

Improving English as a Second Language (ESL) Pedagogy in One University in Ontario

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, theoretical pedagogical approaches and practical pedagogical approaches are investigated by drawing on English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers' pedagogical principles and practices, and ESL Chinese students' second language acquisition and learning needs as they related to improving ESL pedagogy in one university ELP in Ontario. Three experienced ESL teachers were inquired by interviews and 30 ESL Chinese students were surveyed by questionnaires. Based on the mix-method exploratory research design, communicative, task-based, and content-based language teaching approaches are identified and discussed in the light of the interview and questionnaire data.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

Globalization has opened new avenues and increased the opportunity for many international students to study in Ontario. From 2004 to 2010, Ontario attracted an increasing number of international students to study. In 2010, for example, 96,157 international students came to study in Canada, with 39,154 students going to study in Ontario (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Approximately 69% of the international students (66,381) chose to go to university. In recent years, China has been the top source country for international students coming to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). It is important to investigate what kind of experiences these students have when they study in Ontario universities.

To address this question, the research reported in this document focused on the pedagogical approaches used with Chinese students in an English language program in one university in Ontario. Although these Chinese students have undergone a certain period of English language training in China, it is still difficult for them to adapt to a different cultural environment. Thus, university English language programs are designed to help English as a Second Language (ESL) students develop language proficiency, learning strategies, and study skills for succeeding in future university courses. In these programs, teachers play a crucial role because their pedagogy can influence student learning. Therefore, this research was undertaken to bridge the gap between teaching theories and practices so as to make ESL teaching most effective.

### **Problem Statement**

For ESL students, an effective pedagogy is vital to improve their language proficiency. To achieve this goal, scholars have done studies across the world. For

example, Andon and Eckerth (2009) did research in London to elaborate on the origin of task-based language comprehension. Liu and Jiang (2009) applied a corpus-based lexicogrammatical approach to grammar instruction in southeast China and Hong Kong for ESL and EFL students. However, most studies that have been conducted in the area of second language pedagogies have focused primarily on one particular approach or language course.

In the area of ESL teaching, the quantity and quality of English language acquisition is used as an important measure to judge the effectiveness of different pedagogies. The pedagogy used impacts students' achievement and attitude. Unfortunately, most studies, to date, lack assessments to judge the effectiveness of the various pedagogical approaches.

There is no perfect pedagogy for all international students, but there is best practice in English language teaching for international students that will help them succeed academically in an English language program in Canada. Educators usually pursue research focusing on either one approach in a number of language courses, or they focus on a variety of approaches in a specific language course but often fail to use assessment of various approaches in language teaching to validate their results. This study will enhance the current understanding between theories and practices of ESL pedagogies so as to help find the most effective practical approaches for international students in a specific intensive English language program in one university in Ontario.

### **Study Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of the study was to examine the pedagogy of ESL teachers in one university in Ontario. The focus was on approaches that best meet Chinese students'

needs when entering into a university English language program. If specific ESL approaches help improve Chinese students' English language skills, this document can popularize that particular pedagogy so that national and international programs can benefit from this research.

The study examined the pedagogy of ESL teachers in one university in Ontario. It looked at practical approaches to teaching the English language, and gathered students' perceptions of these approaches. Interviews were conducted with 3 teachers to determine the specific theoretical approaches they believe are most effective in practice. As well, students filled out questionnaires to assess the effectiveness of the teachers' teaching methods. These methods provided data to answer the following questions:

1. What pedagogical approaches do ESL teachers perceive to be most effective in practice?
2. What pedagogical approaches do ESL students perceive to be most effective in practice?

### **The University English Language Program**

The English Language Program (ELP) explored here, established in 1982, is a 14-week one-semester intensive program in which students improve their grammar skills, reading and writing skills, and listening and speaking skills. The program provides English language instruction to students who use English as a subsequent or foreign language, and offers six levels of study ranging from Level 0 (preparatory) to Level 5 (advanced). The duration of instruction at each level is 3 months for one semester.

The ELP is designed for teenagers and adults who want to improve their language proficiency in order to advance their studies for further education in Canada. Before

entering into the program, students are tested for their degree of English proficiency in order for them to be placed appropriately. Once students have been set in a classroom, they should have five courses based on the three English language skills of grammar, reading and writing, and listening and speaking. The instruction of each class lasts 50 minutes. Students have quizzes, one midterm examination, and one final examination in every semester. If students do not attain the advanced level in one semester, they can choose to continue their studies or they can choose to pass IELTS or TOEFL tests to demonstrate English language proficiency. If students receive A for every course in one semester, they can advance to a higher level. If not, they stay in their original level. The ELP also provides volunteer jobs, entertainment, and outside conversation partners for students to improve their English language skills by integrating them into Canadian culture.

The ELP explored in this study is similar to other university English language programs. The goal of most students in the program is for future studies; therefore, the main goal of this study is to find the most suitable pedagogical approaches for those Chinese students who plan to pursue a university education in Canada.

### **Rationale and Importance of the Study**

Although researchers have done studies to examine the effectiveness of ESL pedagogy, most studies have been American. This study is expected to help bridge the gap between theories and practices of ESL pedagogy and to produce valuable and practical suggestions for those students who intend to pursue a university education in Canada. It is hoped that the study will help participating teachers in this study and all

others who teach ESL to put into practice the optimal theoretical approaches to improve Chinese students' English language proficiency.

As an English language teacher in China and an international student in an education department, I am interested in exploring the appropriate pedagogical approaches for Chinese students in Canada. Although researchers have done studies on certain types of pedagogical approaches, many international students still find themselves at a significant disadvantage in an academic context (Nakaprasit, 2010), including Chinese students. Thus, there is need for more studies in the area.

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

The scope of the study was restricted to one small university English language program. Results can only be generalized to other ELP with similar demographics. Additionally, the study ignored other variables that can influence student language improvement, such as learning strategies and specific social environments. Despite these limitations, it is expected that this study provides useful information for ESL teachers in Canada and in other language programs in other countries.

There are four underlying assumptions: 1. All participants answered the questions honestly. 2. Other aspects including learning strategies and specific social environments had little influence on the improvement of students' English skills. 3. All participants followed the instruction to ensure consistency. 4. All participants understood the instructions and cooperated throughout the data collection phase.

### **Overview of the Document**

Chapter One describes the background of the problem about international educational trends in Ontario and it reviews problems of ESL pedagogies. Next, it

outlines the purpose of the study, which is to examine the pedagogy of ESL teachers in one Ontario university, and it lists empirical questions to be answered with data from interviews and questionnaires. The chapter also explains the rationale, stating why these issues should be investigated, and it notes limitations and assumptions of the study.

Chapter Two reviews literature related to theoretical pedagogic approaches, including the grammar-transition approach, the direct method approach, and the audio-lingual method approach, highlighting (a) the communicative language teaching approach, (b) the task-based language teaching approach, and (c) the content-based language teaching approach. The literature review demonstrates ESL pedagogical theories and presents results of contemporary studies relevant to the three specific ESL communicative teaching approaches. Finally, the chapter explains theories of second language acquisition and cognitive academic language proficiency, as well as instructional strategies, and the motivation for ESL learning to support three communicative approaches.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used to collect the data. A mixed exploratory methodology was used in the study. As well, the chapter describes the selection of the site and participants. For the data collection, the chapter presents the pilot study first, and then describes individual interviews and student questionnaires. The chapter also establishes the data analysis strategies, some limitations of the study, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presents findings from ESL teachers and ESL students. The data from ESL teachers were collected from three independent interviews. The data from ESL students were collected from 30 questionnaires. Background data show demographic

information of ESL teachers and ESL students. Interview data are reported through the themes of teachers' practices towards ESL pedagogy. Questionnaire data are reported through the trends of students' attitudes towards ESL pedagogy.

Chapter Five contains three sections: summary of the study, discussion, and recommendation. In the first section, the chapter summarizes what the researcher did in the study from the methodology, qualitative results, and quantitative results. In the second section, the chapter identifies the contributions of the study. In the last section, the chapter suggests important pedagogical implications for researchers to do research on ESL pedagogy and for ESL teachers to do instruction on ESL Chinese students.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1940s, the study of language pedagogical approaches has assumed a central role within applied linguistics (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In the last 10 years, there has been an increasing attempt by ESL teachers and researchers to apply theoretical language pedagogical approaches in classrooms. Two cases in point are Zhang's (2004) research on the content-based language teaching approach in a large mid-Western U.S. university and Song's (2006) research on the task-based language teaching approach in the ESL at Kingsborough in the United States.

This literature review will begin with the background of the research that emphasizes English for academic purposes (EAP). Second, it will review recent pedagogical approaches including the grammar-translation approach, the direct method approach, and the audio-lingual method approach. Third, as communicative approaches have gained prominence in theory and practice, the review will focus on theoretical pedagogical approaches in second language teaching, with special emphasis given to (a) the communicative language teaching approach, (b) the task-based language teaching approach, and (c) the content-based language teaching approach. The chapter will review recent research on the three communicative pedagogical approaches, and it will explore concepts of second language acquisition (SLA), cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), the instructional strategies, and the motivation for ESL learning to support these three communicative pedagogical approaches. The chapter will conclude with arguments for using these three communicative pedagogical approaches for ESL students in ELP.

### **English for Academic Purposes (EAP)**

Each ESL student has his or her own purposes for studying English, ranging from occupational to academic, and every pedagogical approach has its own specific participants and requirements. ESL students with academic purposes may need different pedagogical approaches than students with occupational purposes. As Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) state, “The methodologies and approaches valid in any other area of ESL are not necessarily the most appropriate for EAP” (p. 177). In ELP, ESL instruction tends to be designed to improve English for academic purposes because a growing number of ESL students enter into the program for future education. As Hyland (2006) states, “A major force in English language teaching and research around the world...EAP is now situated at the front line of both theory development and innovative practice in teaching English as a second language” (p. 1). This indicates that English for academic purposes has become increasingly important.

Kasper (1998) identifies two strategies of EAP instruction in university programs, namely, interdisciplinary collaboration and disciplinary-specific ESL courses. Interdisciplinary collaboration requires ESL teachers to incorporate academic courses into ESL language courses. Because students require having the basic knowledge of academic subjects, academic knowledge is the major course content, with English language skill as the accompanying courses. In the instruction, ESL teachers need fluent English language skills as well as abundant academic subject knowledge. However, it is difficult to hire this type of ESL teacher or to provide enough courses for most ESL students to achieve the requirements. Therefore, in ELP with interdisciplinary

collaboration courses, the ideal theoretical pedagogical approach for ESL teachers to improve English language proficiency seems to be impossible.

ESL instruction in disciplinary-specific courses is presented within the framework of some academic disciplines. In this type of program, English language skill courses are the main content, and academic knowledge is the supplementary tool to present certain English language course content. According to Kasper's (1998) research, ESL students who received the disciplinary-specific instruction could enter into mainstream programs more easily than any other ESL students.

The goal of this study was to find the appropriate pedagogical approach for students who learn EAP. In the teaching process, the ESL teachers' role should be changed from traditional information transmitters to multiple role players, including course participators, monitors, and evaluators. EAP teachers should possess a certain level of background knowledge in their students' academic subjects instead of knowing subjects deeply (Bell, 1999; Farhady, 2005). EAP is considered a part of English for specific purposes (ESP). To teach students with EAP, Ibrahim (2010) encourages teachers to create opportunities for ESL students to learn effective communication skills in the classroom. The pedagogical approach of EAP should direct ESL students to genuine language use instead of restricting their realization of English language skills.

### **Pedagogical Approaches in Second Language Teaching**

Teaching language is changing with the creation of new pedagogical approaches and the disappearance of others. Some traditional pedagogical approaches have experienced a renewal as time has passed. Teachers tend to know what is new, so they can find the appropriate approaches to teach more effectively. As Richards and Rodgers

(2001) state, “the quality of language teaching will improve if teachers use the best available approaches” (p. 15). However, Rajagopalan (2007) has found that teachers experience *method fatigue* with various pedagogical approaches in language teaching.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) provide a brief summary of popular second language teaching approaches. In this review, the following prevalent pedagogical approaches in language teaching will be discussed: (a) the grammar-translation approach, (b) the direct method approach, (c) the audio-lingual method approach, (d) the communicative language teaching approach, (e) the task-based language teaching approach, and (f) the content-based language teaching approach. Although all the approaches will be presented, the review focuses mainly on Hymes’ (1972) communicative language teaching approach, Long’s (1996) task-based language teaching approach, and Krashen’s (1985) content-based language teaching approach.

### **The Grammar-Translation Approach**

The grammar-translation approach dominated Greek and Latin language teaching from the 1840s to 1940s. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), it modified its form to be widely used in recent language teaching. The grammar-translation approach refers to teaching the second language by applying its grammar rules to translate second-language sentences into and out of the native language. It is a traditional pedagogy, which is revealed in the role of teachers and students, the nature of student-teacher interaction, and the characteristics of the teaching process. In the classroom, teachers are the authority, giving students the grammar rules and examples, while students are the recipients memorizing and applying the rules taught by the instructor. Students and teachers have little interaction in this method. The teaching process emphasizes grammar

with the primary skills of reading and writing, while ignoring skills of speaking and listening (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). In the process, the native language works as the reference system or the medium of instruction in the second language acquisition (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Teachers teach students to figure out the similarities and exceptions between the second language and the native language. As a result, students can master the grammar rules of the second language accurately so as to learn the second language. This teaching strategy asks students to do exercises so as to notice grammar rules in a deductive way. Based on the reading texts, students can memorize the second language vocabulary. Besides reading, formal writing is the other major focus because it prepares students for formal written examinations in academic settings.

Even though a great variety of teaching approaches can be used for teaching ESL, the grammar-translation approach is still prevalent in some parts of the world, such as in China and Egypt (Shannon, 2006; Zhang, 2006). According to Shannon, Chinese teachers prefer to apply the grammar-translation approach to help students learn English as the second language quickly and to save teachers' labor. Chinese students begin to learn ESL from elementary schools; therefore, a large number of English teachers are needed. However, to train an English teacher is to consume time and money. Furthermore, The National English Examination ignores oral skills; therefore, teachers do not need to be properly trained as an expert to teach ESL. Thus, employing an expert in English to teach ESL at elementary or secondary schools is a waste of time and money.

### **The Direct Method Approach**

Richards and Rodgers (2001) claim that this approach was first applied by Sauveur in Boston in the late 1860s and then developed by Maximilian Berlitz in the

1880s. It refers to teaching students to convey meanings directly in the target language without reference to the native language. The direct method approach is also called the natural method, phonetic method, oral method, and psychological method (Yu, 2000). In this teaching process, teachers and students are more like partners. Although their relationship in the process is more positive than in the grammar translation approach, it still seems to be passive when applied to EAP because teachers always direct the teaching. In the classroom, teachers teach English vocabulary, phrases, and sentences through the use of demonstration and visual aids, making students feel like they are in a real situation. Teachers choose the teaching materials for the syllabus based on these real situations. For example, if teachers teach students economics, the situation for teaching could be as if in a bank; if teachers teach students engineering, the situation for teaching could look like a hydropower station. Teachers frequently ask questions to make students speak. Consequently, students can learn to think in the second language. If students make mistakes, teachers correct them directly. This approach is largely dependent on the ability of teachers to work as captain to direct their class. The pedagogical focus is on grammar skills and speaking and listening skills. In the teaching process, grammar is taught in an inductive way; that is, students figure out grammar rules from examples (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). The fact that reading and writing skills are not practiced often by students makes the pedagogical approach unsuitable for teaching ESL students for future academic study.

The direct method approach has recently become popular in Chinese English training centres because it is effective in improving students' comprehension skills. Teachers ask students questions in English to find the extent of their reading

comprehension. Al-Shammari, Al-Sharoufi, and Yawkey (2008) testify to the effectiveness of the direct method approach in Kuwait and recommend it to be used in Kuwait public school.

### **The Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) Approach**

The audio-lingual method approach is based on a structural approach and behaviorist psychological theory (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) as a way to teach learners the target language through stimulating learners to respond. Teachers applying this approach drill students in the utilization of grammatical structures and explore students' minds to give related feedback. Through practicing repeated exercises, teachers teach students to learn the second language by mastering grammar skills: from morphemes to words to phrases to sentences to passages. In this process, teachers are leaders to direct and control the language behaviors of students, while students are imitators who follow teachers' direction to respond accurately and rapidly. This teaching approach is similar to the direct method approach, as grammar is taught inductively and teachers teach students to form the habits of the second language. However, it is strongly theoretical in linguistics and psychology (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), and is derived from the interactional view (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The audio-lingual method is still a dominant pedagogical approach in China and Taiwan. Some teachers tend to use the approach in their teaching for convenience because they were trained by the same pedagogical approach. From an educational policy perspective, it is defensible due to a lack of funding for teacher training, staff shortages, and large class sizes and standardized examinations focusing primarily on reading and writing skills (Shannon, 2006).

### **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach**

Communicative language teaching has been widely applied in ESL classrooms since Hymes (1972) first proposed the term, which is derived from the communicative approach entitled “using English to learn it” (Howatt, 1984, p. 279). Since the early 1980s, pedagogical approaches have shifted from a linguistic structure-centered approach to a communicative approach (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). The core of communicative teaching is “communicative competence” (Hymes, 1972).

Communicative competence consists of organizational, pragmatic, strategic, and psychomotor competence (Brown, 1994). When ESL teachers apply this pedagogy, they utilize strategies to help students realize the communicative functions of the linguistic forms that students use, through connecting sentences in a meaningful manner to comply with social and cultural rules of an L2 environment.

Teachers’ responsibilities are to establish situations similar to the L2 environment to promote students’ communication. In the process, ESL teachers can use various classroom activities to practice CLT, such as authentic materials, scrambled sentences, language games, picture strip stories, and role-plays (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). These activities work to build language accuracy and fluency. Presently, however, there is no agreement on the most effective version of CLT.

Several roles are assumed by ESL teachers in CLT: facilitator, participant, researcher, learner, analyst, counsellor, and group process manager (Breen & Candlin, 1980; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). ESL teachers facilitate the communication process in the classroom by being involved in the communication. In the process, ESL teachers use the nature of learning and organizational capability to acquire knowledge. If students are

not satisfied with the activities of the teaching approach, teachers are ready to determine and respond to learner language needs. ESL teachers are expected to be effective communicators to understand students' intentions and to give feedback to them. In the student-centered classroom, ESL teachers organize the classroom as a setting for communication. They divide a classroom into several small groups, so each student has opportunities to practice English by using authentic materials. Students interact with each other to share information and to brainstorm. By using the CLT approach to teach students English, teachers in universities can create one class as an academic class because it enhances cooperative interactions. Reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar are all practiced in the CLT approach.

### **Task-Based Language Teaching Approach**

Task-based language teaching refers to the use of tasks as the major way to plan and instruct language teaching (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Teachers play an essential role in this pedagogy as designer, monitor, and evaluator. They create pretask and task follow-up phases to develop students' language skills, based on an analysis of students' needs and abilities. In the process, they also monitor students' performances and intervene as necessary. Applying task-based language teaching approach in a class is putting students central. Students have the flexibility to use their previous or current knowledge to accomplish a task and to cooperate with their peers.

In practice, there are three stages to apply the approach in a class. The first stage is to prepare a task with a specific purpose for students. It is necessary to analyze students' needs for a teacher to plan the task. ESL teachers select target tasks that students might use in future life, such as attending a lecture, reading an academic book, and doing a

presentation. Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001) define *task* as “an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective” (p. 11). Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) identify seven types of tasks to apply the pedagogy: information-gap, opinion-gap, reasoning-gap, unfocused, focused, input-providing, and output-promoting tasks. 1. An information-gap task exchanges information among participants. 2. An opinion-gap task requires students to express their personal feelings. 3. A reasoning-gap task asks for students to pursue new knowledge through inferring it from their previous knowledge. 4. Unfocused tasks are designed to provide opportunities for communicating generally. 5. Focused tasks emphasize communication with some specific linguistic item. 6. Input-providing tasks engage learners with the receptive skills of listening and reading. 7. Output-providing tasks stimulate learners to write and speak.

In general, the first stage is related to what tasks will be conducted and how students should carry out the tasks. Teachers design a benchmark that students can meet and also learn new knowledge after obtaining it. Sometimes, ESL teachers give students models to learn before students perform the task in reality. This strategy is to raise students’ awareness of explicit instruction and linguistic forms. The second stage is to fulfil the task through utilizing their linguistic and academic knowledge. Teachers encourage students to work in groups to practice the task in order to prompt interaction. During the second stage, teachers constantly make notes on students’ behaviors so as to give them suggestions when they accomplish the task. The third stage is to review the outcome. Teachers will send out individual feedback to every student, and then design the next task based on students’ errors to enhance learning.

### **Content-Based Language Teaching Approach**

Content-based language teaching refers to an approach of teaching students *through* communication rather than *for* it (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), which is similar to a task-based approach. Both of these approaches belong to the communicative approach for “learning to use English” (Howatt, 1984, p. 279). However, whereas the task-based language teaching approach uses tasks as the medium to teach students, the content-based approach integrates language learning with other content learning for academic purposes in ESL teaching.

To study in the content-based classroom, ESL students need assistance to learn the academic knowledge. Therefore, teachers are crucial to implementing this pedagogical approach. They should design lessons with both language and academic subject in mind and with clear language and content objectives, making the lessons interesting to stimulate student learning. If teachers do not prepare well, it seems that students cannot learn much from the language class. Because ESL students do not have as much vocabulary as native speakers, the class will become boring if they do not understand what teachers teach. Thus, teachers should have a clear understanding of the content and of the language, and also express their thoughts fluently. Usually, in this method the teachers apply group work to teach English, so students can work collaboratively to understand content while actively using English. When teachers observe errors in the students’ conversation, they can choose to correct them immediately or allow students to self-correct. In the process, teachers are analysts who decide students’ needs, planners who prepare courses, and propellants who process language teaching.

Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (2004) identify three content-based teaching models at the university level: theme-based language, sheltered content, and adjunct language instruction. Theme-based language instruction is the most widespread model among all three. With this method, teachers generate or adapt to outside sources to get content materials for courses. Sheltered content instruction means that ESL students are separated from native-speaking students to learn English. Adjunct language instruction refers to teaching students content courses and language courses concurrently.

As Byrnes (2005) demonstrated, the content-based language teaching approach has been used widely in public schools in the United States. Compared to native speakers, ESL students without a high level of English language proficiency cannot learn either linguistic or academic skills well in regular classes. It is time consuming when ESL students study English language first and then learn academic content. Byrnes argues that the content-based approach enables ESL teachers to help students learn linguistic and academic knowledge simultaneously.

### **Recent Research on the Three Communicative Approaches**

Pedagogical approaches in language teaching is changing from the “focus on form” (Rivers, 1968) teaching approach such as grammar translation, direct method, and audio-lingual method to the “focus on students” teaching approach such as CLT, task-based, and content-based language teaching. The “focus on students” teaching approach emphasizes students’ communicative competence (Hymes, 1972), which is appropriate to teach ESL students English for academic purpose. Recent research has been designed to study further the three communicative theoretical pedagogical approaches. In order to bridge the gap between appropriate theoretical pedagogical approaches and practical ones,

it is necessary to observe how other researchers integrate theoretical pedagogical approaches into practice in the field.

In 2008, Springer and Collins investigated the function of the communicative language teaching approach to ESL students. They chose two university-educated L2 speakers of English called Ivan and Soon Yi as the participants to enroll in a 9-week communicative ESL class and a 3-week volunteer program for academically at-risk English-speaking children. They audio-recorded language classroom activities, and examined their written workshop assessments and daily journals. Their findings revealed that participants paid attention to the language itself at the expense of task completion in the classroom context, whereas they focused on the content and completion of tasks in the volunteer context. During communicative activities, participants could fill gaps in their interlanguage capacity. Regardless of the task, participants felt they improved their language even though they might not have finished a task.

In 2008, Mark, Coniam, and Kwan surveyed Hong Kong secondary and primary school students about the implementation of the buddy reading programme. They found that the task-based language teaching approach stimulated creativity and cultivated interest to write and read English stories. In 2009, Fan conducted an exploratory study of collocational use by ESL students as the task-based language teaching approach. The study revealed that teaching vocabulary in collocational contexts minimized the adverse effect of learners' confusion with L2 and encouraged students to develop the skill of chunking. Fan argued that teachers should not be restrained in their teaching by the neat definitions of collocations. In the same year, Andon and Eckerth conducted semistructured interviews and classroom observations with 4 participants who applied the

task-based L2 pedagogical approach to students in London, England. All 4 teachers planned learner-centered lessons where students could actively communicate and negotiate the selection of tasks and topics. Task-based classroom activities reflected situational and interactional authenticity in second language use. They used tasks as goal-related and outcome-oriented activities. The findings suggest that tasks cannot drive students to acquire a new language, but they can support language teaching as form-focused activities. These studies demonstrate the usage and quality of the task-based pedagogical approach. This approach can improve ESL students' language proficiency all round, which is beneficial for ESL students to pursue their future academic study.

In 2004, Zhang conducted an ethnographic case study to explore content-based reading courses in a large mid-Western U.S. university. He found that some theories and philosophies behind the content-based pedagogical approach were conducive to student motivation and achievement. In 2010, Arslan and Saka conducted a pilot study to investigate the effectiveness of the theme-based model of content-based language teaching approach. They distributed prequestionnaires and postquestionnaires to understand the purposes for ESL students' learning. They found that the content-based language teaching approach enriched ESL students' motivation and academic language learning achievement. The popularity of this approach has increased dramatically in the last 10 years, as ESL teachers who apply it can teach students not only some new content appropriate to their cognitive level but also language skills for future academic study.

### **Second Language Acquisition (SLA)**

Support for the three communicative pedagogical approaches comes not only from the successful outcomes demonstrated in recent research, but also from acquisition

of the second language. Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex phenomenon, and one area of SLA is called “Instructed SLA,” which describes various pedagogical approaches for ESL students. SLA identified here refers to the subconscious process of “picking up” a second language through exposure in the classroom instruction or with “guidance” from textbooks (Ellis, 2008). Ellis has proposed that the most effective way to promote L2 acquisition in the classroom is to provide students with sufficient opportunities to communicate information. Classroom communication or interaction contributes to second language acquisition in a way that relates closely to Krashen’s (1985) Comprehensible Input, Long’s (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, and Swain’s (1995) Comprehensible Output. In a cognitive view of SLA, language input, interaction, and output are united to make gains in a second language. The three communicative pedagogical approaches emphasize language input, interaction, and output, so that ESL students can develop their understanding of English.

The input hypothesis claims that the act of receiving language (reading or listening) constitutes part of the process of second language learning. The three communicative pedagogical approaches enhance English language acquisition through appropriate exposure to reading and listening. When teachers apply the three communicative pedagogical approaches, they simultaneously play several roles as facilitator, monitor, and participant. In this way, they can modify target language input to make language learners understand almost all of the input during the class. Through classroom interaction, teachers slow down the rate of teaching reading and listening so that learners can comprehend English better. ESL students are moving targets because every student has different language needs. What teachers should do is to adjust language

input to the level of students. Input should be just beyond the ESL students' English language ability, so as to motivate them to stretch their language skills. The focus of the three communicative pedagogical approaches is communication that directs teachers to process appropriate inputs for ESL students. Moreover, ESL students in the three communicative pedagogical approaches have many opportunities to learn from teachers and classmates by negotiating classroom content, extending knowledge to related topics, and reviewing previous knowledge.

The output hypothesis focuses on the act of producing language (speaking or writing) to form second language learning. Language output supplements language input to trigger ESL students to learn English well. Swain (1995) proposes three functions of output, including the noticing, testing, and reflective functions. Relative to the noticing function, if ESL teachers only input English language to students, students will not know how to express their intended meaning consciously. Language output helps students to notice linguistic problems so as to learn new knowledge and consolidate existing knowledge. Moreover, ESL students modify their output in response to feedback when they test what they read or listen to. Lastly, by reflecting on language produced by others or themselves, ESL students can mediate their language learning. In the classroom, ESL teachers apply the three communicative pedagogical approaches to create opportunities for ESL students to produce language; therefore, students get a better understanding of their linguistic deficiency and function.

The focus of Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis is placed on negotiation for meaning. In other words, classroom interaction promotes students to recognize the mismatch between input and output so as to fill in the gap. In the classroom interaction,

an ESL teacher communicates with students to provide models and continual feedback; students communicate with each other to exchange information; hence, students can build communicative competence to improve their English language proficiency.

These three hypotheses of second language acquisition are based on the understanding that there are three basic language skills in language teaching: grammar skills, reading and writing skills, and speaking and listening skills. The hypotheses assume that each of these skills is different in acquisition, and each hypothesis addresses different aspects of the three skills.

Grammar teaching per se does not belong to either language input or output, but it is essential in second language acquisition. It is a mediator to transform input skills to output skills. ESL students must not only engage in communicative language use, but they also need to focus on linguistic form to ensure the accuracy of language. Ellis (2008) argues that the proficiency and accuracy of language output are imperative for language acquisition in an academic setting, and that grammar teaching is required to achieve it. Moreover, Grabe and Stoller (1997) note that form and meaning, as two components of language teaching, could not be separated in language learning, which has been confirmed in many studies.

In cognitive psychology, grammar skills can be taught in an exemplar-based system or a rule-based system (Zhang, 2006). The former teaches students concrete situational language, which helps students notice morphological, phonological, and syntactic meaning, while the latter is used to teach students abstract underlying linguistic patterns. The reason for teaching ESL students in a rule-based system is if those learners cannot be exposed to an English environment. However, English is considered an official

language all over the world, and ESL students can practice English outside of classrooms. Therefore, recent pedagogical approaches to teach ESL students grammar skills tend to use the exemplar-based system to focus on communication in ELP classrooms.

Reading involves acceptance of language input, whereas writing is used for language output. Reading is an act of decoding meaning in accordance with the context, and writing is an act of composing. The improvement of one skill can enhance learners' capabilities in the other skill.

Listening is a process of receiving meaning as language input, whereas speaking is the output form of oral language. Without comprehensive listening at the right level, it is difficult for ESL students to speak. Listening exercises make ESL students pay attention to linguistic forms, especially grammar. Thus, ESL students can practice their speaking skills with other learners as native speakers use them.

### **Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)**

Cognitive academic language proficiency offers another support for the three communicative pedagogical approaches. Language proficiency is defined as “the ability to achieve or transmit information in the test language for some pragmatically useful purpose within a real-life setting” (Clark, 1975, p. 10). As Richards and Rodgers (2001) note, there are three theoretical views of the achievement of language proficiency: the structural view, the functional view, and the interactional view. In the structural view, teachers should teach students to learn the system of coding the meaning. The skill level to code the meaning manifests students' language proficiency. It emphasizes teaching grammar skills to understand clauses, phrases, and sentences and then to master English language. In the functional view, teachers should teach students to express functional

meaning accurately and fluently. Language proficiency can be checked by the performance of students. In the interactional view, teachers should teach students to realize interpersonal relations through social interaction. If students can deal with social transaction well, they will have a high level of language proficiency. Both the functional and interactional view support the student-centered and communicative pedagogical approach to teaching ESL. The language tasks to teach ESL students can be identified by motivating students to study. Therefore, it is necessary to apply communicative, content-based, and task-based language teaching approaches to teach ESL students so as to achieve high levels of language proficiency.

Cummins (2003) has posited that to examine the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches for academic purposes, it is imperative to explore the overall development of academic achievement for ESL students. This can be done by assessing students' cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), as developed by James in 1979 (Roessingh, Kover, & Watt, 2005). ESL students who pursue future education must meet increasingly rigorous North American university or college admission requirements. Only the best academic students are currently accepted because seat space in higher education in North America is limited. When ESL students are accepted into a university or college, they will need good English language skills to be successful. Thus, it is important for ESL teachers to enhance their pedagogical approaches to better develop ESL students' CALP.

Second-language acquisition, whether input related, output related, or grammar related, is crucial in achieving CALP. An effective way to establish a high level of CALP

for ESL students is to connect language with context by cognitively demanding tasks through communicative, task-based, and content-based language teaching approaches.

### **Instructional Strategies**

A number of instructional strategies are consistent with the goals of the three communicative approaches and have already shown to be effective in ESL research. These instructional strategies provide additional support for the three communicative pedagogical approaches in ELP classrooms. The research on cooperative learning and use of feedback is of particular interest to my study.

### **Teaching with Cooperative Learning**

Cooperative learning requires students to work together to learn knowledge with shared goals. According to Grabe and Stoller (1997), the purpose of the strategy is to “promote peer support and peer instruction” (p. 8). In the process, ESL or EFL teachers assign a range of tasks for students to complete cooperatively, create a comfortable environment to assist students to carry out tasks, and adopt suitable methods to assess students’ learning. As Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul (2012) found, teachers using this method changed their roles from “sage on the stage” to “guide on the side.” To implement this strategy to teach ESL students, teachers can apply many types of activities such as “Think-Pair-Share,” “Circle the Sage,” “Numbered Heads Together,” “Peer Review,” and the like (Wichadee & Orawiwatnakul, 2012). According to Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul, Think-Pair-Share was described by Frank Lyman and his colleagues in 2002 to assist students to formulate individual ideas and then to share these ideas with other students. Circle the Sage was described by Spencer Kagan in 1994 as a method in which teachers group students as teams, ask one member of each team to learn

information from one sage who has deep understanding of some knowledge, return the students to their original team after learning, ask students to compare their learning from different sages, and work out ways to resolve any disagreements discovered in the process. Numbered Heads Together was also described by Kagan in 2003 as a method to establish student teams by numbers first and then to give answers as a team. Peer Review was derived from the work of French-Lazovick in 1981 to acquire partners to read each other's notes and to give comments on them.

Teaching with cooperative learning is believed to be one of the best instructional strategies to teach students English as the second language. Sachs, Candlin, Rose, and Shum (2003) argue that this strategy can exploit secondary and primary students' language learning potential. Ghaith and Shaaban (2005) maintain that this strategy can help ESL learners develop linguistic competence and psychosocial adjustment. Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul (2012) find that this strategy can increase students' motivations, develop their thoughts, create their sense of community, and reduce their learning anxiety. Thus, the effectiveness of this instructional strategy supports the three communicative approaches in ESL teaching because it shares the same goal of emphasizing communicative skills to create student-centeredness.

### **Teaching with Feedback**

Traditionally, this strategy is used to teach students how to write. Currently, in the development of pedagogical research, this strategy has been applied to every area of ESL teaching. As Mi (2009) notes, there are five modes of this strategy: teacher-written feedback, teacher-student conference, peer feedback, teaching with self-monitoring, and teaching with computer-mediated feedback. Teacher-written feedback is the traditional

strategy in which teachers write comments on students' papers. In an ESL writing class, teachers correct students' errors or provide suggestions to students' writing. In an ESL speaking class, teachers write down their comments about students' speech or presentation. Teacher-student conference refers to teachers meeting one student individually to help him or her solve specific problems and to give constructive suggestions for his or her future studies. Peer feedback is also called peer review, peer response, and peer editing. It means that students work in pairs, and these partners help each other to improve by revising and editing the partner's writing. In this strategy, teachers can require students to do either oral or written comments. This modified strategy seems like teaching with cooperative learning, but it is different from that strategy because it forces students to do pair work. Teaching with self-monitoring is derived from Creswell's (2009) book. Teachers use this strategy to ask students to annotate their text for clarifying their problems or doubts and then to provide comments based on students' annotations, which is often applied in ESL writing class. Teaching with computer-mediated feedback is a new strategy to be used in distance education. It means teachers communicate with students online.

Teaching with feedback has proven to be an effective instructional strategy to improve higher-proficiency learners' English (Mi, 2009). The instructional strategy has similar goals with the effects of the three communicative approaches. Therefore, the effectiveness of the instructional strategy supports the three communicative approaches indirectly.

### **Motivation in the Three Communicative Approaches**

Motivation is a Latin word, meaning *to move* (Ghavamnia, Kassaian, & Dabaghi, 2011). Motivation determines the direction in which individuals move. In ESL learning, motivation provides students with the primary impetus to study English and is the driving force to sustain the long and tedious learning process (Dörnyei, 2005).

In 1985, Deci and Ryan developed one famous motivation theory called Self-Determination Theory. Based on the theory, motivation is divided into “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” motivation. In ESL learning, intrinsically motivated individuals tend to learn English due to their enjoyment of language learning, while extrinsically motivated individuals are driven to learn English by external factors. On one hand, the motivation integrated in the three communicative approaches is extrinsic in nature because teachers require students to have academic success in English. On the other hand, the motivation integrated in the three communicative approaches is also intrinsic in ESL teaching because teachers put students in the center to teach and encourage them to learn English by themselves. As Noels (2001) states, the individual L2 learner has three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Using the three communicative pedagogical approaches, teachers encourage students to speak their own thoughts in control of their actions, so these approaches foster students’ sense of autonomy; teachers communicate with students to inspire them and give them suggestions for improvement so as to make students feel confident in their abilities, so these approaches promote students’ sense of competence; teachers spur students to work as a team to complete a task, so these approaches give students a sense of relatedness.

## Chapter Summary

In retrospect, there are a variety of pedagogical approaches in English language teaching; for example, the grammar-translation approach, the direct method approach, the audio-lingual method approach, the total physical response approach, the lexical approach, the communicative language teaching approach, the content-based language teaching approach, the task-based language teaching approach, and the like. This chapter presents six prevalent approaches in ESL teaching. Grammar translation approach, direct method approach, and audio-lingual method approach are the traditional approaches with teacher-centred and grammatical features, whereas communicative language teaching approach, task-based language teaching approach, and content-based language teaching approach belong to communicative approaches focusing on student-centred classrooms. However, no single teaching approach is flawless, as each of them is designed for different purposes in its appropriate social and cultural context.

The pedagogical approaches noted in this review are expected to prepare ESL students in ELP to learn English effectively for future academic learning. Compared to traditional approaches, communicative approaches enable students to acquire second language comprehensively and to improve cognitive language proficiency profoundly. Moreover, two effective instructional strategies, teaching with cooperative learning and teaching with feedback, support the student-centred approaches as their goals are consistent with these approaches. Finally, motivation in communicative approaches satisfies students' psychological needs. It is the ESL teachers' responsibility to motivate students to learn, so students can learn English effectively. Students should be invited to participate in classroom activities instead of just receiving teachers' knowledge. In short,

the approaches utilized in ELP should ideally be the student-centered approaches of communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching, and content-based language teaching.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

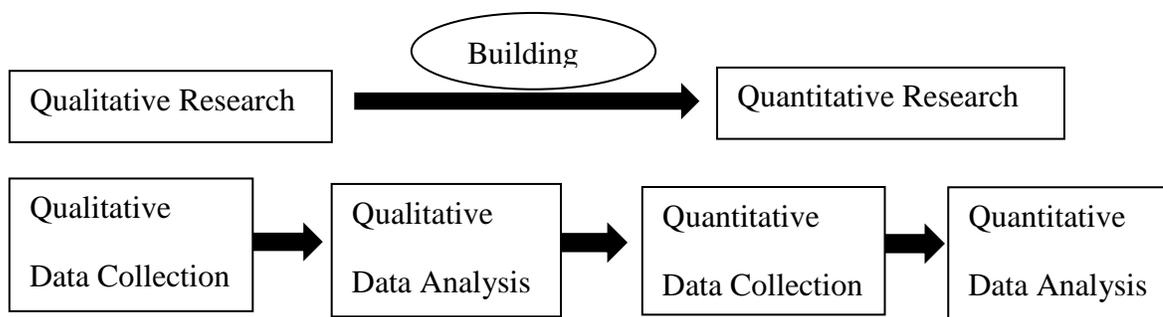
The objective of this study was to examine the pedagogy of ESL teachers in one university in Ontario. The main goal was to seek insights into the perceptions of participants regarding the relationship between theoretical and practical pedagogical approaches. A mixed-method exploratory research design was chosen to better understand ESL teachers' pedagogy. In this study, the mixed-method exploratory research design refers to building a quantitative study based on the results of a qualitative study. The mixed methodology strengthens both qualitative and quantitative research, because it not only explores the ESL teachers' practical pedagogical approaches in the ELP but also investigates the function of these approaches for the academic purposes of ESL Chinese students. The assessment of ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches to improve ESL Chinese students' academic language proficiency is complex, and the use of either qualitative or quantitative research is inadequate to address the complexity. Clark and Creswell (2010) comment on the appropriateness of mixed methodologies as follows: "Researchers use this approach when the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods provides a better understanding of the research problem and questions than either method by itself" (p. 298).

The qualitative phase focused on ESL teachers' perceptions of theoretical and practical teaching approaches in one university ELP in Ontario, and the quantitative phase focused on students' perceptions of the effectiveness of their instructors' teaching approaches. In other words, "the design consists of first collecting and analyzing qualitative data to explore a topic and then collecting quantitative data to help extend or generalize the qualitative results" (Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 306). This chapter will

outline the study methodology, site and participants, sampling, data collection, data analysis, limitations, and ethical considerations.

### **Methodology**

This study followed a mixed-method exploratory research design (see Figure 1). It is distinctive in that it applies the design to pedagogical approaches. Although researchers have done studies on pedagogical approaches, few of them chose the mixed-method design to assess the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches. Qualitative research permits an in-depth exploration of some pedagogical approaches, but theoretical pedagogical approaches are often difficult for ESL teachers to apply in practice. For example, Ajayi (2008) conducted qualitative research to test transformative pedagogy in an ESL high school classroom, which could be used to enhance ESL students' L2 language ability. However, this pedagogical approach is difficult for ESL teachers to practice because it might confuse students by giving them too many different ways of meaning and communication. In another example, Shahini and Riazi (2011) conducted qualitative research to examine the philosophy-based language approach to second language teaching, but this teaching approach cannot be applied to lower-English-level students because they do not have enough vocabulary to discuss some topics. As far as quantitative research is concerned, these types of studies gather information from a large number of people and generalize results, but they do not provide an embedded exploration of pedagogical approaches. For example, Li and Sinn (2010) used quantitative research to investigate the effect of a student-centred approach in teaching argumentative writing to senior secondary ESL students in Hong Kong. By collecting data of pretest and posttest scores from 60 secondary students, the researchers found



*Figure 1.* Mixed-method exploratory research design.

that the student-centred teaching approach enhanced ESL students' language proficiency and motivation. However, the student-centred approach is a generalized pedagogy that includes various instructional approaches, and the researchers did not explore it deeply. Nassaji (2012) used quantitative research to survey 201 teachers' perspectives towards the relationship between second language acquisition and language pedagogy. Nassaji included 119 EFL teachers teaching in Turkey and 82 ESL teachers teaching in Canada with different needs and concerns in the research; therefore, the findings could be effective in different contexts. The research explored the extent to which teachers believed second language acquisition research useful for ESL or EFL teaching, but it did not find out how second language acquisition research can influence different kinds of pedagogical approaches.

The purpose of the design used in this study was to begin with qualitative research to explore ESL teachers' pedagogical practices and then to use quantitative research to better understand the practical pedagogical approaches that ESL students believed were helping to improve their language proficiency. The study consisted of two phases. In Phase 1, qualitative data were collected and analyzed to understand ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches. In Phase 2, quantitative data were collected and analyzed to assess the effectiveness of the pedagogical approaches identified in the qualitative phase. This mixed-method design places weight on the first phase, mixing data through connecting qualitative and quantitative data analyses (Creswell, 2009). In general, collecting quantitative data in the second phase is important to assess the effectiveness of the outcomes from the qualitative exploration in the first phase of the study.

### **Phase 1: Narrative Interviews**

Qualitative research can be categorized as narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, case study, or ethnographic research (Clark & Creswell, 2010). In this study, the individual interviews are viewed as narrative research because the ESL teachers were asked to describe their experiences with pedagogical approaches in the ELP classrooms and to discuss the meaning of those approaches for ESL students. A narrative methodology focuses on understanding individual stories and providing an interpretation of the meaning of the stories for researchers. The objective was to identify themes found in these stories. These stories were about past, present, and future pedagogical approaches that teachers used or will use, which are consistent with narrative methodology (Nakaprasit, 2010).

First, the study established a background context for the story of the participating teachers. The background context helped to draw persuasive themes from the narratives. Choosing ESL teachers with similar backgrounds also helped in drawing insights from the results. Second, the major interview focused on the participating teachers' present experiences and perceptions regarding specific practical pedagogical approaches. The questions were intended to discover the strategies and activities they currently used in ELP classrooms. Third, the interviewer asked participants about future pedagogical approaches they might suggest for an ELP classroom. This chronological sequence is pertinent to the study because pedagogical approaches are evolving. It is assumed that the personal background information influences the present pedagogical approaches chosen and that ESL teachers' present pedagogy will affect their future teaching methods

in ELP classrooms. The goal of narrative methodology in the present study was to explore the pedagogical approaches used to teach English for academic purposes.

### **Phase 2: Survey Questionnaire**

Quantitative research has four possible designs: true experiments, quasi-experiment, single-subject, and survey research (Clark & Creswell, 2010). This study used the survey design. Questionnaires are considered to be the main method of survey research. In order to identify trends in attitudes, expectations, and self-classification of the ELP students, the study selected a sample of ELP students who expected to pursue further university education. In this procedure, theoretical perspectives in qualitative research provided a lens through which to orient the survey questions at the beginning. Then, the researcher selected and studied a sample of 30 ESL Chinese students from all ELP students so as to generalize results to other similar ELP students. There are two types of survey designs, including cross-sectional and longitudinal survey designs (Creswell, 2005). The questionnaires in this study belong to cross-sectional survey designs as the researcher collected data about ESL Chinese students' attitudes and opinions at one point in time rather than over an extended period of time.

### **Site and Participants**

The researcher conducted the study in one university English Language Program (ELP) in Ontario. Individuals who volunteered to participate in the research were divided into two groups. The first group included 3 senior ELP teachers who have taught Levels 3, 4, and 5. The second group consisted of 45 Chinese students who planned to continue their studies in Canadian universities. All the Chinese students were from Levels 3, 4, and 5 to measure their perceptions of ESL teachers' instructional approaches in the ELP.

To examine ESL teachers' teaching approaches, it was imperative to explore theoretical and practical approaches from the teachers' perspectives. Building on the initial qualitative results, the study included the second group in order to investigate students' perceptions on these practical approaches. With this design, the study involved both of the key stakeholder groups in ESL instruction.

### **Sampling**

Both the qualitative phase and the quantitative phase apply *nonprobability sampling* (Clark & Creswell, 2010), which refers to a sampling strategy where the participants are not selected randomly. This sampling strategy was used because it was difficult to obtain a complete list of all ESL teachers and students in the ELP, so it was impossible to draw a random sample. Consequently, the participants in this study are first, a sample of convenience because they were known to the researcher, and second, a purposive sample because they represent some characteristic the researcher wanted to study. In the study, the researcher selected 3 senior ESL teachers who could best understand the pedagogical approaches in the ELP. The type of purposeful sampling strategies being used here is typical of purposeful sampling as described by Clark and Creswell. For the sample in the quantitative phase, the researcher chose 10 ESL Chinese students from each level who were known to be available to be studied throughout the process. This approach is called convenience sampling (Creswell, 2009).

### **Data Collection**

In order to check the content of the data collection instruments, the researcher applied pilot studies with an expert in education research and a Level 5 skilled student, who provided detailed feedback on the interview and questionnaire, respectively. The

researcher made necessary modifications based on the feedback. The data from the pilot studies provided the researcher with a better understanding of the interview format and the questionnaire format.

Data were collected through the use of digital voice recordings and detailed questionnaires, whereby the focus was on five aspects derived from previous studies: strategies, teaching practices, assessment practices, teachers' role, students' role and interaction (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008). Digital voice recordings were used in the interviews with ESL teachers, while detailed questionnaires were the chosen tool to assess ESL teachers' pedagogy from students' perspectives.

### **Pilot Study**

Creswell (2005) defines the pilot study as “a procedure in which a researcher makes changes in an instrument based on feedback from a small number of individuals who complete and evaluate the instrument” (p. 595). The intent of the pilot study was to ensure that interviews and questionnaires would be conducted without any unanticipated problems because of ambiguous, awkward, or poor questions. The pilot study enabled the researcher to save time and effort and to establish rapport with participants when the interview and questionnaire was conducted in the ESL program.

**Interview format.** Before conducting interviews with ESL teachers, the researcher interviewed an expert in educational research to determine if the proposed interview questions were clear and if they would yield the desired information. The expert has published several papers on educational research. Besides teaching courses and delivering seminars in the area of educational research, he also supervises students to do research. In the interview pilot study, he pretended to be an ESL teacher in the ELP to

give suggestions on the interview format and questions. The researcher applied “the standardized open-ended interview” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005, p. 240) in the pilot study. That is, the questions that the researcher used were predetermined.

At the end of his interview, the expert provided the following feedback. First, he emphasized that the researcher should inform ESL teachers of some important points on the consent form, including (a) the interviews would be recorded so as not to lose any information, (b) all the information would be kept confidential, and (c) ESL teachers would see the verbatim transcript and have an opportunity to delete or add information. Second, he indicated that having a comfortable environment was an important part of a successful interview. Before beginning interviews, the researcher should engage interviewees in appropriate informal conversation to make them feel relaxed. Third, he pointed out that the researcher should remain as neutral as possible without giving any personal ideas to influence participants. Fourth, he indicated that, when appropriate, the researcher should use simple probes to encourage participants to answer some questions in more detail, to cut down long answers, or to explain some complex questions. For example, the researcher can ask for clarification with the questions, “Could you add to that?” or “I do not quite understand what you are saying. Could you explain it a little further?” He noted that interviewees may speak a lot on some question, so the researcher should interrupt them appropriately; the researcher should explain any question that the interviewees might not understand well or answer appropriately.

According to the suggestions from the expert, the researcher revised the questions (see Appendix A). The researcher started interviews with casual conversation, and then emphasized important points on the consent form to ESL teachers. During interviews, the

researcher (a) explained questions 2, 4, 7, and 12; (b) paraphrased what ESL teachers said in order to clarify their statements; (c) asked ESL teachers to explain some answers a little further; (d) let some questions go when teachers could not answer them; (e) asked them whether they were still looking for better ways to improve their teaching on question 5; and (f) restricted lengthy answers for some questions so as to control the situation.

**Questionnaire format.** Before conducting the questionnaire part of the study, the researcher carried out a pilot study with a Level 5 skilled student in the ELP. The student had a better understanding of ESL teachers' pedagogy and ESL Chinese students' thinking towards the pedagogy in the ELP. Besides being an advanced ESL Chinese student, he had also been in the ELP for 1½years. The researcher asked him to answer the questionnaire that would be presented to the ESL Chinese students.

The student gave the researcher suggestions on the questionnaire, including telling students the consent form content and explaining some questions. He explained that because some students start doing the questionnaire without reading instructions, the researcher should read to every participant the letter of invitation, potential benefits and risks, confidentiality, publication of results, and contact information and ethics clearance on the consent form. Furthermore, the student thought some students might be confused with some questions; therefore, he suggested that the researcher explain some questions but not push ESL students to answer questions. One suggested method was to give examples to help students answer the last three open-ended questions.

Because the student had not suggested changes to the survey questions, the original questionnaire was used in the study (see Appendix B). According to the student's

advice, the researcher explained the content of the consent form for ESL students before conducting the questionnaire. During the questionnaire, some students skipped question 3 because they did not want to answer it. The researcher explained the six open-ended questions (4, 5, 6, 13, 14, and 15) by translating these English questions into Chinese and giving examples.

### **Individual Interviews**

The individual interviews were semistructured and designed to collect qualitative data in a consistent yet flexible manner (Fontana & Frey, 2000). In order to minimize bias, the researcher asked each ESL teacher the same set of questions with the same order and wording as the pilot study. In this study, the individual interviews were divided into two parts. First, participating ESL teachers were asked to fill out a form related to their background information. This background information enabled the researcher to compare and draw insights from the interview data more reliably and easily. The second part was a series of open-ended questions about the teachers' current instructional practices and their beliefs about pedagogic approaches in ESL teaching. Open-ended questions provided opportunities for participants to express their cultural and social experiences freely instead of being restricted to the researcher's experience (Neuman, 2003). At the beginning, general opening questions were included to put participants at ease. These were followed by key questions related to which theoretical pedagogical approaches they believed were effective, and what pedagogical approaches they applied in practice. In addition to key questions, probing subquestions were used as appropriate to elicit more information. At the end, concluding questions allowed participants to make additional comments. During the individual interviews, digital voice recordings were used to

provide a detailed record, adding field notes to keep a record of the important points. The interviewer prepared a set of 4 questions as part one and a set of 14 questions as part two for ESL teachers, but follow-up questions were asked whenever it was possible for ESL teachers to clarify their response or add information.

The study incorporated six techniques and specific skills into the semistructured interviews. These were environment set-up, recording, asking questions appropriately, active listening, following up, and getting teachers to self-correct. Creating a comfortable and cheerful environment was important for participants in the interviews. To provide a positive environment, the researcher used strategies such as giving participants opportunities to choose the interview places, sitting on a sofa to establish a comfortable setting, and providing snacks and drinks to participants. A digital voice-recording device was used to record the interviews. The recording could recall everything the participants said, so they would not lose their way in the interviews. By asking open-ended questions, the interviewer made sure not to influence the data from the participants. Most of the time, the interviewer just listened for understanding; this process is called active listening. The interviewer paid attention to the participants' verbal and nonverbal messages so as to be sensitive not only to the content but also to signs of unspoken perceptions. Although the interviewer did not interrupt the participants during the interview, the interviewer used some follow-up questions at the end of the interview to ask for clarification and more information. After the interviews had been recorded, the researcher transcribed the recording by herself and then sent the transcriptions to let interviewees correct any possible misinformation. Above all, participants were invited into the interview to

express their opinions, to make any changes to the transcript, and to give approval on the overall accuracy of the interview information.

### **Student Questionnaires**

After obtaining themes from the individual interview data, the researcher adapted the questionnaires to match the themes found in the qualitative exploratory phase of the study. The questionnaires were designed to obtain the perceptions by ESL students of their growth in language proficiency so as to evaluate ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches. It began with questions about the students' demographic background. Demographic data were related to gender, age, email address, and experience. The second part of the questionnaire required students to indicate their attitude toward ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches. Attitude questions were about the improvement of ESL Chinese students' English language proficiency after studying in the ELP. The final part of the questionnaire asked students to recommend specific teaching strategies that could improve ESL teachers' pedagogy so as to help international students adapt to an academic setting. Students made recommendations by selecting the expected teaching strategies. For variety, the student questionnaires included different types of closed-ended questions, from 5-point scale of importance to a range of agreement scale, as well as some open-ended questions to encourage students to elaborate on their experiences. In summary, the researcher collected both attitudinal and factual information from ESL Chinese students in a set of 6 questions as part one and a set of 15 questions as part two.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data from the individual interviews were analyzed thematically, followed by the analysis of quantitative data from the questionnaires through descriptive

statistics. Analyzing data of the individual interviews included four steps: preparing the data, exploring and coding the data, developing descriptive themes from the codes, and validating the findings (Clark & Creswell, 2010). In step one, the researcher transcribed digital voice recordings herself. She then indexed the data, as Rushton (2004) suggests, by highlighting colors and making notes in the margins. In step two, once the interview data were prepared, the researcher read every transcript and coded the text in order to gain a sense of the ELP teachers' beliefs about and uses of the pedagogical approaches. In step three, the researcher created descriptions after overviewing the transcripts. The researcher broke each transcription into meaningful units and synthesized the units to develop themes. In step four, the researcher validated interview results by triangulating data from the three different participants. The researcher compared each thematic category among the three participants' interviews to find consistencies and inconsistencies in the data.

Data from the questionnaires were analyzed with descriptive statistics to describe trends in the data pointing to the effectiveness of ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches. It involved three steps: (a) scoring the data, (b) describing the statistics, and (c) inferring from the statistics. The researcher entered each response on the questionnaires into a database and then used descriptive analyses to uncover the overall tendencies in the data. This study used single-item scores to analyze the data, which meant an individual score was given to each question for each participant (Creswell, 2005). The case in point was that some questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very positive to very negative. The researcher checked for the central tendency in the data through analysis of the mean scores for certain questions and through frequency counts for other

questions. The researcher also measured variability through analysis of the range to identify the highest and lowest responses for certain questions and through analysis of the standard deviation (SD) to know the amount of spread among the responses in other questions. Finally, the researcher used the results to make predictions about the effectiveness of ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches.

### **Limitations**

According to Creswell (2009), internal validity threats include the participant experiences and various stratification of the population before selecting the sample. In this study, internal validity was affected because the study did not use a random stratified sample. The focus of the study was on the pedagogical approaches for ESL Chinese students who expect to have further academic education, and, thus, the researcher chose a purposive and convenience sample to meet this criterion. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the greater population. Furthermore, the students' language skills might also have affected their understanding of the questionnaires, which could influence the researchers' understanding of their perspectives.

External validity threats include less rigorous administration procedures, as Salant and Dillman (1994) state. In this study, it was difficult to get a complete list of all ESL students in the ELP; therefore, there are coverage errors. Additionally, the sample in this study was limited to 3 ESL teachers and 30 ESL Chinese students in the ELP, which can be seen as a sampling limitation.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before participants volunteered to participate in the research, the researcher invited them to join the study by invitation letters and consent forms. These documents

stated the purpose and procedures of the study, so participants would fully understand the research process while deciding whether to participate. Moreover, consent forms outlined the participants' right to withdraw at any time from the study, to ask questions for clarification, to refrain from answering questions, to ensure confidentiality, and to obtain results after completing the research. Once the research was completed, all the related profiles and digital recordings were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's room. Access to this data was restricted to the researcher and her advisor.

Before conducting the study, the invitation and consent form, the questionnaires, and the interview protocols involved in the research were reviewed by the Brock University Research Ethics Board (File #11-295). Once ethics clearance was obtained from the Board, the researcher went to the director of the ELP at the university to request permission to conduct the research. After receiving approval, the researcher sent the invitation email, letter, and consent form to ESL senior teachers inviting them to volunteer in the research. After conducting interviews, the researcher went through the halls of the ESL center to invite ESL Chinese students to volunteer in the research.

In order to control variables, this study requested some personal background information with the consent of participants. During data collection, participants were informed that they were free to refuse to answer some or all questions or withdraw from the research, even though they consented to participate. The consent forms, recordings, transcripts, and questionnaires would be destroyed 5 years after the data were collected as APA suggests. Keeping the identity of individuals confidential was promised in this study. Confidentiality was protected by using pseudonyms for all participants, by storing the data in a secure place, and by ensuring that only the researcher and her advisor had

access to the data. Pseudonyms were applied for research purposes because the study followed the guidelines proposed by Silverman (2006) that ethically considerate research practices are required.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter involves more than simply identifying the study design; it includes seven interrelated steps. The first step sets out the design of the study, which is the mixed-method exploratory research design, including narrative qualitative research and survey quantitative research. The second step describes the site and participant selection process for this study. The third step shows the sampling techniques for the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study. The fourth step describes data collection in view of preparing interview and questionnaire format, deciding what types of data to collect, and developing techniques to collect data. The fifth step describes data analysis, first the qualitative thematic analysis, and second, the quantitative statistical analysis. The sixth step lists internal and external limitations in this study. The final step considers ethical issues for the participants and the research site. The results derived from these methods will be presented in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH RESULTS**

This chapter presents findings from the investigation into the effectiveness of practical ESL pedagogical approaches in one university ELP in Ontario. The data were collected first, from interviews with instructors, which aimed at identifying theoretical approaches believed to be useful and practical approaches actually used, and second, from questionnaires with ESL Chinese students, which focused on language improvement in the ELP. The data were analyzed to determine what specific pedagogical approaches are appropriate for ESL Chinese students to succeed academically in a university in Ontario.

This chapter is divided into two parts: (a) findings from ESL teachers and (b) findings from ESL Chinese students. The ESL teacher data analysis is a review of background data and interview data. The ESL Chinese student data analysis is an illustration of background data and questionnaire data.

### **Findings from ESL Teachers**

The data from ESL teachers were collected through face-to-face interviews to seek information on the pedagogical approaches the participants applied in the ELP classrooms. The data were organized into two categories: demographic information and interview information. Demographic information helped to place the interview data in a specific context. Interview data illustrated the specific theoretical and practical pedagogical approaches ESL teachers applied in the ELP.

### **Background Data**

The interview yielded background data on seven features: gender, age in years, course taught, educational background, number of years of teaching experience, preferred

course, and importance of each language skill. First, teachers who volunteered for the interview were all female. The researcher was unable to compare their understanding towards pedagogical approaches of male teachers, but it was possible to compare their responses to each other. Second, all teachers were within the age range of 30-39 years old. Because the study restricted the research to senior teachers who have taught Levels 3, 4, and 5, and because the researcher chose the participants in the study by chance, this demographic information implies that the majority of ESL senior teachers in the ELP are between 30 and 39 years old. Third, all teachers were senior teachers in the ELP. The first ESL teacher had taught ESL students for 2-5 years; the second one had taught ESL students for 6-9 years; and the third one had taught ESL students for more than 10 years. Their experience suggests that all 3 teachers have a good understanding of how to teach ESL students. Fourth, all teachers taught all the courses in the ELP, including reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar. The more courses the teachers taught, the deeper they understood ESL pedagogy, or at least the more likely it was that they could provide a comprehensive view of ESL pedagogy.

In addition to these four consistent background data, there were three inconsistent background results in this study. Diversity was reflected in teachers' educational background, preferred courses, and attitudes towards each English language skills for academic success. First, participating teachers had different educational backgrounds. Two teachers had a Bachelor's degree, and one had two Bachelor's degrees as well as a college certificate and a higher academic degree. These differences suggest that they might have different understanding of ESL pedagogy and apply pedagogical approaches in practice differently. Second, teachers had different preferences for teaching English

language courses. One participant liked to teach speaking and grammar; one preferred to teach writing, speaking, and grammar; and one favored reading, writing, and grammar courses. All teachers liked grammar teaching, but they had different favorites of other courses teaching. Thus, this study could be useful to improve ESL pedagogy by encouraging teachers to enjoy teaching all ELP courses. Finally, teachers held different views on the importance of three different language skills. Two participants thought all three English language skills were very important in a student's academic success but one participant believed that grammar was not as important as the other two skills. This demographic information demonstrates that ESL teachers' pedagogy in the ELP has some similarities but also some differences. Table 1 presents the summary of the background data.

### **Interview Data**

In the second part of the interview, the teacher participants responded to a set of 14 questions that were intended to provide a specific understanding of pedagogical approaches in ELP. The interview data were placed in thematic categories rather than in the question order. In referring to each ESL teacher, pseudonyms have been applied to protect anonymity. The first teacher is called Angela; the second teacher is called Britney; the third teacher is called Cathy.

**Theoretical pedagogical approach.** The topic of questions 4, 5, and 6 is what is called the theoretical pedagogical approach. The theoretical pedagogical approach refers to teachers' beliefs of teaching students to learn language (Baldwin, 2001), including the grammar-translation method, the direct method, the audio-lingual method, communicative language teaching approach, task-based language teaching approach, and

Table 1

*Summary of Background Information of ESL Teachers*

	Gender	Age in Years	Course Taught	
Teacher 1	Female	30-39	All	
Teacher 2	Female	30-39	All	
Teacher 3	Female	30-39	All	
	Educational Background	Number of Years of Teaching Experience	Preferred Course	Importance of Each Language Skill
Teacher 1	Bachelor	2-5 years	Speaking and Grammar	All very important
Teacher 2	Bachelor	6-9 years	Writing, Speaking and Grammar	All very important
Teacher 3	Two Bachelor Degrees; Certificate of College; Higher Academic Degree	10 years or more	Reading, Writing and Grammar	Reading and Writing; Listening and Speaking very important; Grammar important

content-based language teaching approach. The data collected in the teacher interviews revealed that they all use a variety of approaches to teach different students. However, each teacher had different styles about the theoretical pedagogical approach.

When starting to teach ESL, Angela followed a communicative approach with a teacher-centered classroom, by saying, “When I started teaching, my pedagogy was mainly teacher-centered. When I had much more experience and felt comfortable, I switched my pedagogy from teacher-centered to student-centered, but I am always a communicative approach follower.” Britney realized from the start that she could not implement certain pedagogical approaches on every student because every student had different needs in ELP. She said, “I just focused on the performance and tasks, so my pedagogical approach was very task-oriented.” When Cathy started to teach, she tended to teach students as the way she learned at school. She told the researcher that, “when I was new, I focused more on my content in one course...I just assessed my students’ needs at the beginning of teaching...My class is always student-centered, communicative, and integrated.” These results indicate that all 3 participants used communicative approaches when they were novice teachers.

When speaking of her current theoretical pedagogical approach, Angela said, “I try to follow a little bit of every theoretical pedagogical approach because I think they are all crossed... I always go in the direction of communicative approach with student-centered classroom.” She illustrated one example in which she incorporated the total physical response approach to the communicative approach to teach lower level students. As for Britney, she currently used different approaches for different levels of students, such as applying the total physical response pedagogical approach to teach lower-level

students and using the task-based or the content-based pedagogical approach to teach intermediate- and higher-level students. Cathy had become more flexible over the years. She conducted students' needs assessments often to satisfy students' goals instead of their teachers' goals. Cathy believed there was not one approach she should use exclusively in the ELP classroom. Except for translation pedagogical approach, she used different approaches to meet different objectives. She explained:

I hate the grammar translation pedagogical approach, which is how I learned other languages. I found it was dry and boring. It is not useful. It just translates text. I study grammar and do exercise. However, I cannot speak. It is not practical. I do not speak the same language as theirs. How do I translate the language to them? If it is the translation course and students are becoming translators, this pedagogical approach is great. But it is not for our program...I use audio-lingual pedagogical approach sometimes. I definitely use communicative teaching pedagogical approach. I use task-based, content-based, and sometimes lexical pedagogical approach...Different objectives require different approaches...so I try to satisfy audio, visual, lingual, and musical learners. I also think if I can vary my approach by using different approaches, it makes learning more interesting for my students...ESL students are very young...You should give them variety to make learning interesting.

The results show that the participating teachers adapted their theoretical pedagogical approaches to their students when they became senior teachers in the ELP, but they still preferred the communicative approaches to traditional approaches such as the grammar translation pedagogical approach.

When asked about the ideal theoretical pedagogical approach for future teaching, Angela would like to use one style or the other, or incorporate all as long as it fit her classrooms. However, she insisted, “my favorite theoretical approach is communicative approach.” Britney believed that ESL teachers could benefit from theoretical pedagogical approaches, but theoretical pedagogical approaches were not always appropriate for ESL teachers to teach students. She said, “ESL teachers should adapt students to ELP classroom...because...they have different background information, needs, and motivations.” Cathy talked about using grammar-based communicative approaches to teach ESL students in the future. In general, they all agreed that the ideal approach to use in the future should make them listen, observe, and get in touch with students to analyze their needs.

**Practical pedagogical approach.** The topic of questions 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12, and 13 was the practical pedagogical approach ESL teachers apply. The practical pedagogical approach refers to teachers’ beliefs in selecting purposeful and participatory activities (Baldwin, 2001), including teaching methodology, teaching content, and teaching environment. Because the researcher restricted the teaching environment to ELP classrooms, ESL teachers were only asked questions about teaching methodology and teaching content.

Questions 3, 7, and 13 represent responses about the practical pedagogical approach. As senior teachers in the ELP, the 3 participants had learned what were their least effective, most effective, and ideal practical pedagogical approaches over the years.

One of the biggest challenges for Angela was getting students to read instructions. Britney said it was a challenge to make students focus on English because they tended to

use their native language in ELP classrooms. Cathy referred to a special situation about the environment in the ELP. It was difficult for her to control cultural conflict when prejudice or attitudes from home or history were reenacted by ESL students in the ELP classroom. Although they had different challenges in ELP classrooms, the participating teachers all overcame those challenges through modifying their teaching methodology. As for Angela, she tried not to explain too much but to force students to read instructions by asking questions. Britney approached students to speak English in the ELP classrooms by communicating with students as often as she could. Cathy also communicated with students personally and publicly to manage conflict in the ELP classrooms. She noted, “What I usually do is walk over to my students very quietly and say some personal information.” These results suggest that the teachers could modify their teaching methodology to solve any problems in classrooms. In the process, they always communicated with the students in their classrooms.

One of the most effective practical pedagogical approaches for Angela was group work. She tried to change group members each week to help students widen their horizon through talking with different people. As for Britney, the effective practical pedagogical approach was related to different teaching subjects. Error correction was effective for her to teach writing and grammar, while discussion was workable to teach listening. To see the whole map, she thought communication was valid, by which ESL teachers could adapt students to the ELP classrooms as every student had different problems in learning English. Cathy gave a special activity called running dictation. She explained:

Two students are grouped as a team. There is a text hanging on the wall. One student reads, and the other student writes...One student should go over there to

remember as much as they can in a fixed time. He or she can remember it by word order, sentence structure, and other ways. Then, he or she comes back to the other student to say the text and the other student writes it down until the whole text has been written... They sit together to read what they have written and edit the mistakes in their opinions. Then, I will give them the original copy of the text.

One student reads word by word, and the other one checks closely.

With this activity, students could practice reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar simultaneously. Group work, discussion, and running diction were all involved in teaching with cooperative learning, and error correction was used as a part of teaching with feedback. In short, all 3 participants referred to instructional strategies as part of the teaching methodology for an effective practical pedagogical approach.

Ideally, Angela would like to teach English language by topics rather than by skills. To illustrate her point, she said, "I will incorporate all language skills without using skill-based curriculum. Every day, I will teach students to practice a little bit of every language skill." Britney shared the same dream. Britney spoke to this more deeply, sharing her desire to teach listening and speaking together, reading and writing together, and grammar to connect everything. Angela also mentioned taking students out into the world and practicing English on a trip, which was the same as one aspect of Cathy's ideal practical pedagogical approach. Furthermore, Angela hoped to use games in which students could pay attention to the teaching content and improve their English quickly because young students tended to enjoy this kind of teaching material. Likewise, Cathy said, "students know that they come to the classroom to do the same thing every day. It's boring. When students are bored, they do not pay attention. Everything becomes very

interesting except the lesson, and then the learning stops.” The last aspect Angela said was not about teaching methodology but teaching materials. She wished to bring a lot of regalia to ELP classrooms for students to see and touch. Britney expected she could let students listen to real academic lectures to learn English and give students consistent feedback in her future ELP classrooms. Moreover, she hoped to change the specific teaching environment in the ELP. She wanted to have only 10 students in one ELP classroom so as to accommodate individual needs. All students would be from different parts of the world, and, thus, students would have to use English in the classroom. Every ESL teacher could have his or her own computer library to teach writing. Cathy spoke about selecting teaching content in the future: “I hope to ask students what they want to learn and what they need to learn to balance with what I want to teach and what she needs to teach.” In summary, their responses to ideal pedagogical approaches varied from teaching methodology to teaching content to teaching environment based on their experience. However, the aspect they considered most important was teaching methodology.

In detail, question 8, 9, and 12 state responses about teaching methodology of practical pedagogical approach. The participating teachers were asked to provide three most helpful teaching strategies, three least helpful strategies, and the most effective activities.

There were no common answers for the most helpful teaching strategies. ESL teachers’ teaching strategies varied from individual to individual even though they all taught in the same ELP. Angela found that it was beneficial for students to learn English if she asked students to do group work, and to discuss their tasks in certain situations. She

said, “I actually used a lot of role-play in class... I try to make them express their personal opinion. They can feel relaxed and have fun in role-play. It is a way to practice their English in another context.” Britney said error correction, lesson review, and student presentation were workable for her to improve ESL students’ English proficiency effectively. She also mentioned role-play in another way, saying, “If we do role-play in class, they will present their dialogue to their classmates.” Cathy noted that student self-correction and peer teaching helped ESL students learn English quickly. She explained the benefits of peer teaching, “It can make the teaching content very simple. It also helps students to learn the materials very well when they teach somebody else.” Responses to question 8 relating to the most helpful teaching strategies coincided with responses to question 7 about the effective practical pedagogical approaches.

When interviewed about the three least helpful strategies, the 3 participating teachers had different responses. Angela said that giving students too many or too difficult tasks was not helpful to improve their language proficiency. She explained that too many tasks made students too busy to pay attention to what she said in class, and too difficult tasks made students automatically shut down and not do those assignments. Besides those two strategies, Angela mentioned that another least helpful one was to force students to express their opinions in front of the whole class. She stated, “If they do not want to, they will get shocked and not talk anymore.” Cathy indicated that doing lectures, teaching textbooks word by word, and overloading information were least helpful for her to teach ESL students in the ELP classroom. To emphasize the disadvantage of overloading information in her classroom, she said, “Sometimes less is more because students can remember, use, and understand it.” Britney provided a special

answer by saying, “Every strategy has its usage which can benefit students.” In her opinion, there were no least helpful teaching strategies as the effectiveness of strategies depended on how teachers used them.

In response to the question about the most effective activities to incorporate for effective instructional strategies, both Angela and Britney mentioned role-play and brain storming discussion. However, they used these activities differently as Angela applied two activities to practice grammar, whereas Britney applied role-play to teach speaking by “giving students seminars and asking students to do role-play” and brain storming discussion to teach writing by “asking students to write down ideas on the board and draw pictures on the paper during pre-writing section.” Specifically, every participant supported different effective activity. Angela talked about drilling to help students remember the answer to some questions. Britney pointed out,

When I teach reading, sometimes I let my students read aloud. If they do not want to do that, I never force them. But if they feel comfortable, I ask them to read a paragraph and then discuss about it.

Cathy noted,

Group work, peer share, is especially effective...Students have time to think about something by themselves and then write about it. They share the information with their partner by talking about it. Then they share it with everybody in the classroom.

Although every participant had different instructional strategies and activities in the ELP, they integrated effective ones into theoretical pedagogical approaches so as to bridge the gap between the practical and theoretical pedagogical approach.

Furthermore, question 2 illustrates responses about teaching content of practical pedagogical approaches. All 3 participants provided considerable detail about how they integrate other English language skills into one language skill course.

Participants had three ways to combine reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammar in one skill-based course. For Angela, across the levels, depending on the skill, the teaching content changed a lot. Britney emphasized using speaking in her class no matter what language skill she taught. She explained, “When I teach grammar, I have to speak and students have to speak back to me...If I teach pre-listening, I need to have something to discuss.” Cathy addressed all skills of English language. She said, “If I do not give all the five skills in one class one day, because sometimes it is impossible, I try to balance it out throughout the week.” It was difficult for them to say the exact percentage of different language skills in one classroom but they all taught multiple language skills in one ELP course.

**Teaching material.** In response to a question about teaching materials in the ELP, all 3 participants elaborated their feelings towards textbooks used in the ELP. Angela said that in general most of the textbooks she used in the ELP were nominal except a couple of current books for both grammar and speaking. She declared,

I do not think they present a variety of tasks to students. I do not think they present English language in context...Lots of books are very dry and outdated and present information that do not apply to young students anymore.

Britney believed that all textbooks she used in the ELP were good because “the ELP always use new textbooks.” Cathy noted that she had different feelings about different English language skill textbooks, stating that the grammar textbook was dry but other

textbooks were great. She demonstrated her point: “I did not like the grammar textbook the ELP used last term because the topics are scattered and the grammar explanation is unorganized and confusing...Reading, writing, listening, and speaking textbooks are good.” Although they had different attitudes towards the teaching materials in the ELP, they all pointed out what would be good textbooks for ESL students in the ELP. Angela noted that good textbooks should present English language in context with current topics. Britney thought that textbooks were always changing in the ELP so they were good for teaching ESL students. Cathy mentioned that a good grammar textbook should focus on grammar with theme-based chapters to reveal interesting things students know. Cathy believed that other textbooks were beneficial for ESL students to satisfy teachers’ and students’ needs.

**The most challenging English language skill for ESL students.** Because all 3 teachers had taught every level of ESL students from the beginner to the advanced in the ELP, they were asked to describe the most challenging English language skills for ESL students. Angela found that writing was difficult for ESL students because the structure was different from students’ native languages, and Britney felt grammar was the most challenging English language skill for ESL students because they could not structure sentences correctly in lessons on writing and speaking, and they could not understand every sentence precisely in reading and listening. Interestingly, Cathy presented a different perspective on the most challenging language skills for ESL students, namely, that students from different places have different challenges related to the focus of language study in their home country. For ESL Chinese students, she said, “Asian students find speaking very difficult.” Participating teachers had three radically different

views towards students' most challenging skill and, consequently, had different key points on their teaching.

**Suggestions.** In regard to a question on suggestions for developing a better understanding of teaching ESL, the participating teachers generally believed that the interview questions covered nearly all the important factors to teach ESL, including theoretical pedagogical approach, practical pedagogical approach, teaching material, and the most challenging English language skill for ESL students. Angela offered two recommendations: (a) teacher-made teaching materials and (b) technology in ELP classrooms. Angela noted that those factors could also influence ESL pedagogy. However, there was overwhelming agreement among the teachers that the elements investigated in the interviews were necessary to understand ESL teachers' pedagogy.

### **Findings from ESL Chinese Students**

After analyzing the interview data from ESL teachers to determine the specific pedagogical approaches they applied or were seeking to apply in the ELP classrooms, the researcher analyzed the questionnaire data from ESL Chinese students to assess what pedagogical approaches they perceived to be the most effective in practice. Demographic information, as the first part of the questionnaire, was analyzed in order to create an overall view of the students' background information. Questionnaire data, as the second part of the questionnaire, reflected ESL Chinese students' second language acquisition and needs with respect to ESL pedagogy in ELP.

### **Background Data**

Background data were collected on five demographic features: gender, age, the amount of time in the ELP, expected study time in Canadian universities, and study level.

The variables that were controlled included the country of origin and the program level. The researcher analyzed the background data by calculating the number (n), frequency counts, range, mean, and standard deviation (SD). All participants were ESL Chinese students in one ELP. Of the participants, 20 (67%) were female and 10 (33%) were male. 8 females and 2 males were in Level 3; 8 females and 2 males were in Level 4; 6 females and 4 males were in Level 5. Because there was little difference in the gender distribution among Levels 3, 4, and 5, the researcher could compare the study results between male participants and female participants.

The participants represented a narrow age range (18-22 years old), with a mean age of 19.97 years old. The standard deviation (SD) of participants' age was 1.016, which meant the scores of age were close together. Thus, all participating students were of a similar age. Therefore, the ESL pedagogy investigated in this study could be applied to this age range of students.

Furthermore, the participants all spent a period of time studying in the selected ELP, varying from 2 months to 18 months (1.5 years), with a mean of 8.67 months. The SD of time period in the ELP was 3.019, which indicated the scores of study time were more spread out. Thus, students from different levels had different months of studying experience. The range of study in the ELP for Level 3 students was from 2 to 8 months, for a range of 6 months. For Level 4 students, the amount of study time in the ELP ranged from 7 months to 1 year, for a range of 5 months. For Level 5 students, the amount of study time in the ELP ranged from 9 months to 1.5 years, representing a range of 9 months. The findings suggest that ESL Chinese students stayed in Level 4 nearly for the same length of time as Level 3; however, ESL Chinese students stayed in Level 5

much longer than in Level 3 and Level 4. On average, the amount of study time in the ELP for Level 3 students was 6 months; the time for Level 4 students was 8.3 months; the time for Level 5 students was 10.8 months. The difference of study time in the ELP between Level 3 and Level 4 students was 2.3 months; the difference of study time in the ELP between Level 4 and Level 5 students was 2.5 months. These data indicate that ESL Chinese students progressed steadily from the lower level to the next-higher level in the ELP. They also suggest that ESL Chinese students could complete one level of study in the ELP within 2.4 months with 12 months to complete all six levels in the ELP. Compared to the predicted 21 months to complete the ELP, ESL Chinese students' language learning was quick.

Finally, the participants hoped to study an average of 3.86 years ( $SD=0.778$ ) in a university except 2 ESL Chinese students who had no idea about their future studies. These results imply that nearly all the students expected to have a long period of study time in Canadian universities, which signifies that the ESL Chinese students studied in the ELP for academic purposes. The summary of background information of ESL students is illustrated in Appendix C.

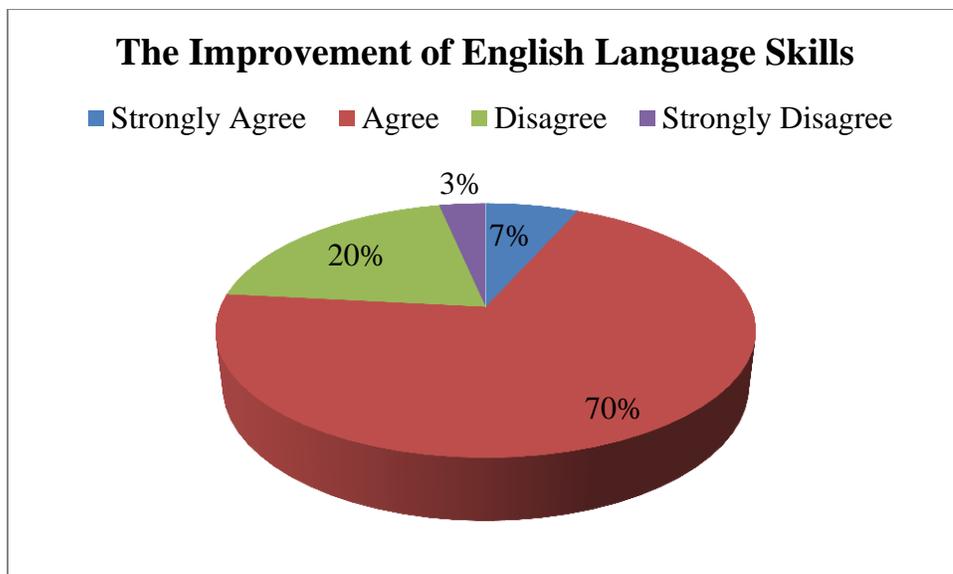
### **Questionnaire Data**

In the second part of the questionnaire, the student participants responded to a set of 15 questions to get a general idea about their English language improvement for academic success and their attitudes towards ESL teachers' pedagogy in the ELP. The qualitative data gathered through the close-ended and open-ended questionnaire items were grouped thematically rather than in the question order. The 15 questions were divided into five broad groups: (a) self-evaluation, (b) the importance of different English

language skills, (c) evaluation of practical pedagogical approaches in the ELP classroom, (d) evaluation of textbooks, and (e) recommendation to improve ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches. In the following sections, the results pertaining to each groups explored were presented. In referring to each ESL Chinese student, the researcher numbered each participant from student 1 to student 30. Participating students had been limited to ESL Chinese students in the higher level of the ELP. The background data of the questionnaire showed that the participants had a narrow age range and most planned to pursue future academic studies. The researcher applied descriptive statistics to "meaningfully describe many pieces of data with a few indices" (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p. 413). The researcher analyzed with the descriptive statistics of numbers, frequency counts, mean, and standard deviation (SD), as appropriateness for specific questions.

**Self-evaluation.** Questions 1, 8, and 9 revealed responses of ESL Chinese students' self-evaluation on English language improvement, by asking them to (a) summarize their English language improvement in general, (b) rate their language skills before entering into the ELP, and (c) rate their language skills after entering in the ELP.

To determine students' perception of their English language improvement in the ELP, students were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that their English language had improved. The data were analyzed by calculating frequency counts for students' attitudes. In the question, 7% of students (n=2) strongly agreed; 70% of students (n=21) agreed; 20% of students (n=6) disagreed; and 3% of students (n=1) strongly disagreed that their English language had improved (see Figure 2). Although a great number of students had positive thoughts about their English improvement in the ELP, some students still had negative thoughts. This result implies



*Figure 2.* The improvement of English language skills.

that the ESL teachers' pedagogy was effective for most but not all ESL students in the ELP.

For further detail, the researcher compared how participating students rated their language skills before entering into the ELP as opposed to how they rated their language skills after entering into the ELP. Participating students were asked to rate their language proficiency before entering into the ELP and after entering into the ELP, by (a) weak, (b) moderate, (c) strong, and (d) very strong. Responses were coded (a) =1, (b) =2, (c) =3, and (d) =4. The data were analyzed by calculating the mean and standard deviation.

Towards those two questions, 2 participants had no answers. Table 2 demonstrates that the mean of male participants' rating scores to their previous English language proficiency was 1.56, whereas the mean of their rating scores to their present English language proficiency was 2.45; the mean of female participants' rating scores to their previous English language proficiency was 1.84, whereas the mean of their rating scores to their present English language proficiency was 2.42. Although both male and female participants improved their English language proficiency, their language still required to be improved as the mean of their rating scores to present English language proficiency did not reach 4. Moreover, Table 2 shows that the standard deviation (SD) of male participants' rating scores to their present English language proficiency was 0.73, while the SD of female participants' rating scores to their present English language proficiency was 0.52. However, male and female participants had the similar mean score of their present language proficiency. Thus, male participants' English language proficiency was more stable than female participants' English language proficiency after entering into the ELP.

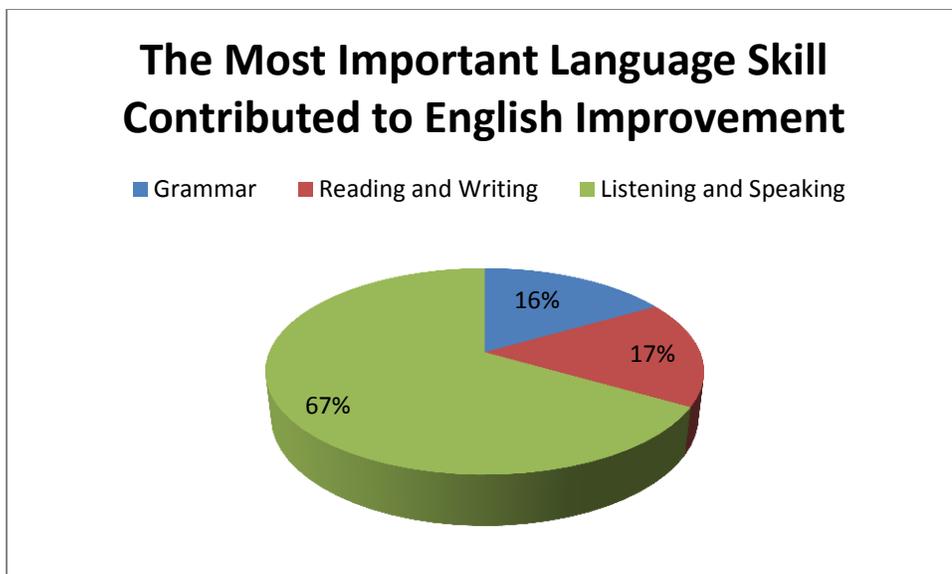
Table 2

*Self-evaluation of English Language Proficiency*

	Male			Female		
	n	mean	SD	n	mean	SD
Before entering into the ELP	9	1.56	0.53	19	1.84	2.42
After entering into the ELP	9	2.45	0.73	19	0.37	0.51

**The importance of English language skills.** Question 3 asked participating students to rate the importance for academic study of the three English language skills of grammar, reading and writing, and listening and speaking. Participants responded on a 5-point scale of increasing importance. The data for this question were analyzed by calculating the mean for each skill. Compared to the other skills, listening and speaking skills ( $m=4.5$ ) were judged to be the most important skills for academic study, reading and writing skills were next most important ( $m=4.3$ ), and grammar skills ( $m=4.1$ ) were the least important. The similar means indicate that all three English language skills were seen as being important, but participants believed listening and speaking skills were more important than the other two skills for academic study.

Moreover, participating students were asked to identify which of the three English language skills contributed most to academic success so as to evaluate the importance of the different language skills from another side. The data were analyzed by calculating percentages for each skill (see Figure 3). Data analysis indicated that listening and speaking (67%) were judged to be the skills in which proficiency contributed the greatest to English improvement, reading and writing proficiency (17%) was judged to contribute the next greatest to English improvement, and grammar proficiency (16%) was viewed as the area that contributed the least to English improvement. The findings appear to be similar to the rating in the previous section, where listening and speaking were rated as the most important language skills and grammar was rated as the least important language skill. These findings indicate that greater proficiency inspires greater English improvement and greater English improvement springs from more proficient language skills. However, there is a difference between the two questions. The first set of data



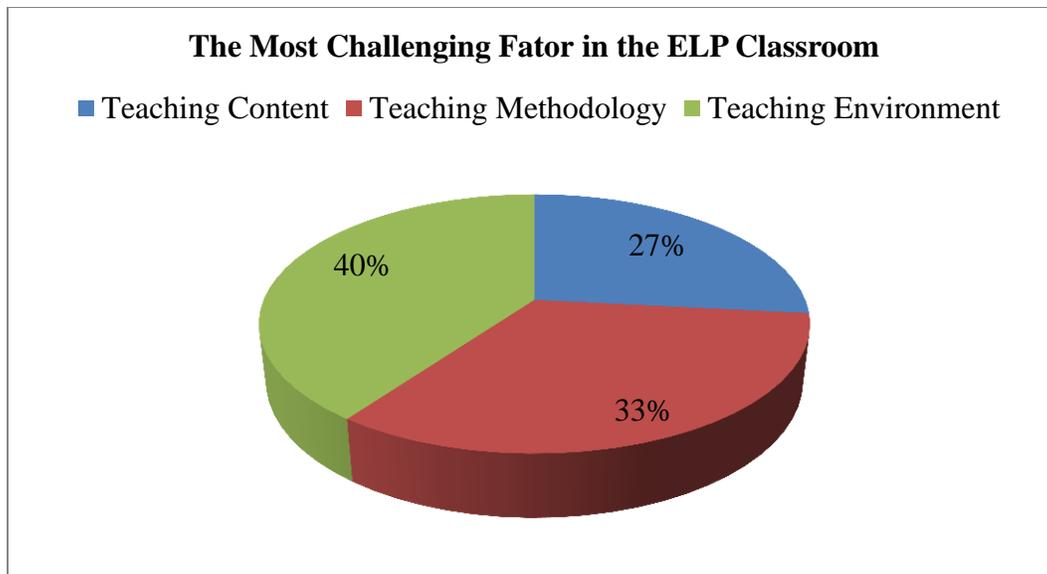
*Figure 3.* The most important language skill contributed to English improvement.

showed little difference in the importance of all the English language skills; by contrast, in the second set of data (see Figure 3), the importance of all three English language skills was more varied, as the majority of students thought that listening and speaking proficiency contributed to English improvement far more than the other language skills.

### **Evaluation of practical pedagogical approaches in the ELP classroom.**

Recognizing that practical pedagogical approaches in the ELP classroom are somewhat different from theoretical pedagogical approaches to ESL teaching, this study sought to discover students' perceptions of practical pedagogical approaches. The researcher collected qualitative data with one close-ended question and four open-ended questions to investigate (a) the most challenging elements to learning English in ELP classrooms in general, (b) the helpful elements to learning English in ELP classrooms in detail, and (c) the specific activities that help students to improve their English.

Question 4 asked what ESL Chinese students thought were the most challenging elements of practical pedagogical approaches to learning English in ELP classrooms. Given three choices (i.e., teaching methodology, teaching content, and teaching environment), participating students chose the element that they thought was the most challenging factor. The data were analyzed by calculating percentage counts for each option. As Figure 4 demonstrates, 40% of students found the teaching environment to be the most challenging factor in ELP classrooms, 33% of students identified teaching methodology, and 27% of students believed teaching content was the most challenging factor. Some interesting results emerged from the data. First, students thought the teaching environment was more important than teaching methodology and teaching content to learn English in academic settings in Canada. In this study, the external



*Figure 4.* The most challenging factor in the ELP classroom.

teaching environment was restricted to one university ELP in Ontario, and the survey questions considered only the internal teaching classroom environment.

The finding reveals that the Chinese students tended to be influenced by the classroom environment. Although teaching content was the least important element in academic study, it still influenced ESL students' English language learning. That is to say, ESL Chinese students needed not only the effective teaching methodology but also a good environment and relevant content when they learned English in the ELP.

In detail, students were asked to identify the most helpful factor to improve their grammar, reading and writing, and listening and speaking through question 5, 6, and 7. The data of these three open-ended questions were analyzed by calculating the number and percentage counts of each response. The findings were summarized in Table 3. To improve grammar, 19 students (63%) found teaching methodology was the most helpful factor; 6 students (20%) found the teaching environment was the most helpful factor; 3 students (10%) found the teaching content was the most helpful factor; 2 students (7%) had no idea. To improve reading and writing, 23 students (77%) believed teaching methodology was the most helpful factor; 4 students (13%) believed the teaching content was the most helpful factor; 3 students (10%) had no idea. To improve listening and speaking, 23 students (77%) thought teaching methodology was the most helpful factor; 5 students (17%) thought the teaching environment was the most helpful factor; 2 students (7%) had no idea. In conclusion, no matter which English language skills improved, teaching methodology was the most helpful factor. The priority for improving ESL pedagogy was effective teaching methodology. When asked about the teaching methodology, most students mentioned teaching with cooperative learning, teaching with

Table 3

*The Most Helpful Factor to Improve English Language Skills*

	Grammar		Reading and Writing		Listening and Speaking	
	n	%	N	%	N	%
Teaching Methodology	19	63	23	77	23	77
Teaching Environment	6	20	0	0	5	17
Teaching Content	3	10	4	13	0	0
No Attitude	2	7	3	10	2	7

feedback, and teaching with extensive reading as being most helpful. By comparison, the teaching environment was indifferent for learning reading and writing skills, but it influenced learning the other two skills; teaching content was indifferent for learning listening and speaking skills, but it affected the learning of the other two skills. These results imply that the students sought different pedagogical approaches in learning different skills.

Question 14 asked participating students to list three of the most effective activities in ELP classrooms. The data were analyzed by counting the number of each response. Not all the participants answered the question or listed three choices. Among the responses, 10 participants mentioned discussion as the most effective activity; 7 participants talked about presentation; 6 participants noted peer teaching and learning; 5 participants voted playing games; 4 participants believed watching video was the most effective activity. Other responses included an academic trip (n=3), scenario (n=1), telling jokes (n=1), and argument (n=1). These results imply that ESL teachers diversify activities in ELP classrooms instead of using certain effective activities all the time.

**Evaluation of textbooks.** In questions 10, 11, and 12, the students were asked to evaluate grammar, reading and writing, and listening and speaking textbooks they used in the ELP. The data of the response from those questions were analyzed by counting the number of each response. The students' responses are listed in Table 4.

On one hand, 6 students liked the grammar textbooks, while 12 students liked the reading and writing textbooks and 12 students liked the listening and speaking textbooks. On the other hand, 20 students disliked grammar textbooks compared to 13 students who disliked reading and writing textbooks and 13 students who disliked listening and

Table 4

*Attitudes towards English Language Textbooks*

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	Like	Dislike	Indifferent
Grammar	6	20	4
Reading and Writing	12	13	5
Listening and Speaking	12	13	5

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speaking textbooks. Finally, 4 students were indifferent and 5 students were indifferent to grammar textbooks; 5 students were indifferent to reading and writing textbooks; listening and speaking textbooks. These various results imply that most of the participating students cared about the textbooks the teachers used in the ELP. Furthermore, most of participating students disliked grammar textbook.

**Recommendations to improve ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches.** To discover what students expect from ESL teaching and what issues they considered significant to be investigated, the students were asked two open-ended questions. One question asked the students to recommend instructional strategies of practical pedagogical approaches in ELP classrooms to improve their English language skills. The responses of the question were varied from participant to participant. It was difficult to analyze the data by statistics; therefore, the recommendations are listed as follows: teaching with games, teaching with movies, teaching with music, grammar-based instruction, telling stories, theme-based instruction, interpreting new vocabulary, conducting some conversation for a long time, communicating with students instead of focusing on textbooks, teaching with cooperative learning, telling jokes, doing seminars, giving handouts of some important information, doing some field based exercises, processing debates, using more visual aids, doing role-play, teaching with feedback, connecting textbooks to real life, and teaching with rewards. These responses address a wide range of issues that the students considered to be important, especially teaching with cooperative learning and teaching with feedback.

Another question asked the students for suggestions to develop a better understanding of the effectiveness of ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches. Only

participating students offered recommendations to the question. Student 3 stated, “You should ask teachers’ responsibility of ESL teaching.” Student 11 noted, “I want to know why the ELP do not change system, such as different subject in different level.” Student 16 said, “I hope ESL teachers connect their teaching to local culture.” To the end, their responses involved teaching management and teaching content.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter offered perspectives from both teachers and students on ESL teachers’ pedagogy in the ELP. These complementary perspectives provide a well-rounded assessment of ESL pedagogy in one university ELP in Ontario. The analysis of the teachers’ responses in the interview revealed what specific theoretical and practical pedagogical approaches were used by teachers. In practice, ESL teachers not only followed some theoretical pedagogical approaches but also incorporated effective methodology, valuable content, and a comfortable environment to teach students. The analysis of the students’ responses on the questionnaire showed how ESL teachers’ pedagogy could improve students’ English language proficiency and how improved ESL pedagogy could satisfy ESL Chinese students’ needs. How to ameliorate pedagogical approaches in practice will be the focus of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

This study investigated the value of combining theoretical pedagogical approaches and practical pedagogical approaches for improving ESL pedagogy in one university ELP in Ontario. Whereas traditional researches on pedagogical approaches usually explore one or two specific theoretical pedagogical approaches in practice, this study intended to find a plan of connecting theoretical pedagogical approaches with practical pedagogical approaches. Applying mixed-method exploratory research design, it investigated what pedagogical approaches ESL teachers perceive to be the most effective in practice and what pedagogical approaches ESL students need most for academic study in Canada. The study was undertaken in order to make English language programs in Canadian universities more effective in teaching ESL students for academic purpose and to improve recent researches on ESL pedagogy.

### **Summary of the Study**

The researcher applied a mixed-method exploratory research design to assess the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches ESL teachers used in practice. In the first phase, three individual interviews were conducted in one university ELP in Ontario to explore ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches. In the second phase, the qualitative findings from these interviews were used to develop 30 questions for ESL Chinese students to identify those pedagogical approaches the students found to be most useful. Data were collected by means of digital voice recordings of the interviews and detailed written questionnaires. The responses to ESL teachers' interviews were analyzed and categorized for themes, and the responses to ESL students' questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis of the data from ESL teachers found the theoretical pedagogical

approaches they believed and the practical pedagogical approaches they applied in the ELP classrooms generally. The analysis of the data from ESL students gave rise to some practical suggestions for ESL teachers to improve their pedagogy in the ELP.

The findings from the qualitative interview data indicated that ESL teachers had definite ideas about what pedagogical approaches are effective for academic purpose in practice. Their picture of effective pedagogical approaches was influenced by past experience in ESL teaching, current trends in pedagogy choice, and future plans for enhancements to pedagogy in the ELP. While their ideas varied considerably, there was consensus that they preferred communicative approaches to traditional approaches and they tended to incorporate their preferred effective instructional strategies and activities into their pedagogical approaches.

The findings from the quantitative questionnaire data demonstrated that ESL Chinese students held specific ideas about what they expected from their teachers to improve ESL pedagogy. They talked about effectiveness of ESL pedagogy on a variety of subjects, including self-evaluation, the importance of different English language skills, evaluation of practical pedagogical approaches in the ELP classroom, evaluation of textbooks, and recommendation to improve ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches. Although ESL Chinese students improved their English language proficiency in the ELP, the consensus was that the ideal approach needs (a) to emphasize the teaching of listening and speaking skills, (b) to apply diversified strategies and activities, and (c) to choose new grammar textbooks tailored to ESL Chinese students' needs. The data also showed that participating students stayed in Level 5 much longer than in Level 3 and Level 4 and

that male participants' English language proficiency was more stable than female participants' English language proficiency after entering into the ELP.

### **Discussion**

In this study, the time for ESL Chinese students to improve their English language proficiency was significantly shorter than the predicted study time for ESL students in the ELP. ESL Chinese students can complete one level of study in the ELP within 2.4 months on average based on the questionnaire data, but the ELP explored in this study is a 14-week one-semester intensive program that expects students to take an average of 3.5 months to advance to the next level. In this program, ESL participating teachers reported that they applied communicative approaches, including communicative, task-based, content-based language teaching approach, as the theory to teach ESL students. These findings suggest that relying on the three communicative approaches as the preferred teaching theory can improve ESL students' language proficiency. It verifies Springer and Collins' (2008) claim that communicative approaches are effective to help ESL students improve English proficiency.

ESL participating teachers stated that they took into account the teaching environment, teaching methodology, and teaching content when they developed their pedagogical approaches for students. They also indicated that ESL students from different countries have different concerns related to the three aspects of practical pedagogical approaches. These two findings confirm that it is critically important for ESL teachers to explore the learning concerns of ESL Chinese students and to address these concerns as they plan their approach. As Ajayi (2008) notes, the role of teachers in classrooms is to investigate students' learning needs in a problematized form. From the

ESL teachers' perspectives, they incorporated certain instructional strategies and activities into their pedagogical approaches because they were found to be more effective than others. However, based on the survey results and supported by Ajayi's observation, ESL teachers still need to ask themselves: Do these instructional strategies and activities satisfy ESL Chinese students' needs? How do we make our pedagogical approaches relevant to the learning needs of ESL Chinese students? In other words, ESL teachers should also take into account whether their pedagogical approaches are satisfying ESL Chinese students' needs in practice.

One of the main problems for ESL Chinese students in language learning was acquiring listening and speaking skills for future academic study. This particular problem can be overridden if the principles of communicative approaches are adopted in English language teaching. The three communicative approaches are effective in improving all three language skills comprehensively (Krashen, 1985; Long, 1996; Swain, 1995), but they pay special attention to the "communicative competence" (Hymes, 1972) of listening and speaking skills. Although ESL teachers applied the three theoretical communicative approaches to teach students, they balanced all language skills evenly rather than emphasizing listening and speaking skills. The results from the ESL Chinese students imply that ESL teachers should change their teaching content to focus on listening and speaking skills when they follow the principles of communicative approaches.

In addition to noting a shortage of listening and speaking skills teaching, the ESL Chinese students called for diversified instructional strategies and activities. To draw on various instructional strategies and activities to meet a specific teaching context, ESL

teachers might, for example, apply different methodologies to teach students at different levels. As Roessingh, Kover, and Watt (2005) argue, teaching content needs to be “big enough” for students to take what they need from an instructional perspective. ESL teachers can also apply diversified instructional strategies and activities to motivate students to learn English intrinsically by helping students to be curious about every course (Deci & Ryan, 1985). However, the ESL teachers in this study only applied certain instructional strategies and activities to teach students. Thus, it is necessary to expand beyond the preferred instructional and activities in ELP classrooms.

Finally, the grammar textbooks used in the ELP did not meet the ESL Chinese students’ needs. Grammar enables ESL students to communicate effectively and accurately. As Fan (2009) states, the more often a grammatical structure is practiced, the more likely a message can be expressed rapidly and accurately because the prefabricated form that has been stored in the brain saves processing effort. The grammar textbooks should be designed to be genuinely communicative for practicing both writing and speaking, and psychologically authentic to raise students’ interests. The findings from this study revealed that ESL teachers did not think grammar skills were as important as the other two English language skills. Thus, they did not pay much attention to what kind of grammar textbooks they used to teach students. The findings suggest that ESL teachers should change grammar textbooks to teach ESL Chinese students.

The finding that the ESL teachers designed or modified their teaching methodology and teaching content according to students’ learning needs reveals a certain kind of relationship between theoretical pedagogical approaches and practical pedagogical approaches. The theoretical pedagogical approach can and should be applied

to the practical pedagogical approach, but the wise teacher would not put the theoretical pedagogical approach into practice automatically. Theoretical pedagogical approaches are proposed by researchers, whereas practical pedagogical approaches are practiced by teachers. These two groups see ESL pedagogy from different perspectives. Nassaji (2012) pointed out that much of the practical impact of theoretical pedagogical approaches is lost if the language used in research documents is not easily accessible to teachers. The findings of this study suggest that ESL teachers might use the principles of theoretical approaches but in practice they select and modify instructional practices for their ELP classrooms.

### **Recommendations**

The results of this study may be of interest to ESL teachers, applied linguists, educational researchers, and others who are interested in ESL pedagogy. An understanding of how to improve ESL pedagogy arising from this study can be used to support ESL learning in university ELPs in Ontario, and can also help to create more effective ESL pedagogy for other ELPs in Canada and elsewhere. Given the exploratory nature of this study, pedagogical and research recommendations arising from the findings of this study are presented as suggestions for ESL teachers and educational researchers.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that ESL teachers in ELP should be trained to modify the three communicative approaches of communicative, task-based, and content-based language teaching to teach ESL Chinese students. Communicative approaches provide the best alternative to traditional approaches for teaching ESL Chinese students. According to Shannon (2006) and Zhang (2006), ESL

Chinese students receive traditional approaches in China, so they have a communicative deficiency in their English language learning when they come to a Canadian ELP. By following the three communicative approaches as principles, teachers can convert them from passive learners to active learners because those approaches can motivate students to communicate in English. However, even if ESL teachers apply the three communicative approaches in the ELP classrooms, those approaches (a) should concentrate on listening and speaking skills, (b) should provide diversified instructional strategies and activities, and (c) should incorporate current teaching materials. Remedying the instructional situation will entail new teaching environment, methodology, and content that are based on the three communicative approaches.

With respect to the teaching environment, teachers should make it comfortable for the students. Nakaprasit (2010) has found that the classroom environment has a remarkable influence on students. Specially, he found that students are highly motivated when they are taught by highly motivated teachers in a student-centered classroom. ESL teachers can increase motivation by inviting other ESL teachers or university professors to teach a course collaboratively, or they can organize an academic trip and teach students on the way, which can provide “breathing space, space to reflect, space to plan, space to discuss, space to be creative and investigative” (Tinker Sachs, 2002, p. 45; cited in Andon & Eckerth, 2009) for both teachers and students. The best way for teachers to maximize the improvement of students’ language proficiency in ELP classrooms is to establish a supportive environment in which students are motivated to engage in activities appropriate to their background.

With respect to methodology, the most practical implication of modifying the

three communicative approaches is that ESL teachers should not limit themselves to the instructional strategies identified in the theory of communicative approaches. They should combine strategies of communicative approaches with other effective instructional strategies such as Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul's (2012) teaching with cooperative learning, Mi's (2009) teaching with feedback, and Lyman's (2002) think-pair-share strategy. ESL teachers should have a good understanding of the principles and rationale relevant to communicative approaches, so that they can choose effective instructional strategies that are consistent with the goal of communicative approaches. That is to say, eclecticism is applied to choose effective instructional strategies. Teachers should plan various interesting class activities well in advance to ensure that they incorporate effective strategies based on the three communicative approaches.

With respect to teaching content, ESL teachers should adopt theme-based content that integrates all three English language skills and academic knowledge, with an emphasis on listening and speaking skills. Theme-based teaching exposes students to academic knowledge through integrated themes rather than isolated facts. With theme-based teaching, students can encounter similar content topics across different academic disciplines in one theme. Theme-based content teaching can also trigger students' previous academic knowledge. Interest arises as ESL Chinese students increase their knowledge of a topic with appropriately increasing learning challenges (Grabe & Stoller, 1997). Theme-based content teaching also includes a number of activities to foster students' all three English language skills. Therefore, it provides students with better opportunities to improve their English language proficiency and to lay the foundation for their future academic studies (Arslan & Saka, 2010; Song, 2006). More importantly, as

Arslan and Saka argue, theme-based content teaching helps students learn grammar better than general English. The participating ESL Chinese students needed to learn grammar skills profoundly, and if ESL teachers apply theme-based content teaching, they can satisfy the students' needs.

### **Research Implications**

In order to draw better conclusions as to the effect of the study, more larger-scale research is recommended. This study involved 3 ESL teachers and 30 ESL Chinese students to explore appropriate ESL pedagogy for ESL Chinese students in one ELP. The success of the exploration leads to a call for its expansion with many more ESL teachers and ESL Chinese students in this program but also in other universities in Ontario and elsewhere to determine the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

The research base has revealed that students with different backgrounds differ very much in the ways they learn English as the second language (Ibrahim, 2010). Thus, it is recommended to conduct research with different groups of ESL students who are from different countries to discover their various concerns to ESL pedagogy in ELP. ESL teachers might apply different theoretical pedagogical approaches as principles to teach different groups of students. This study establishes a basis for future researches on improving any kind of theoretical pedagogical approaches of ESL pedagogy by connecting theoretical pedagogical approaches to practical pedagogical approaches.

To fulfill the pedagogical implications, more research needs to be conducted on how to organize the ELP to support ESL teachers to improve ESL pedagogy. Improving ESL pedagogy in one university ELP in Ontario is a multifaceted challenge that is more than a matter of establishing a supportive teaching environment, applying diversified

teaching methodologies, and using theme-based teaching materials. Effective ESL pedagogy also depends on administrative support, quality ESL programming, teaching management, and collaborative working relationships among ESL teachers and their colleagues. Although these variables were not investigated in this study, the study establishes a rationale and methodology to inform other studies aimed at improving ESL pedagogy from the bottom up for ESL teachers in ELP classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

The three communicative pedagogical approaches, including communicative, task-based, and content-based language teaching approaches, proved to be effective for ESL Chinese students in terms of their language acquisition. The modified communicative approaches are practical and effective because those approaches satisfy students' needs. If ESL teachers appropriately modify the communicative approaches on English teaching, ESL Chinese students can be more successful in their future study upon the completion of the ELP. The modified communicative approaches can prepare students for their future studies in Canadian universities. This kind of "evidence-based practice, based on systematic research evidence" (Nassaji, 2012), can help ESL teachers bridge the gap between theoretical pedagogical approaches and practical pedagogical approaches to improve ESL pedagogy.

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## Appendix A

### Questions for Teachers (the Interview)

#### PART ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF ESL TEACHERS

1. Gender

Male\_\_\_\_\_

Female\_\_\_\_\_

2. Age in years

20-29\_\_\_\_\_

30-39\_\_\_\_\_

40-49\_\_\_\_\_

50 or older\_\_\_\_

3. Education

Certificate of College\_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor Degree of University\_\_\_\_\_

Master Degree of University\_\_\_\_\_

Higher Academic Degree\_\_\_\_\_

4. Number of Years of Teaching Experience

Less than 1 year\_\_\_\_\_

2 year-5 years\_\_\_\_\_

6 years-9 years\_\_\_\_\_

10 years or more\_\_\_\_\_

5. Courses Taught

Reading\_\_\_\_\_

Writing\_\_\_\_\_

Speaking\_\_\_\_\_

Listening\_\_\_\_\_

Grammar\_\_\_\_\_

#### 6. Preferred Courses

Reading\_\_\_\_\_

Writing\_\_\_\_\_

Speaking\_\_\_\_\_

Listening\_\_\_\_\_

Grammar\_\_\_\_\_

7. Indicate the importance of each language skill for the success of academic study, using the following 5-point scale.

1. Not at all important
2. Somewhat important
3. Fairly important
4. Important
5. Very important

Grammar\_\_\_\_\_

Reading and Writing\_\_\_\_\_

Listening and Speaking\_\_\_\_\_

#### PART TWO: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What level of students do you usually teach?

2. What percentage of language skills including reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammar do you instruct in your classroom? Please explain.
3. What are the biggest challenges for you to teach ESL? How do you overcome them?
4. What particular theoretical approach (total physical response, grammar-translation, audio-lingual method, lexical, communicative language teaching, content-based language teaching, task-based language teaching, and others) do you follow or do you utilize a variety of approaches? If so, which ones? And how do you use them?
5. If you utilize a variety of theoretical approaches, how has your teaching changed over the years?
6. Is there an ideal theoretical approach to teaching ESL? Please specify.
7. In what way do you find your applied pedagogical approaches (teaching methodology, teaching content, and teaching environment) useful for students as an ESL teacher?
8. What do you find to be the three (3) most helpful teaching strategies to improve students' English skills in your classroom?
9. What do you find to be the three (3) least helpful teaching strategies to improve students' English skills in your classroom?
10. How would you evaluate the grammar, reading and writing, and speaking and listening textbooks used in the English Language Program (ELP)?
11. What language skills do you think your students find to be the most challenging in your classroom?
12. Which activities (drill, movie, game, role-play, and others) in your classroom do you find the most effective?

13. In an ideal world, how could you make language teaching in your classroom most effective?

14. Are there any questions I should have asked to develop a better understanding of teaching ESL? If there are, please specify.

## Appendix B

### Questions for Students (the Questionnaires)

#### PART ONE: Background Information

1. Gender: Male\_\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_\_
2. Age\_\_\_\_\_
3. Email Address\_\_\_\_\_
4. How long have you been in the ELP?
5. How long do you expect to study in a Canadian university?
6. Which level of the program are you in at the present?

#### PART TWO: Language Learning

1. At which level were your English language skills before you entered into the ELP?

Weak\_\_\_\_\_ Moderate\_\_\_\_\_ Strong\_\_\_\_\_ Very Strong\_\_\_\_\_

2. Please indicate how important you think each of the language skills is for the success of academic study, using the following 5-point scale.

1. Not at all important
2. Somewhat important
3. Fairly important
4. Important
5. Very important

Grammar\_\_\_\_\_ Reading and Writing\_\_\_\_\_ Listening and Speaking\_\_\_\_\_

3. What factor do you find to be bold challenging in the classroom, which prevents you from communicating effectively in academic settings in Canada? Circle only one.

Teaching Methodology\_\_\_\_\_ Teaching Content\_\_\_\_\_ Teaching Environment\_\_\_\_\_

4. What factors do you find to be most helpful in the classroom, which encourage you to improve your grammar?

5. What factors do you find to be most helpful in the classroom, which encourage you to improve your reading and writing?

6. What factors do you find to be most helpful in the classroom, which encourage you to improve your listening and speaking?

7. At which level are your English language skills after taking this program for over two terms?

Weak\_\_\_\_\_ Moderate\_\_\_\_\_ Strong\_\_\_\_\_ Very Strong\_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you think your English language skills have improved a lot?

Strongly Agree\_\_\_\_ Agree\_\_\_\_ Disagree\_\_\_\_ Strongly disagree\_\_\_\_

9. If you think your English language skills have improved a lot, what in particular has contributed most to this improvement? Circle only one.

Grammar\_\_\_\_\_ Reading and Writing\_\_\_\_\_ Listening and Speaking\_\_\_\_\_

10. What do you think about the grammar textbooks used in the ELP?

I like\_\_\_\_\_ I dislike\_\_\_\_\_ I am indifferent \_\_\_\_\_

11. What do you think about the reading and writing textbooks used in the ELP?

I like\_\_\_\_\_ I dislike\_\_\_\_\_ I am indifferent\_\_\_\_\_

12. What do you think about the speaking and listening textbooks used in the ELP?

I like\_\_\_\_\_ I dislike\_\_\_\_\_ I am indifferent\_\_\_\_\_

13. What three important activities do you think teachers use to make their teaching effective?

14. What three important activities do you think teacher should do to make their teaching more effective in the future?

15. Are there any questions I should have asked to develop a better understanding of the effectiveness of ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches? If there are, please explain.

## Appendix C

### Background Information of ESL Chinese Students

3-1

Students	Background Information	Gender	Age	Amount of Time in the ELP	Expected Study Time in Canadian Universities	Study Level
Student 1		Male	22	9 months	4 years	Level 5
Student 2		Male	20	1.5 years	4 years	Level 5
Student 3		Female	22	9 months	2 years	Level 5
Student 4		Female	21	9 months	3 years	Level 5
Student 5		Female	19	9 months	4 years	Level 5
Student 6		Male	20	1 year	4 years	Level 5
Student 7		Female	21	9 months	4 years	Level 5
Student 8		Female	19	9 months	3.5 years	Level 5
Student 9		Female	19	Almost 1 year	4 years	Level 5
Student 10		Male	19	Almost 1 year	4 years	Level 5

3-2

Students	Background Information	Gender	Age	Amount of Time in the ELP	Expected Study Time in Canadian Universities	Study Level
Student 11		Female	20	8 months	2 years	Level 4
Student 12		Female	20	9 months	2 years	Level 4
Student 13		Male	21	9 months	4 years	Level 4
Student 14		Female	20	9 months	5 years	Level 4
Student 15		Female	21	8 months	4 years	Level 4
Student 16		Male	20	1 year	4 years	Level 4
Student 17		Female	19	7 months	4 years	Level 4
Student 18		Female	20	1 year	4 years	Level 4
Student 19		Female	20	9 months	5 years	Level 4
Student 20		Female	20	9 months	N/A	Level 4

3-3

Students	Background Information	Gender	Age	Amount of Time in the ELP	Expected Study Time in Canadian Universities	Study Level
Student 21		Female	19	Almost 2 months	4 years	Level 3
Student 22		Female	21	7 months	4 years	Level 3
Student 23		Male	19	7 months	4 years	Level 3
Student 24		Female	20	6 months	5 years	Level 3
Student 25		Female	20	7 months	4 years	Level 3
Student 26		Male	22	2 months	N/A	Level 3
Student 27		Female	19	Almost 6 months	4 years	Level 3
Student 28		Female	19	8 months	4 years	Level 3
Student 29		Female	19	8 months	5 years	Level 3
Student 30		Female	18	7 months	3.5 years	Level 3