from exam-oriented education to quality-oriented education in the Chinese English curriculum in middle schools?" A mixed research method will be conducted on 104 middle school English teachers in Nanning, as well as the ethical considerations of the whole research process.

c) Next, the results of interviews and questionnaires will be deliberated one after another, based on the unsolved problems that emerge in the process. A final interview with a local education organiser will bring suggestions for policy implementation.

d) Finally, the outcomes from interviews and questionnaires will consider whether there is a consensus, or if there are still plenty of problems in new mode education. In addition, whether the reformation brings more benefits or challenges to middle school teachers, will be discussed. In conclusion, a summary of the research will be proposed, as well as the limitations of the research.

As the researcher in this paper, when I study in an international environment, I often meet a prejudice from foreigners, hearing that Chinese students have high scores but low abilities. Within the domestic community, citizens always believe those who live in less developed areas are more hardworking, but lower in comprehensive quality. I doubt the reasons behind this bias and wonder if it is true of the situation in China's education field, how educators feel and what they do to alter the status quo. With the interest of education policy implementation and a little knowledge and experience of China's quality-oriented education reformation, the urgent domestic issue, which addresses the educational difficulties, especially in less developed areas, drew my attention. Therefore, this research will be conducted in my hometown, Nanning city, aiming to summarise practical suggestions for local educators and make contributions to my hometown's education construction.

1. EDUCATION IN CHINA: THE MOVE TOWARDS QUALITY-ORIENTED EDUCATION

1.1 Overview of the traditional education mode

1.1.1 Introduction of the traditional education mode

In the history of Chinese education, the exam-oriented education is the traditional mode. This treats the examination as the goal so it does not become concerned with learning capacity and the skills of students, but equips them for the college entrance examination. It puts the teachers in a central place, aiming to improve graduation rates for middle schools (Zheng, 2008). The reason why exam-oriented education has become the mainstream education mode is as a result of the Chinese culture (Ye, 1991; Ye, 2001; Xiao, 2001). In history, the imperial examination system was the old examination system in feudal China (AD 605—1905), which can be seen as the predecessor of exam-oriented education. This education system has contribution to Chinese politics, the economy, culture and national characters (Liu, 1995). Similar to the imperial examination, under the control of exam-oriented education, students are required to finish plenty of exercises and examinations, which occupy their free time and bind their individual development. Taking part in the college entrance examination, a small group of students are selected for universities or colleges, whereas the majority parts of youngsters step into society without any professional skill (Ye, 2001).

1.1.2 Challenges of traditional mode

If it concludes that the benefits of exam-oriented education are higher marks, good educational performance at international levels, more hard-working students and teachers, then, there are

far more demerits exceeding, for the students, education systems and the whole society. Firstly, exam-oriented education might make students either physically or mentally ill (Man, 1997; Yang, 1997). In order to pursue a higher score in exams, it was usual for schools to blindly add classes and more hours of class time to students' burdens, which makes schooling overloaded physically and mentally. In addition, the teaching method of this education mode is simple; it gives a single lecture to all of students at the same time with the same teaching method. In fact not all people are at the same level yet the education content is nearly the same in nationwide. Even worse, the whole country utilises the same English textbook in middle schools in China. Under this education approach, students become nothing but the "test machine" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). Secondly, the education under the exam-oriented mode, results in poor quality outcomes. In basic education schools, they weight intellectual education as the most important one and the skills and abilities trainings are disjointed, so most of students develop one-sided. In terms of moral education, physical education, aesthetic education and education in labour skills, all of these courses have been advocated for many years, but in fact it lagged far behind intellectual education (Man, 1997). Finally, along with cultivating successors for society, the exam-oriented education also nurtures plenty of so-called "educational failures". Under this mode, students were judged by their scores. When some have poor academic performance, our schools were not educating students in accordance with their personality, but forcing them to take the same courses as others, therefore increasing problems rather than solving them. Further, these students were negatively represented in comparison with regular classes since they were named as "the poorer students" or "academic underachievers". When categorised as educational losers in schooling, they would become "problem citizens" in society, which creates many social problems. Their experiences demonstrate the failure of exam-oriented education (Man, 1997). Yang (1997) added that exam-oriented education brings growing burdens for the Chinese society. This education mode is a selection system. It only offers opportunities and protects the rights of students who have good academic performance, whilst a large amount of youngsters are weeded out. It speeds up social problems and makes the community injustice.

1. 1. 3 Conclusion of the traditional mode

The exam-oriented education has resulted with the majority of educational activities in schooling being designed to meet the requirement of standardised examinations, both teachers and students' education goals are valued by exam results. A quality education reformation became a requirement to alter the teaching and learning processes, evaluation approaches and curriculum contents, so education can encourage students to create and research independently (Zhang, 2010).

1. 2 Overview of the quality-oriented education

1. 2. 1 Introduction of the quality-oriented education

Based on the problems brought by exam-oriented education, the Chinese education system was encouraged to move away from the restrictive conditions of the traditional education mode and organise a far-ranging reformation. The purpose of this reformation transferred the education

mode from the exam-oriented education to quality-oriented education, making changes in educational ideology, the curriculum, teaching methods and evaluation measure, in order to improve the over-all quality of China's education and cultivate more talented graduates (Pepper, 1990; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Dooley 2001; Liu, 2007, Liu & Dunne, 2009). The quality-oriented education mode was designed to improve students' all-round development, strengthen their sense of social obligations, enhance their innovation in study and advance their problem-identifying and problem-solving skills. It pays attention to combining the cultural studies with moral edification, the theoretical study with social experience and the all-rounded with personality development. To sum up, it requires every effort to make students master learning, practice and innovation (Gu, 2010). This new education mode determined by a difference in educational philosophy. These two modes hold diverse ideas for cultivating different kinds of graduates. The traditional one aims to produce a small number of elites by a single evaluation system; whilst the modern one nurtures the majority of citizens in different ways and develops them to become builders and successors in social enterprise.

1. 2. 2 Origins of quality-oriented education

The history of advocating quality education reformation in China began in the 1980s. In 1985, the former Chinese national leader, Deng Xiaoping, pointed out the issue in a national education work conference, that "the quality of workers and intellectuals are the main factors of the national strength and economic development in the future China". In the same year, the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued the decision related to the education system reform of China: "in the whole reform process, it has to remember that the basic purposes of reform are improving the national quality and cultivating more talents" (cited in Yulin Bureau of Education, 2006). These words have become the origin of reform thought. In this initial stage, the implement of reformation was embodied in "educational differentiation" or a "dual-track schooling system". Specifically, broadening both key and regular schooling systems and creating key and normal classes within a single school (Lewin et al., 1994, Wang & Zhou, 2002). Whilst broadening basic schooling aimed to cultivating more all-rounded qualities graduates, these bifurcated educational systems, as Rosen (1985, 1987) considered, were like a double-edged sword. It would produce maximum educational results in the minimum time which meets the requirement of quality education reform, at the same time producing graduates who were suitable for higher-level institutions with high exam scores, which went back to the exam-oriented education. The development of the reform was immature at that time. In 1993, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the State Council issued the *Development Outline for China's Education Reform*, in which it said "the primary and secondary schools should transform from exam-oriented education to quality-oriented education mode, aiming to improving citizens' quality, facing all students and enhancing their ideological, moral, cultural, physical and psychological qualities, as well as developing their own characteristics" (cited in Yulin Bureau of Education, 2006). This document was the first time in which the "quality education reform" was proposed officially and become a national policy in China. Dating back to the 1994, it was the first time that "quality-oriented education" became a specific conception.

In the national education work conference, Li Lanqing, the former Vice Premier in charge of education, said that “the basic education should turn from the exam-oriented education to quality-oriented education then overall improve the education quality” (cited in Gu, 2010). In the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, “putting the human factor at the centre stage and promoting quality-oriented education” constituted the strategic theme of educational reform and development in China and at the same time, the exact definition of the quality-oriented education was conceived (Gu, 2010).

1. 2. 3 The development of quality-oriented education

The education reform could not process fruitfully without a number of timely state decisions and interventions (Wang & Zhou, 2002). The “National Primary and Secondary School Education Quality Meeting” which was held by the State Education Commission in Yan Tai, Shan Dong province in 1997, was a significant meeting for the national comprehensive promotion of the quality-oriented education. From then on, the new mode of education was officially implemented throughout the country. After two-years of practice, the curriculum reform in basic education in China went into business. The Ministry of Education in China developed the *Ordinary High School Curriculum Plan (Experiment)* and the new curriculum standards in Chinese, English and another 13 courses. It aims to carry on the new policy from the curriculum and make the textbooks more flexible. After that, there were several conferences which discussed issues of a new education mode. At the same time the reformation policy was established, revised and spread in national and local scale. By the end of the 20th century, the implementation of policy went forward. It met with setbacks, but the reformation never stopped processing. In the beginning of the 21st century, the Ministry of Education in China published a document about education reformation and development in the new decade. Until then, the reformation from exam-oriented education to quality-oriented education was not only the assignment from last century but the continued theme at the beginning of 21st century in China.

1. 2. 4 The western philosophical foundation

Chinese education reform learns from Dewey’s “Experimentalism Education” in three aspects: 1) the social function of school, 2) the practicality of education itself; and 3) the use of scientific methods (Lu & Chi, 2007). First, a core of Dewey’s educational philosophy is considered the social function of schools—nurturing intellectual individuality as well as cultivating cooperation. It encourages students to think and judge in an individual way, but also work together in social affairs and interpersonal relationship. Second, Dewey considered that every social member should share equally social benefits with each other and should teach others, in order to adapt and progress together. Lastly, he treated the experimental method as the most scientific approach, since it has the innovative spirit advocated these days. According to Wang and Zhou (2002), the diversification of teaching methods in teaching processes and the educational administration ways of the new education mode, are both based on the *Contingency Theory*. It was proposed by Fiedler that it should be applied in education practice, in order to consider teachers’ behaviour under certain situations and prove there is no single best

decision-making method (Tarter & Hoy, 1998). In traditional teaching methods, China's education faced difficulties in assessing the capacity of organisations to manage innovation and how to use appropriate educational management strategies. The *Contingency Theory* is conducted like a successful transfer during reformation since this theory guides education organisers on overcoming the weaknesses of conventional planning and recognising the pivotal position of students. It leads Chinese education put the students at the centre rather than to receive knowledge passively.

1. 2. 5 The Chinese philosophical foundation

The idea of Confucius was the original philosophic foundation. Firstly, Confucius asserted educational equality (Ye, 2001; Sun, 2001). The family backgrounds, talents, ages, and other individual factors should be outside the consideration limits. Being educated is everyone's right. Secondly, Confucius considered that education should be comprehensive and permanent (Ye, 2001; Sun, 2001). He organised several kinds of courses to nurture multi-skilled students. His students were spread across different age groups because he thought receiving education was a life-long entitlement. Thirdly, he developed an "elicitation teaching method". He advocated that teachers should not teach unless the student was desperately anxious to learn (Ye, 2001; Sun, 2001). He was against the inculcated education method, which was progressive at that time. Students are placed at the centre of the education process, instead of exam-oriented education in which teachers are the most important characters. The most important idea put forward by Confucius is the teaching of students in accordance with their aptitudes (Ye, 1991; Xiao, 2001). He encouraged teachers to observe the characteristics of different students so as to design various kinds of teaching methods on the basis of students' individualities, abilities, and ambitions.

In ancient history, other famous Chinese philosophers, for instance, Chen Yi and Zhu Xi supported and inherited the ideas of Confucius. They initially applied the thoughts of diverse education methods to different students. The earliest monograph in the world, *Notes of Study*, indicated that, in ancient China, students have met different problems in diverse aspects of the education process, which was caused by the discrepancy of learners. Teachers have to grasp students' specialities in order to further their advantages (Ye, 1991; Sun, 2001). How to fulfil the development of different kinds of talents had already ascended to theoretical high rather than the concern only of teachers. To sum up the Chinese ancient idea: using different teaching methods to educate different characteristics of individuals has become a theoretical core of current quality-oriented education. Besides, the Confucius' free, open, democratic and practical educational philosophy was avoided during feudal China, but now has been taken out and tried again in education practice.

In modern China, Cai Yuanpei, the celebrated educationist developed the philosophical basis for quality education with his theories of "liberty of thought" and "all-inclusive education". On the basis of the theories of Confucius, Cai attached importance to the personality development of students. Furthermore, he advocated that education should be all-inclusive and he made the

guiding principle for running Chinese schools, freedom of thought. He believed that creativity needs a free atmosphere in academic exchange activities. Thus, he was seen to be setting a free environment for both education methods and social ideology in undeveloped China. In addition, he suggested cultivating teachers who had independent spirit and innovation capacity. It is a way to protect the rights of teachers and more importantly, teachers are always the exemplary persons for their students, so providing more room for teachers would be equal to assisting students' free development (Gao, 1988; Gu, 1996; Zhou, 2000). Another educationist and philosopher, Tao Xingzhi, combined the Chinese education situation with the Dewey's theories. He supported the idea that society is a school in which each person can have different outcomes. He advocated learning from daily life. The education system thus has to provide a wide arena for students to gain experience and give them the chance test their knowledge in practice. Until now, this ideal status is still pursued by educators and not implemented well in China. It is rather hard to swallow, that more than half century ago, Tao carried out the policy of "education for all". He believed everyone had the right to be educated regardless of their social classes and family background. This was pioneering work in that era and a warning to the current quality education reformation to keep justice. In 1919, he developed a comprehensive education theory, which aims to cultivate students with a healthy physique, scientific mind, artistic interests and reform spirit, which are exactly the same as the current "all-round development of education policy" in quality-oriented education. His thoughts combined with other modern education theories, have become the orientation of Chinese quality education (Gu, 1996; Tao, 2005).

1. 2. 6 Conclusion of the quality-oriented education formation

In summary, the concept of quality education emerged in the 1980s but the philosophy foundations have developed for more than a thousand years and keep guiding the direction of Chinese education reforms. Even though some western theories have an effect on Chinese education reformations, the new-emerged quality-oriented education and Chinese essential education thoughts, are following one continuous line. The new mode has inherited and carried forward many fine traditional experiences as well as faced plenty of obstacles.

1. 2. 7 The examples of steps in the reform

There are many detailed components of the reform policy, in which, China's New National Curriculum Reform (CNNCR) emerges as the most outstandingly. Motivations for the implementation of a new national curriculum reform are: the fierce international competitions and cooperation; the popularisation of information technology and internet skills and, most importantly, the requirement of quality-oriented education reform. CNNCR is a reformation which stresses the quality education process by altering teaching modes and students' learning methods (Guan & Meng, 2007).

It ensures quality-oriented education is implementation in five ways: 1) the new curriculum reforms in knowledge and skills, procedures and approaches and teaching effects and learning attitudes. This change is helpful to achieve the all-round educational development of students, which is exactly the essence of quality-oriented education. 2) CNNCR establishes a

comprehensive curriculum framework at national level. It meets the requirements of quality-oriented education by paying more attention to lifelong learning than previous curriculums, focusing on students' daily life, modern society and the new era of technology. 3) Educators have more autonomy with this curriculum. CNNCR provides more flexibility for alternative teaching materials and educating methods. This alters the curriculum standards and the evaluation measurement, making quality-oriented education distinguishable from tradition education modes. 4) CNNCR emphasising the improvement of education methods, paying attention to the teaching process, learning experience, instructional methods, evaluation procedure and students' all-round learning skills. Therefore, receiving this new curriculum reduces the risks of quality-oriented education. 5) This curriculum reform is concerned with building a more effective evaluation measure and the all-round development of students. When applying this curriculum, the goals of quality-oriented education would be realised more quickly.

Furthermore, some educators supported the view that the CNNCR enabled the state to implement quality education and work out the issues raised in the traditional education mode. Zhong et al. (2001) discussed that the reform design of a two curriculum form: subject-based curriculum and comprehensive practical activities. Both curriculums aim to alter students' learning style, develop their personality and consist of the same basic essentials, knowledge and experience for students, which assist in solving the challenges in the quality-oriented education. In 2006, Zhong concluded that the new curriculum aims to give students' an all round development, the CNNCR shares the same aim of quality-oriented education and will help the changing of forms.

The College Entrance Examination is a traditional method; "letting the result of one round of exams decide the destiny of a student's life" (Gu, 2010). In other words, it is a selection system to decide further educational opportunities and social future for young people. As the result of this system, students and their parents cannot help but continue to increase their aspirations for the attainment of examination success, and recognise such results as a means to accessing highly desired careers (Liu & Dunne, 2009). On the bright side, the selection function of the college entrance examination is an incentive for graduates to achieve a better academic result by hardworking. However, this system creates distorted aims for education: pursuing success in one exam may lead to excessive focus on getting to the next academic level (Andreas, 2004; Liu & Dunne, 2009). In order to rectify the misconception of selection system, "the National Guidelines for Medium and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020)" was issued. The new college entrance requirements should allow students to make multiple choices when coming to a higher educational institution. They should be evaluated more comprehensively and admitted by more methods. By reducing the importance of the role of the college entrance examination, the students gain more opportunities to increase their all-round abilities, thus quality-oriented education has a chance to achieve its goal.

It is said that “the hope for reviving the nation lies in education and the hope of reviving education lies with teachers” (Li, 1997). Changing education modes should cultivate group after group of qualified teachers, capable of carrying out quality-oriented education. The purpose of teacher training is to equip them with the skills for basic education in China, specifically, to apply the quality-oriented education mode. It goes without saying that if the reform implementation hopes to be successful, the teacher training colleges and schools must carry out all-round quality education among their own students. There are several steps that have already been conducted: 1) a new concept of the quality-oriented education has been established in teacher training schools. Many teachers are to study theories of constructing quality education with Chinese characteristics, to update their minds and understanding of this educational reformation policy. 2) In teacher training schools, there are different kinds of courses in which more high-quality and all-rounded new teachers are nurtured. 3) Schooling conditions are improved as required for quality education. Schools have invested in more money, modern teaching aids and facilities, which is beneficial to teachers’ working (Li, 1997).

Turning to foreign education systems for help is another means to achieve the ultimate goal of quality education policy, the cultivation of all-round student development. Currently, the main form of international educational communication (Huang, 1987; Wang, 2003) is: 1) Sending students and visiting scholars abroad. 2) Accepting foreign students in China. 3) The exchange of visiting lecturers. 4) Cooperative research. 5) The establishment of partnerships between sister institutions. 6) Taking part in international meetings and the organisation of similar meetings in China.

1. 2. 8 Merits of the new mode

When evaluating the implementations of the China’s basic education reform during past decades, plenty of opinions have supported the reformation as an achievement. Levin and Lockheed (1993) insisted that the quality-oriented education reformation brought 1) increasing participation, 2) more effectiveness and 3) growing resources to the education system. The enrolment of students was increasing. Appropriately, more positive learning results were produced. At the same time, more expenditure per students, annual recurrent public educational expenditures, qualified teachers, facilities and textbooks were investment in most schools, which indeed accelerate the progress of Chinese education reform, especially in the late 1990s (MOE Department of Planning and Development, 1998). In 2002, Wang and Zhou suggested the policy has been a success: the national literacy rate had been largely realised; the educational diversity beyond the Ministry of Education system had taken shape. For example, more private schools, “people-managed” schools and community-supported schools were expanded so that there were more types of educational resources for students to choose, rather than passively receiving the traditional education mode from MOE. They also revealed that the “schooling effectiveness”, which is among main field of quality education reform, became a performance indicator of the annual evaluation of governmental officials, which shows the high-profile publicity campaigns for reform became wide spread.

1. 2. 9 Demerits of the new mode

Along with the benefits which the reform has brought to China, China's education system also pays the price since there are still negative issues existing during the implementation of policy. Since the quality-oriented education reform is based on the western experience and developing a new mode, which is totally different from traditional exam-oriented education, inevitably, erodes Chinese traditions (Wang & Zhou, 2002). For instance, the Chinese ancient Confucian thoughts are shrinking with the powerful intrusion of modernisation and the encroachment of free market economy and western educational thoughts. During the introduction of the new western teaching mode, the western thoughts, especially the Americanised traditions, keep coming into China. Further, as Wang and Zhou predicted, the education reform would result in children's "alienated from the past" because the cost of imported traditions of the West and of America should not be overlooked.

One challenge of this reform implementation is uncooperative students or students' incapability. Chinese people have a thousand-year tradition of Mean Ideology, which has guided the Chinese to stick to convention. Young students sometimes lack creativity, they do not dare to challenge the designated education track and expand their own vision beyond the parameters (Zhang, 2010). As can be analysed, the traditional education mode simply pursues the exam results and ignores the individuality of different students, missing the true core of education. Though it helps some students achieve a better life in universities or colleges, the Chinese society, loses vibrant and creative lives. Society asks for quality-oriented education but in fact the Chinese students feel unwilling or incapable to follow the reform.

The quality education reform also meets difficulties during the disseminate process. The majority of Chinese accept and applaud the reformation policy, but even though educators understand the importance of this new mode, in schooling, when exams are around the corner, the reform "is secondary in reality and is put aside when busy" (Pang, 2004). Apparently, the reform practice faces resistance anywhere since exam-oriented education has been dominant in most Chinese schools for so many years that it is not easy to move away from the old tradition. Under the pressure of society, MOE, parents, especially the enormous population in China, exams scores is still the most significant way of gaining a chance for entry into higher institutions. The unequal opportunities between rural and urban areas in China and the limited opportunities for receiving higher education, make people favour exam-oriented education as the only practical choice prior to the college entrance examination (Du & Wu, 2001; Zhang, 2010). They of course have no time and no energy to implement a new quality education mode. Therefore, the new education mode is still invalid. It can be concluding that the quality-oriented education mode could never be carried through, while the Chinese education system remains unreformed in its national curriculum, college entrance examination, teachers' education and increases international cooperation.

In summary, people continue to consider the existing exam-oriented education process, review the developing track of quality-oriented education and the policies which lead to the

development of new educational modes, while discussing the merits this education style brings to us as well, as the challenges during the practice. In China's society, cultivating all-round development of students reaches a national consensus, as Li lanqing, the Chinese Vice-Premier in charge of education, said (1996):

“Only a person who is well developed in an all-round way can be useful to society. That is why we have to adhere to the principle that we must have all-round development of our students—morally, intellectually and physically in our education”.

Apparently, the reformation changing tracks from exam-oriented education to quality-oriented education which cultivates all-rounded students, answers the requirement of the Chinese education society. However, whether the new quality-oriented education mode is carried out effectively, depends on the feedback from a grassroots level and how the policy has been implemented in education practice. Given these considerations, it becomes important to get information from teachers in China. The following chapter will address both qualitative and quantitative methods in small scale research project.

2. CHAPTER II : CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING QUALITY-ORIENTED EDUCATION: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

2. 1 Research Questions

In order to test how the policy was conducted at grassroots level in the English course field, it was necessary to gather opinions from middle school English teachers so as to find out if this reform policy had meaning in practice. It was also important to hear the opinions of teachers on this reform and gather their responses to reflect advice to policy makers; answer queries of the community and satisfy the requirements of parents. In order to achieve these goals, the general question in this research is:

Do teachers support the reform policy of changing the education mode from exam-oriented education to quality-oriented education in the Chinese English curriculum in middle schools?

Specifically, the research questions can be defined as:

- (1) *What do teachers think about the challenges in such change?*
- (2) *What challenges do teachers meet in practice?*
- (3) *What exactly do teachers do to meet these challenges in practice?*

The first one focuses on listening teachers' opinions on this reformation, whilst the other questions aim to collect detailed challenges and practical solutions.

2. 2 Methodology

2. 2. 1 The selection of research methods

Triangulation, especially the methodological triangulation, which means combining two or more methods of data collection on the same object of study (Cohen & Manion, 1980), was applied in this research. In 1989, Borg and Gall considered quantitative method and qualitative method as two main research methods in the education field. In this study, the qualitative method, interview; and the quantitative method; questionnaire, were combined to collect teachers' data.

As a qualitative method, interview is based on a phenomenological exposure and within a phenomenological framework (Lancy, 1993; Pring, 2000) and as Pring summarised, interview is within the area of interpretive theory in philosophy. Researchers have gathered both merits and demerits of this method: on the one hand, the interview has adaptability (Bell, 1993). An interviewer can follow up the ideas of the interviewee and improve the questions; s/he can also probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, along with the research process. Further, interview gives extensive opportunities for showing participants' personalisation. On the other hand, however, the interview expends time, money and labour power. Without any of them the qualitative research would be blocking-upped (Bell, 1993). In addition, "Phenomenology" as a theoretical approach with methodological understandings, lays emphasis on revealing the subjective consciousness and stressing the significance of the interpretation of research in the light of "subjective meanings" (Pring, 2000). Subjectivity is highlighted as an epistemological issue in interview, since each participant has his/her view which might prejudice and bias (Creswell, 1994).

Due to the subjective character of interview listed above, a way to control that uncertainty is needed, that is the reason for conducting the questionnaire (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000), though questionnaire still has its advantages and disadvantages in educational research. For one thing, it can easily reach a large number of respondents; therefore a questionnaire is a perfect way to collect wide data rather than in-depth answers (Cohen and Manion, 1980). Bechhofer and Paterson (2000) added three main merits of questionnaires as: it is an efficient use of time; the questions in it are standardised with a common and transparent meaning; and it is ideal for statistical descriptions, thus, ideal for asking about factual matters. However, the questionnaire faces limited opportunities for both researchers and respondents and the response rates are sometimes relatively low (Cohen and Manion, 1980).

It cannot be denied that both interviews and questionnaires have their own merits in conducting educational research, however, in order to reduce the risks of these dangers, a triangulation method was implemented to overcome the problem of "method-boundedness" (Cohen & Manion, 1980). Interviews would be conducted to pursue in-depth statistics from sample teachers, whilst questionnaires would be sent to understand general situation.

2. 2. 2 Overview of the research process

The research process was divided into three parts: four English teachers were selected randomly by the Nanning municipal education department from four different middle schools and invited, if willing to participate into the 1st phase interviews (the selection process would

be presented later). After collecting their answers, the 2nd phase questionnaire was designed on the basis of the results from the 1st phase. The questionnaire was sent on-line, all the middle school English teachers around the city were free to answer. The first 100 replies were gathered and counted in order to check if answerers shared similar opinions and solutions as the former four participants; and if more issues would be found and more suggestions and experiences could be brought as supplements for the 1st phase interviews. After these two main stages, a final interview would be conducted with the Educational bureau director, aiming to get responses about the prior issues and conclude the overall picture of the changing tracks policy implementation in the Nanning city, in a relatively macroscopic viewpoint. All the statistics of these three phases were synthesised to give appropriate answers of research questions.

This research is slightly different from common educational research which gathered data from quantitative methods first and then focused on specifically qualitative data. Instead, this qualitative research is the initial data resource and this quantitative data will be placed as the supplement. The interviews are helping to focus the main issues in policy implementation, as well as guiding quantitative method design.

2. 2. 2. 1 Phase 1

The Nanning municipal education department was requested to support selection process. As the researcher needed 1) an old teacher from a “key” middle school, 2) a young teacher from another “key” middle school, 3) a young teacher from a “regular” middle school; and 4) an old teacher from another “regular” middle school, the local officials chose 4 participants stochastically and then recommended them to me. During this process, much effort was put in to achieving maximal justice and fairness. The selection supervision was constrained by time and distance since the researcher studied in the UK, but all the participants worked in Nanning city in China. When asking for the support of the local education department, the officials nominated participants and they claimed the selection was processed through the education department intranet. However, as there was no directing supervision in this selection, the criteria might not be as explicit as desired

Participants and their contexts

Interviewee I, Mrs. Dai, was a 25-year-experience English teacher who had witnessed the changing track policy implementation in her school. She worked at a provincial key middle school, which is marked as school I in this research. She currently teaches an English course in two classes at senior grade.

Interviewee II, Miss Nong was a teacher in charge of a junior class in another key middle school coded as school II. She had been teaching English for five years. She only came into contact with the new education mode because of the short-time of her working experience, but a young age gives her more courage and creativity in working, so she was confident enough to participate in this research.

Interviewee III, Mr. Zuo was also a young English teacher with 3 years' teaching experience. He worked in a regular middle school in Nanning coded as school III. He implied he would leave the job and further his education in next year, since he had met many unsolved challenges during practice. As a result of random selection, this is the only male participant in the first phase interviews.

Interviewee IV, Mrs. Zhang had worked for more than 20 years as an English teacher in the regular middle school IV. She shared her 2 decades working experience prior in a key middle school and later in a regular middle school.

Data collection processes: the interviews were conducted one after another on Skype. In order to communicating freely, all the interviews were processed and recorded in Chinese. There were four stages in each interview: after introduction stage, interviewees were asked to reply questions related to the traditional exam-oriented education mode; following that, they were required to express their perceptions of issues about the quality-oriented education. The fourth part was the focal point in every interview since it probed into the changing of policy implementation. Within these four parts, questions were elicited with extraordinarily detail and insightfulness, so that all the interviewees' opinions would be clarified and prepared for data analysis.

Aiming to guarantee authority and transcribe correctly, the interview processes were all recorded. It is a way to provide an unfiltered record of process and avoid omission of information in discussions, so that the momentary messages can be kept as permanent data (Simpson & Tuson, 1995). When the individual on-line interviews were complete, their words were transcribed and translated from Chinese to English. In order to keep the individuals' original opinions, all the English transcriptions were returned to participants to check the authenticity of interviews results. After that, the data was categorised, evaluated and compared. Four outstanding issues emerged at this stage. The qualitative research method resulted in the in-depth data rather than generalisation due to the small sample. Therefore, the results and issues gathered in the 1st phase can only represent individual data; a quantitative study would be implemented in order to gather relatively objective and general messages.

2. 2. 2. 2 Phase 2

The second phase was designed on the basis of the issues raised from the former interviews and aimed to provide supplements for the qualitative results and find out more suggestions for reforming policy implementation. As an open anonymous questionnaire giving out on the Nanning education department intranet, there was no specific criteria for participants, except the qualification as English teachers in middle schools in Nanning. The researcher was empowered to log on the intranet and collect the first 100 valid responds under monitoring by department officials.

Data collection process: there were 32 questions in the questionnaire covering single item choice questions, multiple questions, and short answer questions. Names of respondents were

coded, and the questions were mainly developed by querying their support for the specific ideas of former interviews, providing reasons for their answers; otherwise, they were to give their own ideas or suggest solutions to problems. The topics revolved around the left of exam-oriented education; the situation of teachers' education; the conduction of quality-oriented education; the different education performances between key schools and regular schools; the connection between teachers' training with their knowledge utilisation and other issues raised before.

The data were collected was counted and analysed in charts. Whilst generalising the research data and addressing some of the challenges in 1st phase results, a section of the issues was still unsolved. It is unrealistic to solve all the problems in education practice through one experimental research, but we can provide as many suggestions as possible. In addition, as all the participants were grassroots teachers they can only represent their own experience, thus, the results have a certain limitation. In order to collect a wider overview of the situation, an interview with the education organiser was needed. That is the reason why a third phase was planned.

2. 2. 2. 3 Phase 3

The Director of Education in Nanning, Mr. Xia, graduated from a normal university 30 years ago. He had been a teacher in a key middle school, promoted as the headmaster after 20 years and since 10 years ago, he has worked in a municipal education department, in charge of monitoring education policies dissemination and achievements. Because of leaving teaching work before the quality-oriented education reform policy was extended, he only has the direct practice experience of the exam-oriented education mode. In addition, he has witnessed the process of teachers' trainings, organised by municipal teacher trainings. Since he was not directly responsible for the training processes, he could report relatively impartially on the situations.

Data collection process: on the basis of the former data, I formed 12 questions in this interview. Skype was still applied as the medium and all the discussions were in Chinese. Mr Xia was asked about the issues around teacher's training, differences between key schools and regular schools, reformation and the college entrance examination etc. All of the questions aimed to gather answers for the data raised in former sections. Similar to the 1st phase, the interview process was recorded and transcribed after the discussion. His answers would be the summary of the majority of teachers' opinions and the data would act as the complement for the whole research method, which provides suggestions, but would not alter the research results.

2. 3 The Ethical considerations in methodology

In social research, ethics refers to pursuing rules that make us operate defensively in the political contexts in which the study is conducted (Pring, 2000). Ethical issues arise at a variety of stages in educational research, and in this research.

2. 3. 1 Reliability and validity

Unavoidable criticisms of empirical research, firstly, are reliability and a validity of the research. This study attempts to make the research procedure as reliable as possible, guided by the suggestions of Simpson and Tuson (1995). The data collection processes, choosing categorisation criteria, and data analysis procedures, are all done in a relatively open, explicit and consistent way. Keeping the sincerity and logical consistency of the teachers' responses on their practice, is a way to show the validity of the research (Cooper & McIntyre, 1996). Some of my initial assumptions about teachers' ideas and their actions on the quality-oriented education practice, were overthrown in the first phase interviews, when reaching the second phase, a small part of my hypotheses was revised, some of them were even amended again in the final interview. After three phases of data collections, the research results are considerable, reliable and valid.

2. 3. 2 Anonymity

Depending of course on the specific purposes of the study, the educational institutions and teachers taking part in the research should be made anonymous. It is an extension of the principle of confidentiality and an assurance that this research has taken actions to ensure the accuracy of its findings (Pring, 2000). On the one hand, it complies with the justice standard, which makes the process transparent and objective, on the other hand, however, Scott (1961) thought without the real-name, the risk of non-response questions would increase, which might "distort research" results. Currently, in order to keep the fair standard, the research chose to continue the anonymity and the only suggestion for addressing the problem is to encourage more teachers to finish all the questions and then return completed questionnaires to the researcher.

2. 3. 3 Bias

Bias is always the danger in this research since the interviews are conducted by human beings whose manner might have effects on the respondents (Selltiz et al., 1962; Bell, 1993). From the answers of participants, apparently, they unavoidably faced the issues of subjectively and bias, thus, the quantitative method which collected 100 replies was a remedy for avoiding bias in this research. It altered and improved a small part of answers of 1st phase. Whilst interviewees were guided by their bias during answering, as the researcher, I was involved in the bias issue in research assumptions, conducting research and data analysis processes as well. Hence, whichever research method I chose, based on phenomenology or ethnography or any other philosophical foundation, my knowledge background, cultural differentiations, social cognition, comprehensive ability and any other personalities, would potentially drive my measurement and verdict when conducting the research. Therefore, I have to admit that I pursue the justice situation in this research but an absolutely fair assessment would be ideal in social study.

In summary, there is no cut-and-dried solution to eliminate all ethical issues. It is very often that the ethical problems are multifaceted so there is no right or wrong method to answer them.

The best counsel, as Gilbert (2001) suggested, is to be constantly ethically aware during the data collection stage, as well as the following analysis and discussion phases. The following chapter outlines the responses to the interviews and questionnaires. The data presented will be seen as an interesting account of understandings on those quality issues in China's education reform programme.

3. QUALITY-ORIENTED EDUCATION: VIEWS FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Common themes which ran through teachers' answers emerged in the 4 interviews in 1st phase of research, as well as some outstanding contrasts. In the 2nd phase these issues deepen and spread. Due to different external causes and internal causes, teachers' perceptions and reform performances were not uniform.

3.1 Findings in the 1st phase interviews

The 1st four interviews are the main data resource in this research. There are 4 parts in each individual interview; each stage is based on the prior one so every part is linked with the other. In the first part, 2 questions were asked in order to imply to the interviewees that the purposes would be related to their teaching modes. When they all claimed to value the exam results, it automatically leads to the discussions on exam-oriented education. In the second part, the researcher asked their opinions on this traditional teaching way and inspired them to recall their obstacles faced in the teaching practice and then successfully guided them to thinking about a new teaching style to replace the old one. Quality-oriented education emerged naturally in the third part. The purpose in this part was investigating the implementation of the teaching modes reformation, as well as hearing the voices from practisers. When receiving diverse even opposite responses, the detection of the implementation of reformation policy, was raised as my ultimate research purpose. The issues related to parents, school entrance examination, schools gap and teacher trainings etc. were discussed step by step.

Firstly, when asking them about their daily teaching routines, I was aiming to check if they paid much attention to exams during their work. As I predicted, "taking exams" occupied an important position in their work. In the 2nd questions which explored teachers' opinion on students' exam scores, three teachers valued their students' scores as their main teaching purposes. The 2nd interviewee claimed she "never judge students by their academic score". Further, all of these teachers thought their students' scores should depend on both teachers' teaching methods and students' efforts.

In the second stage, all the interviewees agreed that they had utilised the exam-oriented education mode in their teaching process, a teacher thought this mode was "reasonable" (interview IV). From this uniformity, it was made clear that the exam-oriented education mode has been a tradition in Chinese middle school teaching, so that a great effort was required to fulfil reformation. Next, the 4th question checked their opinions on the exam-oriented education.

In the results, all of them had been equipped with the basic knowledge of the concept. Both the teachers in key schools and those in regular schools, held opposite opinions on this traditional mode. In other words, between key-school teachers, interviewee I expressed her support for the traditional education mode, whilst the interviewee II held the opposite opinion. Where interviewee III was against exam-oriented education, another regular school teacher supported it. Thus, whether both pros and cons were prevalent in each school would be rethought and analysed by questionnaires. In the 5th question, I asked these interviewees to present their own difficulties, which had been met in the exam-oriented teaching practice, each of them considered the question from a different perspective. The 1st interviewee thought that the middle school students had little chance to use English because of the shortage of language environment. From the viewpoint of students, the 2nd interviewee responded that the old-fashioned teaching mode is boring. This viewpoint was similar to those in the 3rd interview, who thought teachers were teaching by rote under the old mode. Only the 4th teacher was confused to think out a specific difficulty, though he admitted that the problems exist. Facing these difficulties, all of the teachers tried to make some changes such as, designing games (interview I & II), but none of them successfully replaced the old teaching mode with a new one. In order to face the issues raised in this stage, I introduced them to a “substitution” of the exam-oriented education, the quality-oriented education, to suggest it as a solution to some of the puzzles and at the same time find out why the new teaching mode has not been popularised yet.

The 6th questions tested their understanding of the reform policy. Three teachers talked of the reformation except for the fourth one who knew very little about it. She is a relatively old teacher and comes from a regular school thus she might had less chance to contact with the new policy. When asked about their own knowledge about the new education mode, all the teachers showed different degrees of understanding, descriptions include “cultivating students abilities” (interview I); “Advocating the overall development of students” (interview II); “Enhancing students’ overall qualities” (interview III); “Cultivating talents with the all-rounded abilities” (interview IV) and so on, which are in a basic agreement. The 7th question was asking if the interviewees can show their experience of utilising the new education mode. The 4th teacher was not suitable for these questions since she had taught the graduating classes in which the teaching innovation was forbidden. all the others have diversified teaching aid and teaching ways, such as “making English posters by students” (interview I); totally reform the teaching plan (interview II); “organising English songs competition” (interview IV). Next, in the 8th questions I asked them to report problems and solutions in practice so that their voice could be heard. During the practice in school IV, the quality-oriented education has been stopped because of the college entrance examination, which measures students by scores in one exam. Teachers in this school had no solution but went back to the exam-oriented mode, which shows the conflict between the academic requirements with the innovation. The other 2 key schools teachers were facing similar difficulties from their students. The first teacher thought out “individual counselling” (interview I) as a solution, whereas the second one had changed her

teaching plans again and again. Their solutions might be useful somehow but are not the most effective ways to address the problems.

In the Policy Implement stage, the 9th questions aimed to detect the implementation of reform policy at the basic level. Apart from the 4th interviewee, all the other teachers had received the teaching skills at different levels, thus the ones who learnt from the trainings have more relative overall and objective understanding of the reform policy, than the one who didn't have contact with the training. It can be seen in these questions that the policy was carried out more successfully in key schools than regular schools, since the involvement of policy process was significantly different. In contrast to the 9th question, which discussed the external condition of the reform, the 10th question checked the internal causes of the practisers on policy implementation. Subjectively, all the policy practisers were trying to learn from others' experiences and collect advice from older teachers. Besides collecting the opinions of teachers, I also tried to collect the thoughts of parents. Because of the limited time, only second-hand data from these four teachers was gathered. To some extent, this can only report parts of parents' opinions, so the reliability of answers should be questioned. In 11th question, these teachers reflected that the majority of parents valued high exam scores as more important than improvement of abilities of their children. Between the high pressure of exams and the requirements of the reformation, the practisers should think of a compromise, which was the purpose of the 12th question: "is there a way can balance the quality-oriented education with high score in tests?" All of these interviewees were on their way to find out alternatives or remedies, but had not built a balanced situation yet. Finally 13th question collected teachers' suggestions on both the reformation and their colleagues. All the interviewees presented similar ideas: the reformation should begin as early as possible and the more practices the better; the practisers should communicate and keep learning. Additionally, they should be given more skill training courses.

From the results of all the individual interviews, there were several issues which arose that make me rethink the implementation of the education mode reformation, and to some extent, overturn my opinions relative to this policy: 1) there are gaps between key schools and regular schools in policy implementation. The different degrees of participation, further, make the gaps increasingly wide. 2) Within a certain school, the old teachers received fewer opportunities for skills trainings than younger teachers. This maybe unfair to old teachers, even makes them feel being left out. At the same time, the students of old teachers will also be influenced. Thus, a gap will be created within the school. 3) In some schools, the quality-oriented education mode is forbidden in graduating classes because of the pressure of college entrance examination. It reminds me to consider whether should we change either the traditional school entrance examination, or improve quality-oriented education? Or if there is a compromise by which a "win-win" situation can be built between exams and the quality-oriented education mode. 4) Feedbacks from students and their parents are not as optimistic as expected. Further, each student has his/her own intelligence and reception level. It cannot be ensured that the new style

is suitable for every personality. Thus, teachers should never stop improving their teaching plans and make consideration as comprehensive as possible, which is really a big challenge to them. Furthermore, the feedback from parents cannot be ignored. As the results in interviews shows, parents might not understand and support the reform since the new education style cannot present an immediately academic improvement to them.

3. 2 Findings in the 2nd phase questionnaires

The questionnaire is separated into four main parts, which is similar to the former interview: the general information from participants, followed by their answers about the exam-oriented education, quality-oriented education and the policy which reforms the education mode from exam-centred to student-centred. The purposes are apparent: collecting the data from 100 English teachers who come from several middle schools of Nanning city; analysing and summarising the outcomes in order to evidence and supporting the findings in interviews. By these questionnaires, we can see if the results of interviews are valid and common. If the questionnaire data is unexpected, further experiment would be applied.

The questionnaire was announced and collected on the internet. Any middle school English teachers in Nanning can feel free to reply anonymously. Among these teachers, 60% of them have been working more than 10 years. Since the reformation has been implemented some teachers have been working for more than a decade and have witnessed the situation across ten years, making their results more effective than those of young teachers. Among these 100 teachers, approximately 60% are working in junior middle school, whilst others are in senior middle schools. In contrast to the unbalanced spread of grades, the rates of participants who come from key schools and regular schools are nearly the same. In general, the spread of participants was wide and somewhat balanced.

Pie Chart A

(3. Which option is the most important part in your teaching?)

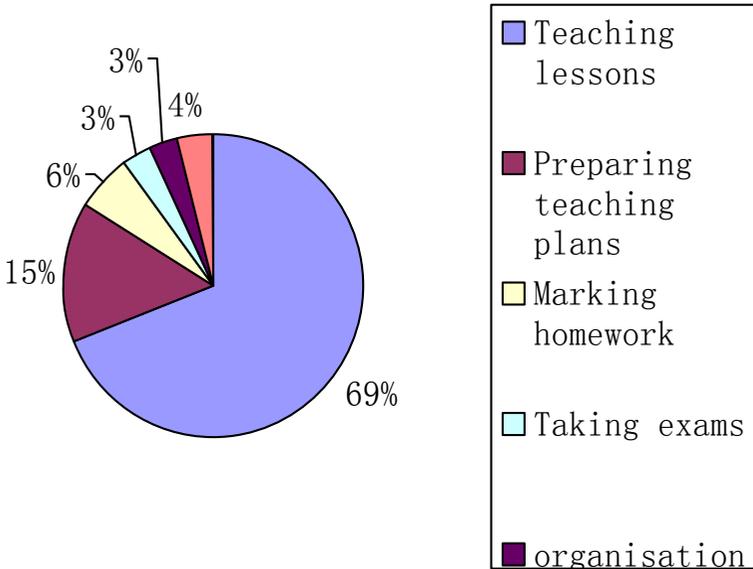


Chart B

Participants (100)	Strongly agree	agree	neutral/ don't know	disagree	strongly disagree
4. students' exam results = your teaching aim?	4	20	62	14	0
5. implementing the exam-oriented education?	7	43	31	19	0
6. support the exam-oriented education mode?	0	22	49	29	0
8. replacing the old mode with a new one?	/	76	/	24	/

Showing as the pie chart A and chart B, without information on the topic before, nearly a quarter of teachers agreed that they valued students' exam scores as their working aim. Even although only 9% of them were concerned by marking homework and taking exams into their work, they were already attaching importance to exams. As expected, half of them agreed that they have applied an exam-oriented education mode in teaching. By this stage, the answers conformed to the results of my former interviews. In following, it is strange that nearly half of teachers held a neutral opinion on exam-centred education, whilst 76 teachers have thought about using a new teaching mode to replace the old one. When asking how they can address the challenges in practice, they added more new solutions, besides those from the interviews. To sum up, there are many other solutions, most of which are within the field of quality-oriented methods. Thus, we can summarise that the majority of middle school teachers are progressively

utilising the quality-oriented approaches to address challenges in exam-oriented education practice.

Chart C

Participants (100)	strongly agree	agree	neutral/ don't know	disagree	strongly disagree
9. have known the reform policy?	/	95	/	5	/
10.support the reform policy?	27	68	5	0	0
12.apply the reform policy into teaching?	/	78	5	17	/
15.avoid reform in graduating classes?	/	48	10	42	/
16.support the 15th. Question?	8	23	33	28	8

In the third stage, there are mainly open-ended questions, prior to which, presented as the data in chart C, 95% of teachers knew the quality-oriented education reformation policy and among all of them, there was no opponent to this policy, which is really encouraging. All the participants expressed their understanding of the quality-oriented education, besides the ideas which are similar to those in interviews, their knowledge about this mode include: offering encourage or appreciate education; cultivating students' adaptation to social environments and their diversified life; advocating patriotic education since it is a way to learn from history and one teacher suggested that the quality-oriented education is not only educate knowledge and teach the study methods, moreover, lead students utilising the knowledge and skills into practice, which is the opinion that I approve most.

Nearly 80% of participants have experienced this new education mode and most of them listed examples about how they utilised it. For instance, raising and solving problems for all by students and designing "the scenario communication method" (which sets simulated situations in order to make students master knowledge during experience). At the same time, the teachers who never tried to use this mode also provided their reasons: exam scores of students are still currently the measure of their academic performance and it is extremely difficult to change this tradition; college entrance examination is the biggest obstacle in front of quality-oriented education, the teachers did not take a risk with students' future by giving up reformation. Due to these factors, concerning the list in the chart C, there were 48% of schools that avoided quality-oriented education in graduating classes and around 30% teachers supported this plan.

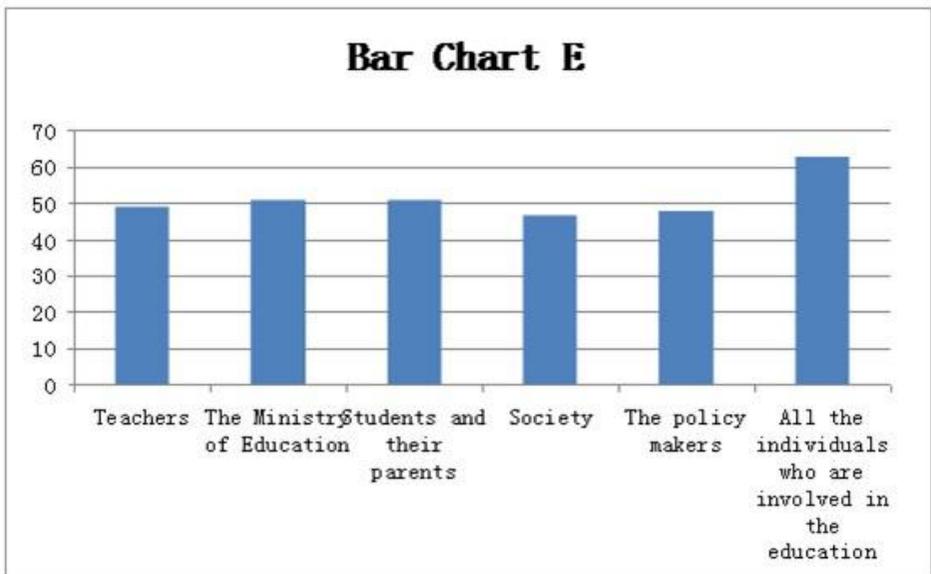
Similarly, two open-ended questions "what difficulties have you met" and "how did you solve the problems" were thrown to those teachers who had new teaching mode experience. The majority of them have faced the challenges from society, schools, the Ministry of Education, their colleagues, students and their parents, more important, they have to ensure their students'

performance in college entrance examination. The new mode which cannot cater for the challenges makes their practice difficult.

Chart D

Participants (100)	strongly agree	agree	neutral/ don't know	disagree	strongly disagree
19. receive trainings about reform policy?	/	66	/	34	/
20. is it helpful if you have been trained?	44	20	/	2	/
22. your teaching skills are accessible to your students?	/	87	11	2	/
24. a balance between the quality education and score?	/	56	26	18	/
26. a gap between key & regular schools in this reform?	/	74	4	22	/
29. old teachers have less training chance than young?	21	37	19	19	4
30. the quality-oriented education can meet the CEE?	/	52	9	39	/

(25. If there is a way can balance the quality-oriented education with high exam score, who should be responsible for it?)



The final part discusses the implementation of the reform policy, some parts of the answers were revealed in chart D and bar chart E. Among the answers, 66% of participants had training experience before and only 2 of them thought that the training was not useful. However, when

answering what specific skills they conduct in practice, their descriptions are blurred, indistinct and superficial. Therefore, the conducting condition of teaching skills in training is still far from being satisfactory. This outcome is similar to those from interviews.

The training receivers are mainly those who were working a relatively short-time, on this point, nearly 60 teachers agreed that the old teachers should devolve the training opportunities to young. Teachers with long teaching experience are denied the right to receive training; what's more, students with different teachers will receive different education and produce different results. The disparity among students will therefore be larger.

Similar to teachers in interviews, the questionnaires witness 74% of teachers who agree that the involvements of reform policy are different between key schools and regular schools. Whist half of participants consider the regular schools to have a poorer implementation of this policy, 23% of them chose the key schools. Answering the reasons for distinction, three kinds of viewpoints are clear: 1) some teachers insisted that the key schools lay their stress on the enrolment rate; by keeping a good performance in exams they would not make society's expectations negative. Hence, the key schools have a poor conduct of this reform policy; 2) others who chose the regular schools considered that the lack of teachers, old teaching concepts, unreasonable classroom setting, formalising teaching process, weakness of evaluation system and poor knowledge reserve of students, were reasons for poor implementation in regular schools; 3) participants who thought the performances of these two kinds of schools are about the same because all the schools face the pressure of reform and exams. And we cannot measure a school by old means any more, hence, in the new education mode there is no so-called "key schools" or "regular schools", they are incomparable.

At last, these participants were optimistic that quality-oriented education can be improved until it meets the requirements from a higher education institution. It endeavours mainly change the school entrance examination to meet this education mode (71 participants); improve both the college entrance examination and the quality-oriented education mode (24 participants). These participants agree that all the individuals who are involved in education (63 supporters), the Ministry of Education (51 teachers), students and their parents (51 participants), teachers, the policy makers and society, should be responsible for achieving goals. In the final questions, participants offer suggestions to other teachers and the reformation processes.

To sum up, there are still many challenges in English teaching in middle schools such as the prolonged and stubborn exam-oriented education; the insufficiency of language environment; the defective implement of policy; the great pressure from college entrance examination and so on. The majority of teachers has been touched by and experienced the new education mode, though the reformation is conducted differently from one to another. Generally speaking, the questionnaires disabuse the interviews of the involvement issue; support the opinion about skills training opportunities of old / young teachers; and leave further discussion on how to improve the training contents and whether the graduating classes should avoid the reformation.

Therefore, the hope was placed on a further consultation with a local education organiser, Mr. Xia.

3. 3 Summary of the 3rd phase interview

Mr. Xia concluded with his viewpoints about the traditional exam-oriented educations, the new quality-oriented education and the policies which reform the education mode. In some ways, the advice is still subjective, thus should be treated dialectically.

On the whole, the traditional exam-oriented education mode has gradually become the old and been cleared away from the middle school English curriculum in Nanning. The municipal government has paid attention to the implementation of reformation policy and the education organisers and practisers have been trained on the national documents about this reformation.

Concerning the gap between key schools and regular schools, Mr Xia admitted the “superiority” of key schools in quality-oriented education reform, since they are the model schools for others. Subjectively, the education department in every city invests a large proportion of funds for key schools development, on teaching aids, campus facilities, teaching staffs or academic subsidies. Objectively speaking, these model schools attract more “first-class” teachers and students, which make the reform outcomes significantly. For these reasons, the key schools are the focal point of the reform and more training opportunities are given to their teaching staff. The city does not aim to widen the gap, but to set a demonstration to all the schools when the public training funds are limited. Within a certain school, the gap between teachers with extensive teaching experience and those with less experience is attributable to similar reasons. Teacher trainings is only one part of public educational expenses, thus cannot satisfy all the training requirements.

In terms of forbidding reformation in graduating classes, Mr Xia does not support it, but has to hedge the risks. The College Entrance Examination has for a long time had the national educational selection system, which has not been distorted or neglected by any city, including Nanning. It is really an awkward situation between the quality-oriented education reformation and the CEE. Mr Xia is on the side of “improving both quality-oriented education reform and the CEE at the same time”. In the long run, these two education systems do not conflict with one another but, compromise to develop and reduce the innovation as much as possible in graduating classes, undertaking responsibility for students, their parents, teachers and the whole society.

It is more “down-to-earth” working than “nail-biting”. At the last, Mr Xia advised that improving the quality and opportunities of teachers’ skills trainings is more important than “daydreaming”. In Nanning municipal education department, more training funds have already been put in place. Teachers are not only receiving more courses on quality-oriented education methods, more chances of official learning in other provinces, even studying abroad are provided.

4. CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

4. 1 Interpretation of the research results

To sum up, the research questions have been answered successfully. Those teachers who participated in the study supported the changing track policy, whether they welcomed it actively or received it with different reasons. They met plenty of difficulties during the educating process, which took place between schools, inner schools, between innovation and tradition, between teachings and learning. Teachers expressed different opinions on the same issue. In order to address various obstacles, these English teachers have applied their own strategies to solve the challenge.

4. 1. 1 Inter-school difference

The majority of participants expressed their support of quality-oriented education but we cannot ignore that the policy implementation was conducted differently in many ways. Both the four interviewees and 100 participants of the questionnaire came from key middle schools and regular middle schools randomly. Though following the same changing tracks reform policy, their answers showed that conduction were diverse and the teaching outcomes were varied as well. All the interviewees support the quality-oriented education reformation. From feedbacks of this research, the reasons for better performance in key middle schools include: 1) teachers are more competitive and have better capacity of work than those in regular schools, so they can understand policy more comprehensively and conduct the reformation more successful in their practice; 2) The average quality of students in key middle schools is higher than those who failed in the beginning. Standing on a higher starting line, students can adapt to the new education mode more easily; 3) The key middle schools draw more attention from the Ministry of Education and relevant departments in all levels, so they have better conditions for conducting the innovation while pursuing high scores. With all of these reasons, English teachers initiatively and automatically support the implementation of quality-oriented education. To the contrary, those who work in regular schools reflected more pressures from these three fields listed above, thus faced more difficulties and held relatively negative opinions on reformation. It seems that their opinions on following the new mode are more likely a “must” rather than voluntary.

It is a pity in the research that nearly all the participants acquiesced and followed “key/regular school” classification no matter how unequal it is. With only a very few exceptions, I support the idea that only by getting rid of this classification can the quality-oriented education be implemented comprehensively and all the teachers solve problems together. It has been a global concern that education should be equal (Gu & Meng, 2001), which implies students not only have equal opportunity to access education, but should receive education which is suitable for his/her development at the same time (Zhong, et al., 2000; You, 2007). Therefore, breaking the rule of education equality, which the classification of schools does, is apparently disturbing the quality-oriented education conduction. I take the side of abolishing the key/regular schools’

classification as a solution to deviant performance in reform implementation. In this way, quality-oriented education will not only act as the reform goal of all the teachers, but also be the evaluation standard used by relevant administrative departments when assessing the educational performance in any certain school (You, 2007).

4. 1. 2 Intra-school differences

In addition, within a certain school, the satisfaction on this new mode is different between old teachers and young teachers. Because of different teachers' education, their knowledge and, understanding, of the quality-oriented education are diverse, as are the students' learning outcomes. From the data in this research, it can be seen that young teachers have more opportunity for teaching skills training than old teachers, regardless of whether they support this behaviour or not. Some participants agree with this measure since the young teachers are deemed to be active and promising. Some follow this action because they understand that the limited training funds and opportunities cannot guarantee enough training opportunities for everyone. When reviewing the prior literature by Li (1997), we can see the significance of training teachers to revive education. Mr Xia and the Director of Education in Nanning also stated that more funds would be invested in order to support as many opportunities as possible for teachers in different age groups. However, without the data and outcomes, the improvement of the situation of teachers' education cannot be guaranteed.

In order to reach the goals in this research, ways to satisfy teachers' of the necessity of quality-oriented education is urgent. There are more approaches which can be applied to popularise quality-oriented education among all the English teachers. As suggested by some participants, the ones who received training can purport their knowledge by setting demonstration classes, exchanging teaching plans and promoting cooperative teaching experience. Under these circumstances, spreading the new education concept and knowledge and balancing every teacher's understanding will become the obligation of each teacher. It is better to communicate actively rather than learn passively. In addition, the initiatives' disseminating methods are meaningful to the teachers who miss the training opportunities, helping to spread the new mode experiences in each school. Most importantly, it is a channel to ensure the overall teaching quality. As reviewed before, the traditional exam-oriented education was the mainstream education mode in China for decades, so the old idea took strong root in old teachers' experiences and the reform was faltering without active participation. In the light of the suggestions from participants in this research, every student can have the same chance to get rid of exam-oriented education, thereby reducing the difficulties of teachers. Consequently, the research expresses that if the teachers' education can be changed, there will be more teaching staff supporting the reformation policy and meeting less challenges in practice.

4. 1. 3 New mode and old selection system

When facing the challenges in applying new education mode, teachers think that improving both the new mode and old college entrance examination system is a compromise which has not yet been realised but is achievable in the future. In the past years, the retention or abolition

of the college entrance examination system has triggered a fierce controversy in China. Though the focus does vary from time to time, the result of discussion has always remained the same: making the selection system innovative all the time (Zheng, 2008). In this research, many graduating classes faced the pressure of the college entrance examination, so graduating class teachers put the quality-oriented education reform as secondary (Pang, 2004), thereby avoiding conflicts between the new education concept and old college selection system. In the data from questionnaires in this research, nearly half of participants purported the abolition of the reform in graduating classes, which provides an exact literature review. In the final parts of both the interviews and questionnaires, participants expressed their hopes that policies can be set in motion to alter the current situation. The majority of English teachers in this research stand by reforming the old college entrance examination, which means the update of the students' selection system in China, whilst conducting the quality education reform process. In any nation, reforming the education system will be a difficult process and should connect different parts together rather than leaving any part out on a limb. In the course of quality-oriented education reformation, the reform of the college entrance examination should also be put on the agenda. However, this issue needs further investigation, which is beyond the consideration of this study.

4. 1. 4 Teaching and learning

One more challenge in reform implementation is: what teachers teach cannot be absorbed by students and without the support of students' parents, which makes reformation hesitant. In terms of students, they may be uncooperative or unable to follow the new education mode (Zhang, 2010), as reviewed above. Another cause is that the teaching skills teachers have learnt from training are not accessible for students. It reflects that the teachers' training and reformation implementation sometimes are disjointed. Modulations should be made by Ministry of Education and relevant departments to teachers' education, only when the contents of teachers' trainings are more practical, understandable and easier to comprehend by students, the reform can be implemented as expected. During the research process, the participants expressed their quality-oriented teaching methods as teaching through lively activities. Diversification of the teaching methods is the main change they made. However, they presented examples which can only improve students interests in learning English, rather than teaching them solid knowledge foundations. In addition, a most important character of quality-oriented education, "teaching students in accordance of their aptitude", was not noted in my participants' answers. Giving backing to the reformation policy should not be a lip-service but also a practical operation. In terms of students' parents, it is reasonable that they do not support the reformation since they do not want to take any chances on their children; a few parents feel their children are like "experimental articles" in the reformation. Teachers admitted these opinions are challenge during practice, but few of them tried to find out solutions.

To sum up all of these interpretations of the research findings, the majority of middle school English teachers in Nanning held positive opinions of the quality-oriented education reform,

though their specific implementation situations varied, making their reform processes different one another. The challenge in front of the reformation policy included cultural erosion, students' incompatibility and traditional block and so on. In real study, I did not meet any reflection about the culture issues. Maybe the reasons for this is that all the research circumstances were in the same city, have fewer conflicts with each other and as a relatively less developed city, Nanning faced less exotic culture shocks. At present, the challenges of implementing the quality-oriented education reform are from key/regular school classification, different training chances of young/old teachers, conflict between innovation and the traditional selection system and the inconformity between teaching and learning. Teachers have utilized several solutions as listed above, however, the support from China's Ministry of Education and relevant departments at all levels, are obligatory. All in all, the research findings answer the research questions, and further the relative literature. The specific implementation of reform policy has not progressed as smoothly as policymakers' wished; however, the policy performers have remedies to address the challenges.

4. 2 Evaluation of the research process

Besides the ethical justifications of the research process itself, in the Methodology part, there are two more limitations of evaluating the whole research critically. a) The selection of research methods. b) The feature of participants. For the former one, it arouses doubts of readers as to why I chose the interviews first and then the questionnaire, which happens inversely to common educational research. I chose the 4 interviewees randomly but no guarantees can be provided as to whether they represent the common English teachers in this city. Due to this, the persuasion of my research will be reduced. As the interview was the key part of the whole study, when the data did not correspond to reality, the outcomes of this research became "metamorphism". In addition, I am in the UK while the data was collected in Nanning, China. I did not witness the process, thus, some facts might have been skimmed over, which also affects the results of my research. For the latter issue, what I worry about is that English as the teachers' main subject cannot be differentiated. Readers might assume that if the participants are teachers of Chinese, Mathematics, Sports, or any other courses suitable for joining the research. However, I insist that the English teacher cannot be displaced by others, since they can understand the whole content of my paper due to their language capacity. The English teachers are more familiar to foreign cultures so that they are more lively and creatively in practice. Thereby, following the same document in teaching, the English teachers ought to perform better in reformation than others. Therefore, it is useful to choose English teachers as research samples.

Finishing analysing the limitations in this research, one more endeavour can be created. The contact between Literature Review and Methodology is not closely involved. Though I designed the questions in interviews and questionnaires on the basis of the literature, answers of participants deviated from the literature in some areas. If I can redress and make more detailed inquiry the research outcomes might be more confirming to the Literature Review.

4. 3 Conclusion and Looking Forward

China's government has pursued a move to the mainstream education mode, away from a teacher/exam-centred teaching style, which transmits knowledge by rote-teaching/learning, to a new student/quality-centred teaching education mode. This educates students to develop morally, intellectually, physically and aesthetically and meanwhile decreases the significance of exams (Zheng, 2008). After this research, the data showed that the majority of participants supported the reform policy and held an optimistic outlook for the reformation implementation. They met several kinds of difficulties, with the support from the education department, these teachers developed cooperative teaching methods and learned from each others' experience. They diversified the teaching approaches in order to draw students' interests; they tried to find out compromises between innovation and tradition. No matter how much contribution they made to the reform policy, the research questions in this study have been answered successful. This research smoothly brings one more example for the development of quality-oriented education reform.

In future practice, in order to increasingly boost the development of quality-oriented education, suggestions can be provided are: a) teachers education, b) international policy-borrowing and experience-learning, c) talent selection system and d) the official investment. Firstly, as the current teachers training opportunities are still limited, besides the suggestions from Mr Xia and my study, China's education system can proceed from improving the selection requirements of teachers. If the average working capacity of teachers was upgraded, teachers might master the policy more easily and impart the English curriculum more smoothly. If that is the case, teachers might remove barriers in practice even without any skills training. Secondly, international academic exchange and cooperation projects are increasingly significant. What can be learnt from these activities, besides the knowledge itself, are the advanced western academic perceptions, the experience of a great range of teaching methods, the educational policies, which stimulate thinking and creating and even the lessons, learn to deal with problems. With attention to cultural erosion, which has already emerged in the relevant literature, the Ministry of Education and other educational departments and institutions, should provide international-learning opportunities both for education practisers and receivers. Thirdly, to be honest, it is unequal to measure an individual only by a degree in university. Youngsters have their own strengths and weaknesses respectively in different areas. On the basis of this concept, the quality-oriented education has centred on Confucius' idea of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude, but has not yet achieved this comprehensively. There are more ways to be a fully developed individual than simply entering colleges. Only when the citizens polish up their old exam-oriented academic conception, can the predominance of the college entrance examination system be weakened. Sequentially, quality-oriented education can be accomplished overall. Finally, more corresponding countermeasures and methods should be added to settle education funds and raise the family ability to bear educational consumption. By ensuring the equal educational opportunity among children, at a national scale, a rational

criterion for education should be built up, funds should be got in various ways and subsidy laws should be developed. There are still many approaches helpful to guarantee the conduction of quality-oriented education in China. The quality-oriented education reform is continuing to develop with a long way ahead. Fortunately, our teachers are optimistic and active in practice, which is exactly the original intention of this experimental research.

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