

# The Role of EFL Teachers in Primary Schools under the New Curriculum Standard Environment in China

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**Abstract:** The aim of the study is to explore EFL teacher's perception of their roles in the classroom. Four EFL primary teachers in China were interviewed. The results show that the main roles teachers perceive are organizer, manager, facilitator, participant and evaluator. However, teachers perform the roles of organizer, manager and evaluator well, while the roles of the participant and facilitator are performed poorly.

**Keywords:** The New Curriculum Standard; EFL Teachers; Roles of the teacher

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## 1. Background of the Study

English as a foreign language (EFL) in China is not only a significant tool for communication, but also an essential subject in China. Since the last century, the concept and method of foreign language teaching have been constantly updated and changed, from the traditional grammar translation method, Audio-lingual Method, to the widely accepted communicative method. In accordance with the new teaching philosophy, China issued the New Curriculum Standards for Primary School English in 2011, defines the overall goal of English teaching is to cultivate students' communicative language ability. Under the background of the new curriculum standard, the role of primary school English teachers needs to be repositioned in order to implement the new teaching model. This study aims to explore teacher's perception of their roles.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 2. Literature Review

The role of teachers refers to the expected behaviors of teachers that is related to their social status and identity. Pedagogy scholars have focused on the study of the role of teachers for a long time and achieved a wealth of results. Brown (2001) believed that the roles of teachers in the interactive language teaching classroom should be as follows: 1) the controller, to provide a classroom environment for students to express themselves freely and to arrange the implementation of teachers' interactive teaching skills; 2) director, to ensure the smooth and effective conduct of classroom activities; 3) manager: to master classroom teaching as a whole, and give students some freedom in specific classroom activities; 4) facilitator: to help students dismantle learning disabilities and find gaps; 5) resource: to provide students with the information they need when needed.<sup>[2]</sup>

Harmer (2001) advocates that English teachers should have such behavior in the classroom as: a controller, a judge, an organizer, a reminder, a participant, a consultant, a mentor, a observers. McIntyre & O'Hair (1996) discuss the teachers' roles as an organizer, a manager, a consultant, a communicator, an innovator, an ethical, political and legal teacher.

As can be seen in the above research results, it is fully recognized that the role of teachers in the classroom is no longer the teacher of the traditional teaching concept of knowledge, but endowed with more roles. The previous studies above share some similar ideas on the role of teachers such as an evaluator, organizer, participant and resource provider to some extent etc., but in different teaching contexts, teachers' behaviors may be quite similar, but also different in their emphasis. This study focuses on the role of teachers in the context of primary school.

## 3. Research Methodology

This qualitative research employed semi-structure interview. The participants are three female teachers and one male teacher from different primary schools in a city in southern China. All the interviewees are experienced teachers with over 10 years

teaching experience. The interview mainly focuses on the teachers' perception of their roles. Here are the main questions: 1. What are your main roles in daily teaching? 2. What roles do you find difficult to perform? What are the factors that affect your performance in these roles?

#### **4. Findings and discussion**

Five main roles are reported in the interviews: organizer, manager, facilitator, participant, and evaluator.

As the organizer. All the interviewees agree that one of the essential roles they play in class is organizers. They organize students to participate in varieties of activities, such as doing a survey, participating in role-plays, having a competition or discussion and so on. As experienced EFL teachers, all the interviewees in this study attach great importance on this role and can play the role well.<sup>[3]</sup>

As the manager. All the interviewees agree that the other essential role they play in class is manager. They all mentioned that they could spend a few minutes on managing students' discipline before the presentation. Teachers act as managers skillfully in the classroom and they are good at managing the discipline and setting class rules. So the manager is a fundamental role for teachers.

As the facilitator. When talking about as a facilitator, all the interviewees consider it an important job to facilitate kids in foreign language class, but it's not easy. Teacher Cindy said she tried to put students at the center of her teaching and give more space for their voice and action, but she failed. The results show that being a facilitator in the classroom is a challenge for teachers. The reasons mentioned by the interviewees are the large number of students and the limited class minutes.

As the participant. All the teachers mention the importance of being a participant but they also admit that they do the jobs of managing and organizing far more than participating. Teachers said that they organized the activities and tried to participate in the activities, discuss and interact with students, but they were not recognized with an equal status to the students. This may be influenced by the traditional teacher-centered thought.

As the evaluator. All teachers mention that they pay much attention to the assessment of students and they can give students a proper evaluation of their performances and encourage peer assessment in a variety of ways. Teachers stated they could give students evaluations timely when it comes to a student's behavior to motivate students, which shows that teachers can play the role of evaluator well in the class. Zheng (2014) has got a similar result that both teachers and students are positive about the role of teacher as evaluator.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### **5. Conclusion**

This paper mainly studies how EFL teachers perceive their roles in primary schools under the New Curriculum Standard Environment in China. The results show that experienced EFL teachers can perform organizers, managers, and evaluators well, but they feel stressed for the roles of facilitator and participants because of various reasons such as the the large class size and traditional educational philosophy, although they all consider the roles are important for language learning. Overall, these results indicate that teachers perceive the transition of their roles under the new curriculum, but partly they remain knowledgeable passers, and are weak to act as the participants and facilitators. Hence, EFL teachers still need to improve their roles as facilitators and participants in the classroom.

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