大學英文教師對大一新生英語能力變化的認知調查研究：以台灣為例

An Investigation of University EFL Teachers' Perceptions of

Changes in Their Freshmen's English Language Ability:

A Case Study in Taiwan

by

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THESIS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, who is in heaven.

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ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Recent research has shown that incoming Taiwanese university freshmens'
English language ability has significantly changed over the past ten years. However,
little research has investigated university teachers' perceptions of these changes in
freshmens' English ability over the last decade. As a result, this study has attempted
to examine whether university teachers have perceived changes in their students'
English ability and the nature of the changes. This study employed a questionnaire
and interviews, both comprised of six domains: changes in grammar, reading,
listening, speaking and writing ability as well as attitudes toward English learning. In
this study, the participants were 18 experienced university teachers who have been
teaching at the same university for more than ten years. Descriptive statistics were
computed to analyze the questionnaire data. Also, a conceptually clustered matrix was
utilized to analyze the interview data.

The major findings of this study are as follows. First, the results revealed that the
teachers perceived that their students' grammar and reading abilities have declined or
remained stable over the last decade. Second, the teachers reported that their students'
listening and speaking abilities have increased over the last decade. Third, the
teachers' perception of their students' writing ability was a decrease over the past ten

years. Fourth, the teachers reported an improvement in their students' attitudes toward

listening and speaking over the last decade. Fifth, based on the teachers' perceptions,

three factors that might have influenced changes in students' English ability are 1)

increased focus on listening and speaking skills, 2) increased exposure to English

resources on the Internet and 3) increased exposure to western media, such as TV

programs and movies. Finally, based on the findings of the study, implications and

limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are provided.

Key words: Language Ability, Teachers' Perceptions, Grammar, Reading,

Listening, Speaking, Writing, Attitudes

CHINESE ABSTRACT

摘要

有研究顯示，過去十年來，台灣的大學一年級新生的英語能力有顯著地改變，可是沒有相關研究探討授課教師對於學生英語能力改變的認知。因此，本論文的研究目的在探討大一新生英語課程的授課教師是否察覺這十年來學生英語能力的變化，以及改變的因素。研究者採用問卷和訪談的方式。這兩種方式皆包含文法、閱讀、聽力、口說、寫作、學習英語的態度等六種面向。本研究的受訪者係受聘於同一所大學，且已有十年以上授課資歷的英語教師，共計 18 名。研究的問卷內容以描述性統計分析；而訪談內容將用概念矩陣表分析。

本研究根據教師的認知結果，說明如下：第一、大一學生的文法和閱讀能力與十年前的大一學生相較，呈現普遍性下滑或是維持不變。第二、大一學生的聽力跟口說能力有逐年提升的趨勢。第三、大一學生們的寫作能力有逐漸下滑的趨勢。第四、大一學生對聽力和口說的學習意願有逐漸增高的趨勢。第五、教師認為有三項因素影響了近十年來大一學生英語能力的轉變：第一項是老師和學生對聽力與口說能力的重視；第二項為學生接觸的英語網路資源日漸增多；第三項是越來越多的學生透過大眾傳播接觸英語環境，例如西洋電視劇或電影等等。最後，本文根據研究結果，提出教學上的建議，以及對未來的研究方向提出建議。

關鍵字: 英語能力，教師認知，文法，閱讀，聽力，口說，寫作，態度

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

Abbreviations	Terms
ALM	Audiolingual Method
CEEC	College Entrance Exam Center
CLT	Communication Language Teaching
DRET	Department Required English Test
FENM	Freshmen English for Non-English Majors
GEPT	General English Proficiency Test
GTM	Grammar Translation Method
JCEE	Joint College Entrance Examinations
LTTC	Language Training and Testing Center
MOE	Ministry of Education
NICT	National Institute of Compilation and Translation
SAET	Scholastic Aptitude English Test
TEPE	Tunghai English Placement Exam

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

With the emergence of English as a global language, the goal of English education in the Asia-Pacific region has undergone tremendous changes. One of these changes is the lowering of the initial grade level where compulsory English education starts (Butler, 2005; Nunan, 2003). For instance, China lowered the age for compulsory English education from fifth grade to third grade in 2001 (Hu, 2007). Similarly, in South Korea, required English education was lowered from sixth grade to third grade in 1997 (Butler, 2007). In Japan there is no nationwide initial English requirement, however, in 2002, most initial English education started between third to sixth grades (Butler, 2004a).

Like most countries in the Asia-pacific region, the Minister of Education (MOE) implemented several English educational policies over the last ten years in order to promote Taiwanese learners' English ability. These policies included the lowering of the grade level for formal English education, and the reforms to the English curriculum from elementary school to senior high school (Butler, 2004b; W. C. Chang, 2007; Y. F. Chang, 2008; W. R. Lee, 2007).

Based on the MOE, the initial age for compulsory English education was lowered to the fifth grade in 2001 (MOE, 1998). Later, in 2005, the MOE lowered it

to the third grade (Butler, 2005; MOE, 2004; Lai, 2008). The purpose of the lowering

grade level is to motivate learners to learn English.

On the other hand, research has shown that lowering the commencement age of

English education can have positive effects on Taiwanese students' English

achievements (Y. C. Chang, 2006; Chou, 1989; Y. S. Kuo, 2001). Y. C. Chang (2006)

states that freshmen who had initially learned English at elementary school had

significantly higher scores on reading and listening components of the General

English Proficiency Test (GEPT) than those who had studied English beginning at

junior high school. Y. C. Chang (2006) also found that freshmen who had received

instruction from native English teachers before they graduated from elementary

school had better English listening ability than those who had not.

In addition to the lowering grade level for compulsory English, another English

education policy is the reform of the English curriculum in Taiwan. In the past, the

focus of English education was on grammar teaching and language drills (Y. P. Chang,

2004). By contrast, current English education emphasizes Communication Language

Teaching (CLT). The principles of the current English curriculum are as follows

(MOE, 2000b):

The objective of the elementary/junior high school curriculum should be to instill

a basic communicative ability, to prepare students to take a global perspective,

and to give individuals confidence in communicating in the global area ("thus

improving the nation's competitiveness"). Elementary and middle schools should

provide a natural and enjoyable language learning environment. (p. 2)

Another change in Taiwan is the increased use of standardized English language

exams. The most widely used of the standardized English exams are the GEPT (J. Wu,

2008). The GEPT consist of five different levels (elementary, intermediate,

high-intermediate, advanced, and superior) and each includes a reading, listening,

speaking and writing section. Currently, 310 senior and junior high schools in Taiwan

require their students to take either the GEPT elementary level or the GEPT

intermediate level (LTTC, 2011). According to J. Wu (2008), approximately 3.2

million Taiwanese learners have taken the GEPT since they were launched in 2000.

More than a half of the students who passed the elementary GEPT were junior high

school students and 51 percent of those who passed the intermediate GEPT were

senior high school students (LTTC, 2009a; LTTC, 2009b).

Not surprisingly, most high school English teachers reported that the GEPT have had an effect on their teaching (J. Wu, 2008; Wu & Chin, 2006). Teachers reported focusing on listening and speaking skills in order to help their students to obtain the GEPT certificate that could help them in gaining admission to university. In the past, teachers did not focus on listening and speaking skills because they were not tested. However, teachers have since modified their instruction because of the use of the standardized exams which now include these components.

Little research has investigated the influence of English educational policies on changes in students' English ability in Taiwan. These changes in language policies might have influenced instruction and as a result might have effected students' English learning and their English ability.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Teacher perceptions of students' ability are essential for instructional decision making and providing additional support (Begeny, Eckert, Montarello, & Storie, 2008; Begeny, Krouse, Brown, & Mann, 2011; Feinberg & Shapiro, 2009). Thus, teachers should be aware of their students' English language ability when making judgments about curriculum design and instruction methods. Also, teachers' perceptions about

students' current language ability are one of the major factors that are influential in shaping teacher expectations (Alderman, 2004; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010; Weinstein, 2002).

As indicated by Sims' (2012) study, freshmen from 1998 to 2010 at Tunghai University in central Taiwan have significantly increased their listening ability from year to year. On the other hand, the grammar and reading abilities of these freshmen have slightly declined or remained stable over the twelve years. Sims (2012) explores the longitudinal data of English scores from freshmen at Tunghai University in Central Taiwan. That university administers the Tunghai English Placement Exam (TEPE) to freshmen in order to divide non-English majors into required freshmen English courses based on their English abilitiy. The TEPE consists of grammar, reading and listening sections. Sims (2012) proposes that student grammar ability remained stable from 1998 to 2000 and from 2006 to 2010. However, students showed significantly lower grammatical ability from 2001 to 2004. Also, there was no significant difference in reading scores among freshmen from 1998 to 2000 or between freshmen from 2006 to 2009. Nevertheless, students' reading ability gradually decreased from 2000 to 2005. Lastly, student scores on the listening component significantly improved year to year from 1998 to 2010.

Recently, there has been growing interest in students' English language ability in Taiwan (Cheng & Chang, 2006, 2007; Sims, 2012). According to Sims (2012), university freshmen English for non-English majors (FENM) students' grammar, reading, and listening abilities have significantly changed. However, few studies have been conducted into the possible changes in students' speaking and writing abilities. Likewise, little research has been conducted into teachers' perceptions of changes in university students' English language ability. This study hopes to fill these missing gaps in the literature.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions of possible changes in students' grammar, reading, and listening abilities, as well as possible changes in their speaking, writing abilities, and attitude towards English learning over the last decade by means of a questionnaire and interviews. Also, this study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of possible factors which may have influenced changes in students' English language ability.

1.4 Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's grammar ability over the last ten years?

2. What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's reading ability over the last ten years?

3. What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's listening ability over the last ten years?

4. What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's speaking ability over the last ten years?

5. What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's writing ability over the last ten years?

6. What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's attitudes towards English learning over the last ten years?

7. What are FENM teachers' perceptions of possible factors that might have influenced changes in their freshmen's English language ability over the last ten years?

1.5 Definition of Terms

Tunghai English Placement Exam (TEPE)

The TEPE refers to an English proficiency test that consists of grammar, reading, and listening components (Sims, 2006a). Non-English majors have to take the TEPE during the freshmen orientation. Based on the results of the TEPE, FENM students are placed into one of three levels: high, mid, and low.

Language ability

There is no generally accepted term about English language ability in the field of second language learning. Some researchers use language ability (Carrol, 1968; Farhady, 2005; Lado, 1961; Zuo, 1995), others tend to utilize language proficiency (Brown, 2004; Cummins, 1979; Spolsky, 1989), and still others make use of communicative language ability (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Purpura, 2008). In short, this study will use language ability in order to be consistent.

Language ability, as defined in the present study, refers to the specific elements of language ability that can be measured independently (Bachman, 1990). In this study, these components of language ability refer to abilities of grammar, reading, listening, speaking, and writing. These components are consistent with the test specification of the TEPE and grading guidelines of the program.

Grammar

Grammar is defined by the specifications and constructs of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) which is based on the items of the TEPE (the ability to use proper verb tense, subject-verb agreement, count and non-count nouns, appropriate prepositions, conjunctions, and conditional sentences).

Reading

Reading is defined by the specifications and constructs of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) which is based on the items of the TEPE (the ability to identify or understand main ideas, specific details, reference pronouns, the meaning of a word from context, and make inferences. Students' general vocabulary level and their general reading rate are also included).

Listening

Listening is defined by the specifications and constructs of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) which is based on the items of the TEPE (the ability to comprehend simple dialogues of a familiar nature as well as extended texts/stories of a familiar nature, the ability to identify specific details from simple dialogues as well as specific details from extended texts). The ability to understand English spoken at a normal rate as well as an academic lecture given in English are also included.

Speaking

Speaking is defined by the specifications and constructs of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) which is based on the goals and grading guidelines of the FENM program (pronunciation, fluency, accuracy/grammar, range in vocabulary, effective word choice).

Writing

Writing is defined by the specifications and constructs of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) which is based on the goals and the grading guidelines of the FENM program (the ability to write grammatically correct sentences, a well-structured essay, a well-organized paragraph, clear topic sentences, and the ability to provide supporting details/information).

Attitudes

Attitude is defined by the specifications and constructs of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) which is based on teachers' perceptions of students' willingness to use or study English (grammar, listening, reading, speaking, and writing).

1.6 Significance of the Study

The followings are the expected contributions of the current study. The significance of the study is to provide a better understanding of how university

teachers perceive the possible changes of students' abilities in terms of grammar, reading, and listening. Since research (Sims 2012) has shown that there have been changes in freshmen's grammar, reading and listening abilities, this study will examine if university teachers can accurately perceive these changes in students' English language ability. This information is vital, because a clear understanding of their current students' true English language ability will help teachers' curriculum design.

Furthermore, the importance of this study is to give a better understanding of university teachers' perceptions of possible changes in freshmen's speaking and writing abilities. Current English education in Taiwan has put more focus on students' speaking and writing skills than students in the past (Shih, 2001; H. Y. Yu, 2006; K. H. Yu, 2008). Also, speaking skills are put an emphasis at the elementary school level (Lai, 2008). However, little research has been conducted into teachers' perceptions of possible changes in students' speaking and writing abilities. This study aims to fill this above-mentioned missing gap in the literature because a clearer picture of students' speaking and writing abilities will help teachers offer appropriate course content for their students.

CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The results of placement tests at Tunghai University in Taiwan have indicated changes in students' English ability over the last decade. However, little research has investigated teacher perceptions of possible changes to Tunghai University students' English abilities. To fill this gap, this study will look into university teachers' perceptions about potential changes to student English abilities over the last decade at Tunghai University. This chapter will firstly review the notion of teacher expectations based on the field of educational psychology. Secondly, although it is hard to prove what factors resulted in the changes in students' language ability over the past ten years, this chapter will present four possible factors that may have influenced changes in Tunghai University students' English ability over the last decade: (1) government reforms in Taiwan, (2) changes in teaching approaches, (3) increased focus on listening and speaking skills, (4) increased exposure to English. Lastly, this chapter will examine other studies on the changes in students' English ability in Taiwan.

2.1 The Notion of Teacher Expectations

This section will first review the definitions of teacher expectations. Next, the potential sources of teacher expectations will be presented.

Researchers have provided definitions of teacher expectations (Alderman, 2004; Good & Brophy, 2003; Jussim, 2009). Based on Alderman (2004), teacher expectations "reflect teachers' beliefs about student capabilities to learn" (p. 173). Additionally, the definition of teacher expectations proposed by Jussim (2009) is "everything from predictions to beliefs about current levels of ability and performance" (p. 921). Jussim (2009) states that what teachers perceive and believe about student ability can be the foundations for predictions about student capability to learn. Likewise, teacher expectations refer to "inferences that teachers make about the future academic achievement of students based on what they know about these students now" (Good & Brophy, 2003, p. 67). In other words, according to Good & Brophy (2003), teachers imagine what a student's achievement will be on the basis of the student's current level. Alderman's (2004) definition will be adopted in this study since the purpose of this study is not to investigate student future achievement from the perspective of teachers. Instead, this study aims to explore whether university teachers have perceived changes in incoming freshmen's English language ability at Tunghai University over the past ten years.

Research has shown that the naturally occurring expectations of teachers may come from their own beliefs about students' abilities and these beliefs are often

accurate evaluations (Alvidrez & Weintein, 1999; Woolfolk, 2010). Teachers' beliefs

about their students' capacity to learn may be one of the potential sources that affect

the formation of teacher expectations (Alderman, 2004; Tsiplakides & Keramida,

2010). According to Tsiplakides & Keramida (2010), teacher perceptions of student

ability are a major source of teacher expectations. Alderman (2004) goes on to

maintain that teachers make judgments on student ability and capabilities on the basis

of actual student performance. In the same fashion, Weinstein states that "one

contributor to teacher judgments of ability is student performance" (Weinstein, 2002,

p. 54). To conclude, the formation of teacher expectations may derive from teacher

perceptions of student ability. In order for teachers to have appropriate expectations of

their students, they need to have an accurate understanding of their students' English

ability. Thus, this study could be of assistance to teachers in forming suitable

expectations by identifying changes in students' English ability over the last decade

and providing teachers with a better understanding of their current students' English

ability.

2.2 Government Reforms in Taiwan

In an attempt to improve English education in Taiwan, the MOE has implemented numerous language reforms over the past ten years. These reforms may have influenced not only Taiwanese English teachers' instruction but also Taiwanese students' development of English ability. In this section, several government reforms will be discussed. First, the objectives of the new guidelines for the Grade 1-9 curriculum for elementary and junior high schools announced by the MOE in 1998 will be reviewed. Second, three additional reforms announced by the MOE will be presented. The first of these reforms is the lowering of the grade level for initial required English learning. The second reform is that listening and speaking skills are the major objectives for elementary school while all four skills are emphasized equally in junior high school. The last reform is allowing multiple English textbooks to replace monopolistic use of a few English textbooks. Following the details of these three reforms, the new guidelines for the senior high school curriculum announced by the MOE in 2006 will be discussed. Finally, an examination of transformations to the college entrance examination will be provided.

2.2.1 The Objectives of the New Guidelines for the Grade 1-9 Curriculum

It is difficult to prove whether changes in educational policies have had a direct influence on shifts in students' English ability. However, these changes may have influenced classroom practices and this may have affected students' English language ability (Butler, 2005; Lai, 2008). In other words, teachers may have altered their instruction in order to follow new educational policies which may in turn have affected students' English ability.

In order to help Taiwan to participate more fully in the international community, the MOE revised the guidelines of the English curriculum starting in 2001 (MOE, 1998; MOE, 2004). The rationale of the Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines in the area of English education is to develop Taiwanese students' communicative competence as well as international awareness.

In addition to the rationale of the Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines, there are three major objectives to the MOE curriculum guidelines in the area of teaching English (MOE, 2004; Lai, 2008; Lee, 2005). The first main objective for formal English education in elementary schools is to develop basic communicative competence. The second objective is to foster students' English learning motivation. The third objective is to allow students to acquire a better understanding of Western culture and also appreciate cultural differences between Asian and Western cultures.

2.2.2 Three Reforms

Apart from the main objectives to the Grade 1-9 curriculum guidelines, three reforms included in the new guidelines might have influenced current English education. According to Y. W. Lin (2003), one of the major reforms was to lower the grade level for the start of compulsory English education. In 1998 the MOE announced that starting in 2001, formal English education would begin in the fifth grade (Liao, 2007; Y. W. Lin, 2003; MOE, 1998). By 2005, English instruction was obligatory starting in the third grade of elementary school (C. Y. Lin, 2005; MOE, 2004; Y. Y. Hsieh, 2007). Although English education is not required until the third grade, many schools implemented English classes sooner (Y. F. Chang, 2004; F. L. Cheng, 2000; Chiang, 2007; Kan, 2005; Y. C. Lin, 2002). For instance, elementary schools in Hsinchu City have conducted English classes for first grade students since 2001 (Y. F. Chang, 2004; Chiang, 2007; Y. C. Lin, 2002). Similarly, first grade students in Taipei City have received formal English education since 2002 (Chiang, 2007; Kan, 2005). Likewise, students in the second grade in Tainan City have studied English since 2002 (F. L. Cheng, 2000; Chiang, 2007). To conclude, although the MOE officially have played an initiative role in introducing English at the third grade level, individual primary schools still have much autonomy to implement English

education at earlier grade levels. However, it is important to note that, over the last decade, the grade level for compulsory English education has been lowered.

Another major reform of the grade 1-9 curriculum guidelines was to focus instruction at the elementary school level on listening, pronunciation, and speaking skills (Lai, 2008). According to C. H. Wu (2000), based on the critical period hypothesis, this focus on listening, pronunciation, and speaking in elementary schools (Grades 3-6) is expected to help students acquire native like accents. In contrast, according to the new guideline for junior high schools (Grades 7-9), the major objective is to equally put emphasis on reading, listening, speaking and writing. This objective is different from the one for English education in elementary schools. Even though there is a different emphasis on English between elementary level and secondary level, the MOE expects formal English education in primary schools to be a foundation for English education in junior high school.

In order to fulfill the objective of improving the Grade 1-9 curriculum guidelines, the third reform is the availability of multiple government-approved English textbooks (Chan, 2000; Y. F. Chang, 2004; Hsu, 2000). In the past, the government had a monopoly on English textbooks published by the National Institute of Compilation and Translation (NICT). That is, there was only one English textbook for

each grade level. However, the MOE opened the market to multiple English textbooks

for each grade level and therefore each school now has the freedom to select English

textbooks (Y. F. Chang, 2004; MOE, 2004; Chu, 2009). The purpose of having

multiple English textbooks available is to encourage diverse content and the

utilization of multimedia for English learning (C. K. Cheng, 2006). Based on the

Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines, the MOE designs criteria for English textbooks. In

order to meet the criteria, English textbooks have to apply several principles. First, the

textbooks must include interesting, practical and relevant topics for the age group.

Also, since one of the objectives of the Grade 1-9 curriculum guidelines is to develop

Taiwanese learners' basic communicative competence, the contents of textbooks must

include daily conversations such as greetings, apologies, requests and so on. Third,

the Grade 1-9 curriculum guidelines offer vocabulary lists for primary and junior high

school students and thus textbook publishers have to refer to the vocabulary lists in

their English textbooks (MOE, 2004). In summary, by comparison with the

monopolistic use of English textbooks published by the NICT, multiple English

textbooks provide a wider variety of topics and content for English learners and offer

daily dialogues in order to assist learners to gain basic communicative competence.

Similar to elementary and junior high school, the MOE has also liberalized

English textbooks for senior high schools since 1999 (T. S. Huang, 2000; MOE,

1995). Prior to 1999, only the NICT published authorized English textbooks for senior

high schools (C. T. Chen, 2002; Y. J. Chen, 2005; T. M. Ko, 2005; Yeh, 2003).

According to the criteria proposed by the MOE (1995), English textbooks for senior

high schools have to be designed based on CLT. Compared to previous textbooks,

English textbooks published after 1999 provide learners more opportunities to

practice English dialogues as well as communicate in English.

2.2.3 The New Guidelines for the Senior High School Curriculum

In order to be consistent with the new elementary and middle school curriculum,

the MOE implemented new guidelines for English in senior high schools (MOE,

2006). The objectives of the new guidelines for senior high school are to enhance

Taiwanese students' English ability in order to help students enter institutions of

higher education or gain vocational advantages (MOE, 2006; MOE, 2010).

In order to meet the objectives of the new guidelines, the goals of the English

curriculum in senior high schools are as follows: The first goal is to enhance students'

English ability, including listening, speaking, reading and writing, to enable students

to apply what they learn in senior high school to real life situations (MOE, 2006; MOE, 2010). The second goal is to develop students' ability to think logically, analyze, make judgments, and integrate modes of Western thinking. Third, students are expected to learn effective strategies for English study in order to develop their self-studying ability. The fourth goal is to foster students' motivations and attitudes toward English learning and thus allow students to gradually expand their knowledge in all fields on their own. Lastly, students are expected to learn to understand and respect other cultures

2.2.4 Transformations to the College Entrance Examination

Similar to the new guidelines affecting classroom practices, the transformation in the college entrance examination might also have had an effect on instruction. In 1994, a new reform of the college entrance exam was carried out (Chang, Yeh, & Chang, 2005). This new reform consists of the introduction of the Scholastic Aptitude English Test (SAET) and the Department Required English Test (DRET). The purpose of the new Joint College Entrance Examinations (JCEE) is to meet the policy of providing multiple ways of entering colleges (Chang et al., 2005). The traditional JCEE had been in practice from 1954 to 2001. Also, the traditional JCEE took place once per

year. That is, students before 2002 had to take the traditional JCEE in July. However, the new JCEE is held twice per year. The SAET occurs in February and the DRET is held in July of the same year. Based on Chang et al. (2005), students after 2002 have more opportunities to take the SAET and the DRET than students did before 2002, since the traditional JCEE only provided one chance for test takers each school year.

The objectives of the SAET are as follow: The first objective is to assess whether Taiwanese twelfth grade students have knowledge of five subjects taught in high schools (CEEC, 2007a; Chien, et al., 2007; H. H. Lin, 2009). The five subjects are Chinese, English, Math, Science (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Earth Sciences), as well as Humanities (History, Geography, Civilization and Humanities). The second objective is to test if students are able to handle college education. The third objective is to assess if students can integrate knowledge from the five subjects. The fourth objective is to evaluate if students have the ability to take their knowledge of the five subjects and apply it to real life situations.

On the other hand, there are four objectives of the DRET: The first objective of the DRET is to assess twelfth grade students' knowledge of ten subjects (CEEC, 2007b; Chien, 2002). The ten subjects are Chinese, English, Basic Math, Advanced Math, History, Geography, Physics, Chemistry, Biology as well as Civilization and

Humanities. The second objective is to test if students are able to analyze data and make inferences from this information. The third objective is to evaluate if students have the ability to express themselves. The final objective of the DRET is to test if students are able to apply their knowledge of the ten subjects to the real life situations.

Although both the SAET and the DRET are the new versions of the JCEE, there are several differences between the English components of the SAET and the DRET (CEEC, 2007c; CEEC, 2007d; H. H. Lin, 2009). First, the word count of texts on the reading comprehension sections in the SAET is from 150 to 250 words, while the word count of the same sections in the DRET is from 200 to 300 words. Additionally, the writing style in the SAET is mainly narration, whereas description and exposition are the major writing styles in the DRET. Moreover, the range of the SAET includes subject matter from the first and second years of high school. However, the subject matter of the DRET covers material which students have studied during all three years of senior high school. Finally, if students fail to offer correct answers in the DRET, their scores will be lower. But in the SAET, there is no such testing policy. Generally speaking, the test contents of the DRET are comparatively more difficult than the SAET, both in terms of text content and writing styles. To conclude, the different

objectives and contents of the SAET and the DRET may have had an influence on what and how teachers instruct in English courses.

In summary, several changes in language policies related to English education have been carried out over the past decade. To some extent, these reforms in language policies may have affected classroom practices and English instruction in ways that are undocumented. In addition, these changes might have had an influence on students' English ability. Over the last decade, the most substantial language reform has been to lower the initial age of compulsory formal English education in elementary schools. In other words, Taiwanese EFL learners have officially received English education in elementary schools since 2001. There may therefore be differences in English language ability between students commencing English study before 2001 and after 2001 since students before 2001 did not start required formal English education until junior high school. In addition, the MOE set out the Grade 1-9 curriculum guidelines that emphasize listening and speaking skills for elementary school English education. In contrast, students who received their English instruction before the new guidelines were implemented may instead have received instruction aimed at promoting writing and reading ability. Therefore, current students' English ability may have changed in comparison to students in the past.

2.3 Changes in Teaching Approaches

In addition to revisions to the curriculum guidelines, changes in teaching approaches may have also influenced students' English ability. First, this section will give an overview of teaching approaches in Taiwan for the past thirty years. Second, since CLT has become a major teaching approach in elementary school classrooms in Taiwan, this section will present the characteristics of CLT. Third, since CLT has been gradually emphasized by the MOE, what most teachers do in English classrooms will be discussed.

2.3.1 An Overview of Teaching Approaches in Taiwan for the Past Thirty Years

2.3.1.1The First Stage

From a macro view of teaching methods in Taiwan, CLT is currently adopted by many English teachers from elementary schools to senior high schools (L. Y. Chang, 2001; Y. H. Kuo, 2002; Shih, 2001; Yang, 2009). In contrast, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was utilized in the past (H. Y. Yu, 2006; K. H. Yu, 2008).

By analyzing English test items of the JCEE over the past thirty years, H. Y. Yu (2006) proposed that teaching approaches in Taiwan shifted from the GTM to CLT. From an historical view, H. Y. Yu (2006) divided the last thirty years into three stages.

According to H. Y. Yu (2006), the first stage was from 1976 to 1980. The focus of test items on the college entrance exams at this time was on discrete points and reading skills. On the other hand, test items for the listening, speaking and writing sections were assessed through multiple choice questions that dealt with students' knowledge of English and not their use of the language. For example, listening and speaking were tested by how well students could read and write phonetic systems. The focus in the first stage indicated that the GTM, the Audiolingual Method (ALM), and structuralism were the main teaching methods during the period from 1976 to 1980.

The following are examples of listening and speaking questions taken from the JCEE during the first stage.

Example 1: "Please select the words with the same pronunciation of the underlined letters.

(A) sale<u>s</u>   (B) rich<u>es</u>   (C) spa<u>ce</u>   (D) cow<u>s</u>   (E) ob<u>s</u>erve"

(One of the questions of JCEE in 1977, as cited in H. Y. Yu (2006))

Example 2: "Please choose an inappropriate answer in the following conversation.

Why did you come so late?

(A) I was caught in a traffic jam.   (B) Does it really matter?

(C) She's not late.   (D) My watch is out of order."

(One of the questions of JCEE in 1976, as cited in H. Y. Yu (2006))

2.3.1.2 The Second Stage

Next, test items from 1981 to 1993 revealed four points. The first point is that

writing ability was emphasized more on the college entrance exams. In contrast, the

writing sections during the first stage refer to discrete-point items where test takers

have to fill in blanks in sentences. The blanks are usually vocabulary words or phrases.

The second point is that the focus of the college entrance exams shifted from

knowledge about language to the use of language (H. Y. Yu, 2006; K. H. Yu, 2008).

For instance, the translation questions pay attention to authentic situations rather than

grammatical knowledge (see Example 3). By comparison, test questions in the JCEE

from 1976 to 1980 focus on knowledge about language (see Example 4). The third

point is the appearances of integrated test types. Testing students' knowledge of

English grammar changed from discrete-point test items to integrative test items. In

other words, the answers cannot be found by looking at a single question. Instead,

answers can only be reasoned after reading the whole passage. For instance, the

answers for Question 17 and Question 18 of the JCEE in 1986 are connected with

Question 16 (see Example 5). The last point is that the contents of the test items focus

more on daily life. According to H. Y. Yu (2006), the second stage was the

beginning of the CLT approach in Taiwan.

Example 3: Please translate English into Chinese.

Most high school students are weighted down with exams.

(One of the questions of JCEE in 1983, as cited in H. Y. Yu (2006))

Example 4: Do you know _____?

(A) where is the City Hall   (B) the City Hall is where

(C) is where the City Hall   (D) where the City Hall is

(One of the questions of JCEE in 1977, as cited in H. Y. Yu (2006))

Example 5: Mexico, the largest nation in the region, provides a good example of life in Middle America. Although Mexico is a large country, Q. 16 12 percent of its land is good for farming. Q. 17 40 percent is good grazing land. The Q. 18 of the land is hills and mountains, dry, high plateaus, or wet coastal regions.

16. (A) only   (B) for   (C) even   (D) with

17. (A) other   (B) Another   (C) The other   (D) All

18. (A) best   (B) place   (C) height   (D) rest

(Three of the questions of JCEE in 1986, as cited in H. Y. Yu (2006))

2.3.1.3 The Third Stage

The third stage is from 1994 until now. The most important reforms are the introduction of the SAET and the DRET. Based on the purposes of these two tests, and the ranges of the vocabulary lists, these tests not only offer guidelines for the test questions but also provide guidelines for teaching. The former test is to assess the basic English proficiency of high school students. The vocabulary list of the SAET

includes four to five thousands commonly used English words. On the other hand, the contents of the latter test are relatively advanced and difficult. The vocabulary list of the DRET involves six to seven thousand commonly used words. H. Y. Yu (2006) claims that the teaching methods in the third stage put an emphasis on CLT.

Similar to H. Y. Yu (2006), K. H. Yu (2008) maintains that English teaching methods in Taiwan transformed from the GTM and the cognitive approaches to CLT. He investigates the relationship between English tests in the college entrance exams and English teaching from chronological analysis. He finds that the main focus of the college entrance exams changes from discrete-point tests to integrative tests. K. H. Yu (2008) goes on to argue that the wash back effects of the college entrance exams reflect changes of English teaching methods in Taiwan.

2.3.2 The Characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching

CLT is a major teaching approach at present. Shih (2001) suggests that there are five characteristics of CLT and gives recommendations on how to apply these five characteristics to classroom practices. The following are these five characteristics. First, a long-term goal of second language learning is to achieve communicative competence. Communicative competence includes grammatical competence,

discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Grammatical competence is not the main focus of English learning. Instead, it is a basic step toward developing communicative competence. Second, classroom activities and group work enhance development of English abilities. Activities and group work provide students with opportunities to speak English and help learners build confidence in speaking English. Third, it is a learner-centered approach rather than a teacher-centered approach. The role of a teacher in CLT is to be a facilitator. In contrast, the role of a teacher in a traditional classroom is to act as an authority. Fourth, fluency and accuracy are mutually complementary. Shih (2001) emphasized that of the main accuracy requirements for novice learners are to have acceptable form and be understandable. Also, a measure of fluency for beginners is that learners are willing to speak English. Lastly, building an English environment is crucial for language teaching and learning. During class, teachers should therefore use the target language as a medium.

2.3.3 Classroom Practices

Many teachers still utilize the GTM and the ALM in English classrooms (Liu, 2005; Yao, 1999). Yao (1999) points out that high schools center on language points

such as grammar analysis and sentence structures. Similarly, Liu (2005) contends that translation from first language into target language is still popular in Taiwan English learning environments. Liu (2005) goes on to maintain that the ALM is used for Taiwanese learners to develop listening and speaking skills. Furthermore, research shows that Taiwanese learners spend most of their time studying vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures in English classes (Chung & Huang, 2009; Jones, 1995). Based on Chung & Huang (2009), Taiwanese learners focus their English skills on grammar and vocabulary in order to pass college entrance exams and enter good universities. In the same fashion, Liu (2005) proposes that Taiwanese teachers and students place emphasis on reading and writing skills in order to get good scores on the college entrance exams. Additionally, according to Jones (1995), students tend to imitate good examples of writing that teachers provide. In summary, despite CLT being advocated in the EFL Taiwan environment, the GTM and the ALM is still the main focuses of English classes since most students have to take the college entrance exams in order to enter good colleges.

Even though most teachers use more traditional methods in English classes, studies indicate that students hold positive attitudes toward implementing CLT in class (Chung & Huang, 2009; Su, 2007). In Chung & Huang's (2009) study, students

recognize the importance of achieving communicative competence and regard it as a long-term goal. Likewise, Su (2007) finds that students change their views from the focus on language points to the emphasis of integrated skills. Although separated language skills are the focuses in English classes, students' views have been increasingly inclined toward the CLT approach.

2.4 Focus on Listening and Speaking Skills

In addition to different teaching approaches over the past thirty years in Taiwan, there has also been an increased emphasis on listening and speaking skills. This increased focus may have had an influence on students' English ability. In an effort to highlight this new emphasis, this section will first review English education practices in elementary schools. Next, the increased use of standardized English exams which have listening and speaking components, as a means for high school and college entrance, will be presented. Thirdly, this section will present how high school teachers gear instruction toward listening and speaking in an effort to help their students prepare for the exams that test these skills.

2.4.1 English Education Practices in Elementary Schools

In order to be consistent with the goal of the Nine Year Curriculum, elementary school English teachers pay attention to the development of listening and speaking skills in their classes. Lai (2008) finds that speaking and listening occupy about forty percent of instructional time in elementary English classes. Additionally, Pan, Weng, & Shih (2004) find that English teachers in elementary schools employ the repetition of English vocabulary and sentences in order to develop learners' listening and speaking skills. Furthermore, the policy of operating foreign English teacher recruitment programs offers opportunities for young Taiwanese learners to listen and speak English in class (Chai, 2007; C. M. Chen, 2008). More than half of educators who were involved in the recruitment program observed that young learners were able to communicate with foreign English teachers by using simple English words in class (Chang, Chen, & Lo, 2009; Lin & Chien, 2003). In summary, listening and speaking is a primary focus of the English curriculum in elementary schools and as a result elementary school teachers emphasize listening and speaking skills in their classes.

2.4.2 The Increased Use of Standardized English Exams

Over the last few years, university and college admission policies have changed. Currently, more and more institutions of higher learning are taking standardized tests

results, such as the GEPT and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), into account for admission (LTTC, 2011; CEEC, 2010). Since the MOE announced the policy of multiple pathways for college admission in 2002, many high school students obtained standardized English proficiency certification as a means to bolster their college application. It is worthy of note that these standardized English tests include not only reading but also other language skills like listening and speaking. For instance, the domestic test, the GEPT, designed by the Language Training and Testing Center (LTTC) in Taiwan, includes reading and listening for the first stage. The second stage of the GEPT includes speaking and writing components. Based on LTTC statistics (LTTC, 2007, as cited in Lin, Ho, & Liang, 2008), the average age of test-takers for the elementary level GEPT from 2000 to 2003 was 16 years old. Also, the mean age of test-takers for the intermediate-level GEPT during the same period was 19 years. The LTTC goes on to provide statistics showing that the average age of passing candidates for the elementary-level were 16 years old whereas for the intermediate-level the average age was 19 year-old from 2000 to 2003. In addition, Wu & Lee (2010) find that test takers who attended the practice test for the GEPT for the elementary-level was approximately 14.98 years old on average whereas those taking the practice test for the intermediate-level GEPT was 16.79 years old. In

conclusion, the majority of elementary (75 %) and intermediate (72 %) GEPT test

takers are junior and senior high school students (LTTC, 2008a; LTTC, 2008b).

2.4.3 Instruction toward Listening and Speaking

Since more and more high school students are taking the GEPT, teachers are

putting more effort into listening and speaking instruction. Based on Wu & Chin

(2006), senior high school teachers in Taiwan spend approximately one fifth of their

instruction time on listening and speaking. In the past, little classroom time was spent

on listening and speaking because these skills were not tested. Furthermore, according

to Wu & Chin (2006), high school teachers periodically employ GEPT-related

material in English classes in order to help students prepare for the GEPT. Despite the

fact that high school English instruction still mainly emphasizes reading and writing

skills, to help students to prepare for the college entrance , English educators currently

spend a proportion of instruction time on developing listening and speaking ability in

order to help learners obtain a certificate of English proficiency.

In conclusion, learners and teachers seem to pay more attention to the

development of listening and speaking skills than in the past. Focusing on listening

and speaking skills may have influenced students' English ability over the last few

years. Students at present have more opportunities to improve their listening and speaking than students in the past because of this new focus in English classrooms. Moreover, more and more young people take the GEPT, which includes listening and speaking components. In comparison, students in the past may have put more effort into reading and writing since reading and writing were the major components of the English test for the college entrance exams at that time. As a result, students' English ability in the four skills may have changed over the past ten years.

2.5 Increased Exposure to English

In addition to the emphasis on listening and speaking skills, increased exposure to English might have had an influence on learners' English ability. First, English instruction that occurs before the start of compulsory English in elementary schools will be presented in this section. Second, increased exposure to English in cram schools for elementary and secondary school students will be reviewed. Third, this section will illustrate the use of English magazines by secondary students to improve their English. Fourth, this section will discuss English language activities at schools. Fifth, the positive affect of study tours and travel abroad will be reviewed. Last, this

section will discuss how computers and modern technologies have an influence on

English learning outside of schools.

2.5.1 English Education in Kindergartens

Many parents in Taiwan believe that the younger their children study English,

the better their English ability will eventually be (Chang, Chang, & Lin, 2002). As a

result, some parents send their children to "English only" or "bilingual" kindergartens

before the children receive formal English education at school. Seventy eight percent

of kindergartens offer English instruction in one area of Taipei City (Hsin, 2004).

Also, one third of national kindergartens and the majority of private kindergartens

implement English teaching for children (Chang et al., 2002). Moreover, many

kindergartens hire native English speakers to teach English to children (Chang et al.).

Regardless of the teaching quality and background of these native English speaking

teachers, many young learners in Taiwan are exposed to English before they start

receiving formal English education in elementary school.

2.5.2 English Education in Cram Schools

In addition to the popularity of English-learning kindergartens, one third of elementary school students go to English cram schools (MOE, 2000a; MOE, 2001). Likewise, more than sixty percent of junior high school students attend English cram schools (M. C. Hsieh, 2007). Similarly, around seventy percent of first-year senior high school students claim that they had been to English cram school during junior high school life (Chang et al., 2003, as cited in M. C. Hsieh, 2007). This indicates that students in elementary and junior high schools receive English education not only at school but also after school.

While students in elementary and junior high schools receive additional English instruction in cram schools, many senior high school students go to English cram schools in order to prepare for the college entrance exams. Based on Lin & Chen (2006), thirty-five percent of incoming freshmen in 2003 had attended an English cram school, in order to prepare for the DRET, since their first year of high school. Lin & Chen (2006) explore the data for incoming freshmen in 2003 in the Taiwan Assessment of Student Achievement database and thus find that about seventy-five percent of freshmen in 2003 entered college using their score in the DRET. In the same fashion, according to a survey of incoming freshmen in 2005, forty three percent of these freshmen claimed that they went to cram school for additional English study

(Y. R. Huang, 2009). Y. R. Huang (2009) finds that high school students in top

schools go to cram schools to improve their English more frequently than those

students in general high schools. On the other hand, the number of English cram

schools in 2010 is three times the number in 2001 (Education bureau of Kaohsiung

City Government, 2010). In conclusion, students increased exposure to English occurs

not only at school but also in cram schools.

2.5.3 The Use of English Magazines

Many secondary school students are required to study English magazines as

extra homework, in addition to their textbooks (P. J. Ko, 2008; H. J. Lin, 2001). For

instance, seventh and eighth grade students at one junior high school in Taipei had to

watch or listen to a program called *English 300* once a week at school (H. J. Lin,

2001). Also, the seventh grade students must watch or listen to the English program,

Let's Talk in English, once a week at school (H. J. Lin, 2001). Similarly, the English

magazine, *Live Magazine* was assigned at one senior high school and the students

who read this improved their listening and reading skills (P. J. Ko, 2008). Furthermore,

based on books on the market, the top six selling English magazines are

Studioclassroom, English 4, Ivy League English, EZ Talk, Global Village, and *Live*

Magazine. All of them share similar characteristics (Li & Shen, 2006). First, the cover

pages of these magazines indicate levels in order to match with the GEPT. Also, these

magazines are designed for use from the elementary level to the high-intermediate

level. Second, these magazine publishers offer daily on-line programs or radio

programs and the programs are mostly in English. Additionally, these magazines

include CDs or VCDs so that learners can listen to the English program more than

once. To conclude, English magazines are often used as one of the English

assignments for secondary school students since these magazines can help to develop

reading and listening skills.

2.5.4 English Activities at Schools

In addition to the availability of English magazines for EFL Taiwanese students,

English activities like singing contests or drama contests are popular at schools (W. C.

Chang, 2006; Huang & Lu, 2007; J. M. Kuo, 2008). For instance, junior high school

teachers hold English contests such as storytelling, mini play, and singing

competitions for students in order to provide an environment for students to use

English (H. J. Lin, 2001). Learners who are involved in these English activities not

only have the chance to practice English during the activity but also have

opportunities to speak English to each other. Likewise, Huang and Lu (2007) maintain that English activities, such as speech contest and singing contest, were positive motivators for university students to learn English. Also, they built their confidence to speak English during English activities. Although little research has been conducted into what aspects of English language skills Taiwanese learners have improved during English activities, English activities offers an environment for learners to speak English as well as helps learners in Taiwan enhance their confidence in speaking English.

2.5.5 The Effect of Study Tours and Travel Abroad

Many students spend their summer or winter vacations studying and traveling in English speaking countries (Yang, Yu, Tsai, Yu, & Chen, 2008). According to D. Hsieh (2009), learners who go on study tours aim to enhance their English listening and speaking proficiency and increase their opportunities to speak English (Chiang, 1998; D. Hsieh, 2009; Miao & Harris, 2003). However, Li (2003) contends that learners who went on study tours in English-speaking countries did not improve their English ability very much due to a short term immersion in an all-English environment. Although there has been far less research on the effects of study tours on

students' English ability, Taiwanese learners who have experience of study tour may improve their listening and speaking ability to a certain extent.

Despite little research has focused on the relationship between study tours and students' English ability, research has shown that study tour can motivate Taiwanese learners to study English (C. H. Chang, 2005). In addition, Taiwanese learners who go on study tour enhance their confidence in speaking English with foreigners (Li, 2003). In sum, study tours not only provide learners an environment to speak English but also help learners actively study English.

2.5.6 The Influence of Computers and Modern Technologies

In addition to English activities at school and study tours, computers and technology provide learners increasing opportunities to learn and use English. Although there are few studies on the effect of computers and modern technologies on Taiwanese students' English ability, these studies have shown that students in Taiwan tend to enhance their English ability by using computers in their available time (Shen, 2008; Shen, Tseng, Kuo, Su & Chen, 2005). Based on Shen (2008), three fourth of the students in one university in Southern Taiwan utilized computers after class in order to improve their English ability. Similarly, half of the students in one of the

universities in Taiwan have a tendency to study and read English online as an out-of-class English learning activities in order to improve their reading ability (Shen et al., 2005).

In addition to the utility of computers and modern technology, research has shown that Taiwanese learners attempted to enhance their listening skills by watching western movies or listening to English broadcasting. Researchers contend that three fourth of the students in two of the universities in Taiwan claimed that they watched Western movies in order to improve their English listening ability (Shen, 2008; Shen et al., 2005). In the same way, approximately fifty percent of the Taiwanese students in one university attempted to listen to International Community Radio Taipei (ICRT) in order to enhance their listening skills (Shen et al., 2005). ICRT is the only all-English radio in Taiwan (Sheu, 2005; Kao, 2010). The programs of ICRT pay attentions to entertainment, western music, and domestic and international news. Even though few studies have indicated the influence of exposure to western movies and English broadcasting on students' English listening achievement, Taiwanese learners expose themselves to English broadcasting and western films in order to improve their listening ability.

In summary, current learners in Taiwan may have considerable exposure to English in addition to formal English classes at school. This increased exposure to English comes from English magazines, activities at school, study abroad opportunities, and modern technology and computers. As a result, this increased exposure to English may have influenced changes in students' English ability.

2.6 Studies about Changes in English Abilities

In addition to increased exposure to English, both inside and outside the classroom, a review of research on changes in English ability may reveal differences in students' English ability from the past compared to the present. This section will first review the English listening and reading ability of students from junior and senior high schools in Taiwan. Second, this section will discuss the changes in freshmen's English ability including reading, listening and grammar components, over the past twelve years.

Cheng and Chang (2006, 2007) explored the achievements of students from 2006 to 2007 based on data from The Taiwan Assessment of Student Achievement database. Cheng and Chang (2006, 2007) found that second-year junior high school students', second-year senior high school students' and second-year vocational high school

students' ability to understand daily English conversation has increased. However, while second-year students in senior high and vocational high schools have improved their reading ability, in terms of ability to read English signs and charts employing commonly used vocabulary, second-year junior high school students in 2007 seem to have lower scores than those in 2006. The two studies indicate that students' listening ability in Taiwan may have gradually increased over two years with regarding to ability to listen to dialogues about daily life.

In the same fashion, research shows that incoming freshmen at present have attained better listening ability than those in the past (Sims 2012). Based on Sims (2012), current incoming freshmen at Tunghai University have higher listening scores than incoming freshmen did twelve years ago. Sims (2012) examines the English performances of non-English major freshmen from 1998 to 2010 (excluding students in 2002). This university gives an English placement test to non-English major freshmen in order to place students into freshmen English classes based on their English ability. The placement tests consist of listening, reading and grammar components. According to Sims (2012), students' grammatical ability declined from 2001 to 2005 while students' grammatical ability from 2006 to 2010 stayed the same. Furthermore, students' reading ability remained stable from 1998 to 2000 and from

2006 to 2009. However, students' reading ability decreased from 2000 to 2005. Lastly, students' listening ability increased from 1998 to 2010. To conclude, the listening ability of incoming freshmen at Tunghai University has gradually improved over the last twelve years. The above studies show that students at present tend to have higher listening ability than students in the past.

2.7 Summary

This section includes three parts: the notion of teacher expectations, four possible factors that might have influenced the changes in student English ability over the last decade, and research on changes in students' English ability in Taiwan. Research has shown that FENM students at Tunghai University in Taiwan have improved their English listening ability while their reading and grammatical ability appear to have declined or remained stable over the past twelve years. However, little attention has been paid to teacher perceptions about these changes in students' ability in terms of grammar, reading, listening, speaking and writingskills. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate university teachers' perceptions about the possible changes in freshmen English ability at Tunghai University.

Furthermore, the second purpose of this study aims to investigate university teachers' perceptions of possible factors which might have influenced the changes in student English ability. These factors might include the ones presented in the literature review above. These possible factors are as follow: 1) reforms to government language policies, including changes to the English curriculum in both elementary and secondary schools, as well as reforms to the college entrance exams, 2) transitions in teaching methods from the Grammar Translation Method to more Communicative Language Teaching, 3) attempts to improve students' listening and speaking ability in order to obtain certificates of English proficiency such as TOEIC and the GEPT, 4) increases in exposures to English including extracurricular activities, access to the Internet, attending cram schools, and participating in oversea study tours. In summary, based on teachers' perceptions, this study aims to identify changes in freshmen English ability and factors that may have caused these changes.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

This research aims to explore Tunghai university teachers' perceptions of possible changes in students' English ability. This section presents the research methodology that will be used in this study. First, the settings and the participants will be described. Second, the instruments will be presented. Third, data collection procedures will be specified. Fourth, the data analysis procedures will be provided. Lastly, the procedures to determine the validity of the interviews will be discussed.

3.1 Settings

The setting for this study is Tunghai University in central Taiwan. Tunghai University is a private university established in 1953. Tunghai University is composed of six colleges and three schools. The student population is homogeneous with ninety percent of the students being native Chinese language speakers (Tunghai University Office of Academic Affairs, 2010). This study will focus on the undergraduates of the non-English major freshmen population.

Every incoming non-English major freshman at Tunghai University must take the Tunghai English Placement Exam (TEPE) during freshmen orientation. The TEPE is an eighty-minute language exam designed to divide students into Freshmen English

for Non-Majors (FENM) classes based on their English ability. The TEPE is a multiple-choice exam consisting of sixty questions, each with only one correct answer (Sims, 2006a). The TEPE is designed to measure three skills: grammar (20%), reading (40%) and listening (40%).

The test specifications of the TEPE are as follows (Sims, 2006a). First, the grammar section is designed to assess students' ability to recognize language that is commonly used in standard written English, including subject-verb agreement, count and non-count nouns, prepositions, adjective clauses, gerund, and infinitives. Second, the reading section of the TEPE is composed of five types of questions: main idea questions, detailed questions, pronoun-reference questions, vocabulary-in-context questions, and inferences questions. Lastly, the listening section includes three components: stories, dialogues, and appropriate responses. The goal of the stories and dialogues is to measure general comprehension of extensive listening texts. On the other hand, the goal of the appropriate responses is to measure students' immediate listening skills in response to what they will have heard. In summary, the TEPE is designed to assess students' grammar, reading, and listening abilities.

3.1.1 The FENM Goals

The participants were asked to identify changes in FENM student English ability based on the goals of the FENM program. What follows is a brief description of the FENM program and its goals. FENM at Tunghai University is a four skills integrated English course (Sims, 2006b). Based on Sims (2006b):

The general goals of the FENM program are to provide an atmosphere that will increase students' participation in a non-threatening environment, increase their confidence in English speaking contexts, and increase their ability to apply the knowledge of the English language they have acquired in high school. In order to accomplish these general goals, the emphasis is on fluency rather than accuracy. Creativity is encouraged, but language errors that impede comprehension should be corrected with sensitivity. (p. 358)

The goals for each of the four skills are presented as follows.

3.1.2 Reading Goals

The main goal of the reading component of the FENM is to maximize students' opportunities to use basic reading skills such as skimming, scanning, identifying the main ideas, making inferences, and guessing unknown vocabulary. This is done through the use of intensive as well as extensive reading. Intensive reading involves

50

reading articles in the reading textbooks. Extensive reading includes the use of simplified readers. The reading component of FENM is skill-based. In the intensive reading component, students are taught the specific reading skills listed above. In the extensive reading component, students apply the specific skills they have learned in the intensive reading component to reading simplified readers and other English language material. The reading items of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) will correspond to the reading skills taught in FENM program.

3.1.3 Listening Goals

The main goal of the listening component of the FENM is to maximize students' opportunities to listen to English as spoken by people from varied ethnic backgrounds. Students are expected to be exposed to diverse authentic English inputs that will help them comprehend daily conversations. Richards (1985) provides several ways to achieve this goal: (1) memorize segments of language for different lengths of time; (2) use the student's life experience to infer the purposes of passages; (3) predict results from descriptions; (4) make connections between events; (5) determine causes and effects from descriptions of events. Students should attempt to accomplish the program's listening goals by employing the methods offered by Richards (1985).

By the end of the FENM program, it is hoped that students have the capability to comprehend short oral stories and conversations, as well as choose appropriate responses. It is also expected that students are able to answer listening questions based on both the main ideas and specific details. These goals form the basis of the listening component of the exams in FENM and will be the constructs for the listening items on the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

3.1.4 Speaking Goals

The major goal of the speaking component of the FENM is to provide students with the maximum opportunity to speak English in class. Pair work, group work, role-plays, dialogues, and speeches are used to achieve this goal. It is hoped that students will have built up their confidence in speaking English by the time they complete the FENM. In addition, the oral component of the FENM is task-based. According to Sims (2006b), in task-based instruction, teachers offer a series of purposeful tasks which students need to accomplish by utilizing English. The suggested grading criteria for oral assignments will form the basis of the speaking items of the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

3.1.5 Writing Goals

The primary goal of the writing component of the FENM is to maximize students' opportunities to express concepts and ideas using formal written communication in English. Upon completion of the FENM, students should have developed an understanding of the essential elements of well-structured and cohesive rhetorical structures and understand the different purposes of formal written communication. During the FENM, students are taught a variety of writing strategies to compose texts. Students should develop the capability to write topic sentences and construct paragraphs though three stages: modeling, drafting, and revising.

The purpose of the writing component is to enable students to apply the vocabulary and the grammar they have learned in high school to writing English compositions and to help them to be conscious of English academic writing styles. Students are taught to compose clear topic sentences in written form in order to express their main ideas. Students are also taught to provide related details to support the main ideas and to offer logical conclusions. The writing items of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) will be consistent with the writing goals in FENM.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were 18 current FENM teachers. The participants

consisted of 1 associate professor and 17 lecturers. All of the participants had been

teaching FENM at Tunghai University for more than ten years and had obtained at

least a masters degree in Teaching English as a Second Language or a related field

from universities in the United Kingdom or the United States. Eight of the participants

had taught in FENM programs for more than twenty years at Tunghai University,

while six of the participants had taught in them for more than fifteen years. The

remaining participants had been teaching FENM for more than ten years (see Table

3.1). Sixteen of the participants were full-time teachers. Two of the participants were

part-time teachers, one of whom was a retired lecturer from Tunghai University. The

other part-time teacher had been teaching for more than twenty-five years. In

summary, the participants were all extremely experienced FENM teachers at Tunghai

University.

Of the participants, four had usually taught high level classes, ten had generally

taught mid level classes, and four had mostly taught low level classes (see Table 3.2).

This ratio (4 high: 10 mid: 4 low) is representative of the whole FENM population at

Tunghai University (Sims, 2008). Finally, seven participants were native English

speakers whereas eleven participants were native Chinese speakers. Ten of the

participants were female and eight were male.

Table 3.1

Number of Years Teaching at Tunghai University

Range of years teaching	Number of teachers
10-15	4
16-20	6
21-29	8

Table 3.2

Level of FENM the Participants Have Mostly Taught at Tunghai University

Level of FENM	Number of teachers
High	4
Middle	10
Low	4

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Mixed-method Approach

Based on Tashakkori and Creswell (2007), a mixed method research is defined as "research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry" (p. 4). Moreover, mixed method designs consist of four types: a triangulation mixed methods design, an embedded mixed methods design, an explanatory mixed methods design, and an exploratory

mixed methods design (Brannen, 1992; Creswell, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Additionally, differences exist among these four types as follows: the sequence of

collecting the quantitative and qualitative data, different emphasized roles of the

quantitative and qualitative data, as well as the priority of the quantitative and

qualitative data (Creswell, 2007).

An explanatory design is one type of the mixed method designs (Brannen, 1992;

Creswell, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). An explanatory design was employed

in this study to answer the research questions because the advantage of this design is

"clearly identified quantitative and qualitative parts, an advantage for readers as well

as for those designing and conducting the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 560). Also, this

design embodies the essence of both quantitative and qualitative data. The strength of

the quantitative results is that they can be generalized. On the other hand, the benefit

of the qualitative results is that they can provide in-depth understanding.

According to Creswell (2007), an explanatory mixed methods design refers to

the procedure of first collecting quantitative data, and then collecting qualitative data

in order to explain or elaborate on the results of the quantitative data. As a result, the

researcher first collected quantitative data via the questionnaire and then gathered

qualitative data by means of the interviews. More specifically, in the first phase, the

results of the quantitative data from the questionnaire indicated the perceptions of the

participants. In the second phase, the qualitative data from the interviews helped the

researcher gain a deeper understanding of how the participants perceived the possible

changes in students' English ability.

3.3.2 Questionnaires

A questionnaire was employed to identify teachers' perceptions of possible

changes in students' English ability and attitudes toward English learning. The

questionnaire included the following two sections: 1) basic personal background

information and 2) the participants' perceptions of possible changes in students'

English ability (see Appendix A).

The first section included the names of the participants, the numbers of years

they have been teaching at Tunghai University, and the class level the participants

have mostly taught in the FENM program. The purpose of this section was to have an

understanding of the participants' background and their teaching experience at

Tunghai University.

The researcher designed the items of the second section based on the goals,

objectives, and the testing specifications of the FENM program at Tunghai University

(Sims, 2006b). The questionnaire used a five-point Likert-scale ranging from A = major increase (5 points) to E = major decrease (1 point). In addition, the second section of the questionnaires was designed to measure six domains: possible changes in grammar, reading, listening, speaking and writing as well as attitudes toward English learning. The items on the questionnaire (see Appendix A) for each domain were created to be consistent with the specific goals and the grading policy for the FENM program at Tunghai University. More specifically, the items for the domains of grammar, reading, and listening were created to match the test specifications of the TEPE (Sims, 2006a). Also, the items for the speaking and writing domains were designed on the basis of the specific goals for speaking as well as writing in the FENM. Lastly, the items for the attitude domain will be created to explore the participants' perceptions of possible changes in students' attitudes towards grammar, reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

3.3.2.1 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire Items

Based on Brown (2001), an expert ratings approach is one way to support content validity of an instrument. Therefore, this study employed an expert ratings approach in order to determine whether the questionnaire measures what it was

supposed to measure. Three associate professors in the graduate program of Teaching English as a Second Language at Tunghai University were asked to determine whether the items of the questionnaire had content validity. These three scholars were not involved in the construction of the questionnaire and would not participate in this study. The three associate professors concluded that the items of the questionnaire are a valid measure of the desired specifications.

Brown (2001) contends that Cronbach alpha can be used to examine if the questionnaire has internal-consistency reliability. As a result, Cronbach alpha was calculated through the statistical package SPSS 15.0 for Windows in order to determine the internal reliability coefficient of the questionnaire items.

Internal-consistency reliability coefficients of the questionnaire responses were shown in Table 3.3. As can be seen, all the values of Cronbach alpha were quite high. All of them were above .90 except for the listening domain. In sum, the questionnaire has high internal-consistency reliability.

Table 3.3

Internal-Consistency Reliability Coefficients of the Questionnaire Responses

	Reading	Listening	Speaking	Grammar	Writing	Attitude
Cronbach alpha	.922	.888	.924	.952	.903	.917

3.3.3 Interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to shed light on the ways the interviewees perceive possible changes in student English ability. Semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher developed specific questions beforehand, but elaborated on the questions and answers during the interviews (Hatch, 2002; Seliger & Shohamy, 2001).

The questions for the interviews (see Appendix B and Appendix C) were designed based on the six categories of the questionnaire. In order to have a comprehensive and complete set of interview questions, the advisor reviewed the questions before pilot interviews are conducted. Also, the researcher modified the interview questions after the pilot study by asking the interviewees' opinions and suggestions at the end of the interviews. The researcher also revised some interview questions if they were unclear to the interviewees in the pilot study.

The interview questions were divided into two sections. The first section corresponded to the background information of the questionnaire (see Appendix B). Seven additional questions were added to provide more details on the interviewees' teaching experiences at Tunghai University. These seven questions are as follows:

1. What majors of students have you mostly taught at THU?

2. What aspects of English do you mostly emphasize in FENM at THU? For example, reading, listening, speaking, writing.

3. What language do you use mostly in class?

4. What language do students use mostly in class?

5. In addition to the midterm and final exams, what kinds of tests do you use in FENM?

6. How long have you used these tests?

   A. If teachers change the test every year, ask why they change.

   B. If not, ask them whether there is any difference of overall performance over the past ten years.

7. How many writing assignments do students need to do in FENM per semester?

   A. What are the topics?

   B. What is the word count?

   C. What kinds of criteria do you use for writing assignments?

The second section of the interviews focused on their questionnaire responses (see Appendix C). Generally speaking, the researcher asked the interviewees why and how they perceived possible changes in students' English ability. Also, the researcher asked the interviewees to provide examples of changes in students' performances in

class. The researcher also asked further questions based on the responses in each domain of the questionnaire. Lastly, the researcher asked the interviewees' opinions on potential factors that might have influenced the changes in students' English ability. It is worthwhile to note that the researcher would not ask all the same questions to each interviewees because the participants held different perceptions of possible changes in students' English ability. However, all the interview questions were directed toward developing a deeper understanding of possible perceived changes in students' English ability.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

3.4.1 Data Collection for Questionnaire

The 18 participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires during midterm exam week of the fall semester. In order to give the participants time to review their grade books and other material from the last ten years, the participants had one week to fill out the questionnaires. The participants were asked to return their questionnaires to the advisor's mailbox once the participants had completed the questionnaires. The reason why the researcher will distribute the questionnaires during the midterm exam week of the fall semester was that the participants had

developed perceptions of their current students' English ability. Also, the participants

had more available time during the midterm exam week.

3.4.2 Data Collection for Interviews

Ten interviewees were randomly chosen for interview. They are Crystal, Curtis,

Howard, Jacob, Janet, Jeffery, Megan, Opal, Roger, and Stanley. These are

pseudonyms. Three of the interviewees have mostly taught high level class, five have

taught mid level, and two have taught low level (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4

The Names of the Interviewees and the Level of the Interviewees Have Mostly Taught

Interviewees	Level of the Interviewees Have Mostly Taught at Tunghai University
Howard, Jacob, Jeffery	High
Crystal, Curtis, Janet, Roger, Stanley	Mid
Megan, Rosa	Low

These ten interviewees were interviewed after the end of the fall semester. The

researcher asked when the interviewees were available to be interviewed via

one-to-one emails and also asked the interviewees where they preferred to have the

interviews, such as the interviewees' own offices or the teachers' lounge. When the

researcher met individual interviewees, each interviewee was asked whether they

were willing to have the interview video taped prior to the interview being conducted. If any interviewee was not willing to be video taped during the interview, the researcher looked for other interviewees who were willing to have the interview video taped. Warren (2002) proposes that "the conventional wisdom has been that qualitative interviews should be audio-recorded" (p. 91). In order to reduce the anxiety of the interviewees, the researcher greeted the interviewees, introduced herself, as well as stated the purpose of the study at the beginning of the interviews. Also, the interviewees chose their preferred language during the interviews in order to allow the interviewees to express their thoughts clearly and fluently. Next, the interviewees spent time reviewing the questionnaires they completed before the researcher asked interview questions. After the interviewees had reviewed their questionnaires, the researcher asked the pre-designed questions (Appendix B and Appendix C). Each interview was anticipated to range from thirty minutes to an hour. Lastly, all the video tapes of interviews were transcribed into English or Chinese.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Data Analysis of Questionnaires

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed by utilizing the statistical package SPSS 15.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics were computed to determine mean, frequency, and standard deviation for each item. The focus of the statistical procedure was to describe the frequency of the participants' perception of possible changes in University students' English ability. These descriptive statistics will be calculated for each section of the questionnaire. Additionally, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the six categories of the questionnaires was computed.

3.5.2 Data Analysis of Interviews

In order to provide a better analysis of the interview data, a conceptually clustered matrix was utilized to analyze the interviews. Since the interview data were analyzed based on the six domains of the questionnaire (grammar, reading, listening, speaking, writing, and attitudes), the researcher utilized a conceptually clustered matrix because, according to Miles & Huberman (1994), this method helps most in conditions when researchers have clear conceptual themes.

Miles & Huberman (1994) present three procedures to use conceptually clustered matrices. First, Miles & Huberman (1994) suggest building the display format. A format is necessarily essential to demonstrate all of the related responses from the

interviewees. The example, offered by Miles & Huberman (1994), is that the first row

displays different categories based on different research questions. On the other hand,

the first column of the same format displays different interviewees. The second

procedure is to enter the data. Miles & Huberman (1994) propose that coded segments,

significant to the research questions, are needed in order to categorize the raw data.

Lastly, conclusions can be drawn based on reviewing across the rows and columns of

the matrix. Reading across the rows helps to highlight relationships between different

variables. Additionally, reading down the columns offers a method to make

comparisons and contrasts between the responses of all the interviewees.

The researcher followed the procedures for using a conceptually clustered matrix

provided by Miles & Huberman (1994). Firstly, the researcher created a display a

format, with the six categories in the first row and the different interviewees in the

first column (see Table 3.5). Next, the researcher read all the transcripts and place

labels on them. The researcher then entered the labels and the segmented transcripts

into the matrix. Finally, the researcher made comparisons and contrasts between the

rows and columns in order to draw conclusions.

Table 3.5

A Conceptually Clustered Matrix: Six Domains (Format)

	Research Question					
I	Grammar (up/ same down)	Reading (up/ same/ down)	Listening (up/ same/ down)	Speaking (up/ same/ down)	Writing (up/ same/ down)	Attitude (up/ same/ down)
Crystal						
Curtis						
Howard						
Jacob						
Janet						
Jeffery						
Megan						
Roger						
Rosa						
Stanley						

Note. I = interviewees (pseudonyms).

A template organizing style was utilized to analyze the last interview question on what possible factors the interviewees thought might have influenced the changes in students' English ability. Crabtree & Miller (2000) propose that "the template organizing style makes use of a template or organizing codebook that is applied to the text being analyzed" (p. 21). The template includes four procedures. First, the researcher developed a code manual on a basis of the literature review. Since four potential factors which may have influenced students' English ability were discussed

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in Chapter Two, the researcher created a code manual based on these four factors. Next, the interview texts were coded and pasted onto diverse colorful cards. For instance, texts related to government reforms were written on pink cards, and texts related to changes in teaching approach were placed on yellow cards. Third, the researcher sorted the segments to put similar and related texts together. Lastly, the researcher read segments and then made connections by utilizing chucking. Based on Crabtree & Miller (2000), "chucking refers to examining chunks of related texts together. Chunks are segments of texts that are several paragraphs or pages in length (p.170)."

3.6 Validity of the Interviews

In order to increase the validity of the qualitative research, triangulation and member-checking, suggested by Creswell (2003), help researchers confirm the accuracy of the findings. Based on Creswell (2003), triangulation and member-checking are two strategies that are most frequently utilized and easy to implement. As a result, these two strategies will be utilized in this study.

Based on Denzin (1978), methodological triangulation refers to the utility of a variety of methods to explore a research question. The researcher employed surveys

and interviews, together with the hard data, in the process of data triangulation. That is, the researcher investigated teacher perceptions of possible changes in student English ability by employing the surveys and interviews with the participants. In addition, the hard data from Tunghai students' English scores of the TEPE indicate quantifiable changes in students' English ability.

The member-checking strategy was utilized to increase the validity of this study. Researchers contend that one of the primary ways of improving the quality of qualitative studies is to do member-checking with the participants (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Therefore, the researcher asked the interviewees to review their interview transcript in order to increase the accuracy of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will report the results of the investigation of Tunghai University EFL teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen English language ability in Taiwan. This chapter will be organized into eight sections. Each section will report the results of the quantitative data, followed by the findings of the qualitative data as well as discussion of the results.

4.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Changes in Students' Overall Ability

Table 4.1 provides the participants' perceptions of changes in students' overall language ability. As shown in Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1, more participants (44.5%) perceived that students' overall language ability has improved over the last decade than participants perceived a decrease (16.7%). One third of the participants perceived no changes in students' overall language ability over the past ten years. The data also show that three quarters of the participants who taught high level FENM classes perceived that their students' general language ability has improved. Similarly, half of the participants who taught low level FENM classes reported that there has been an improvement in students' overall language ability. However, approximately half of

the participants who taught mid-level classes reported no changes in their students'

overall ability.

The participants perceived improvements or no changes in students' language

ability over the past ten years, which is consistent with Sims' (2012) findings that

students' English ability has increased or remained stable over the last decade based

on scores of the TEPE from 1998 to 2010. Although the TEPE scores consist of

grammar, reading and listening sections, these three abilities are parts of the overall

language ability (reading, listening, speaking and writing). As a result, the

participants' perceptions tend to correspond to Sims' (2012) results.
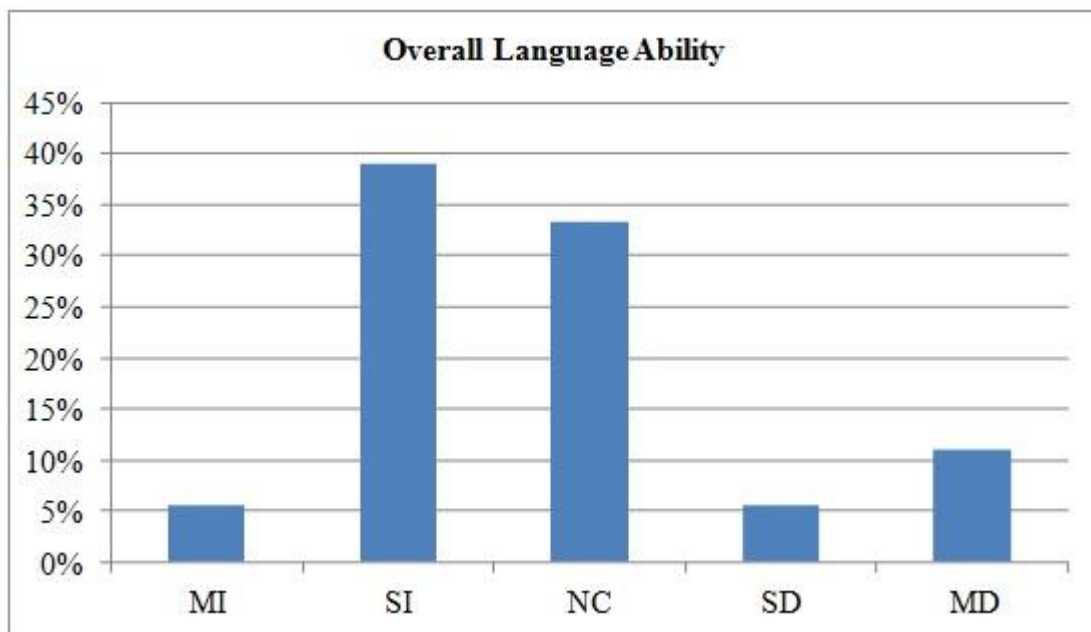
Figure 4.1
Participants' perceptions of changes in students' overall language ability

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease; MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics for Overall

1. General overall language ability							
	MI	SI	NC	SD	MD	M	SD
Total	1 (5.6%)	7 (38.9%)	6 (33.3%)	1 (5.6%)	2 (11.1%)	3.24	1.09
High	0	3	1	0	0	3.75	.50
Mid	1	2	4	1	1	3.11	1.17
Low	0	2	1	0	1	3.00	1.41

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease; MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

4.2 Teachers' Perceptions of Changes in Students' Grammar Ability

This section will address research question 1: What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's grammar ability over the last ten years. The first part will report the quantitative aspect and the second part will report the qualitative aspect.

4.2.1 Quantitative Results

Based on the results of the questionnaire, the participants' perceptions of changes in students' grammar ability are presented in Figure 4.2 and Table 4.2. As can be seen,

more participants (44.5%) perceived that students' overall grammar ability has declined over the last decade than reported no changes (33.3%) in students' general grammar ability during this time period. Also, the data indicate that half of the participants who taught mid level and low level classes reported a decrease in students' overall grammar ability. In addition, no participants perceived a major increase in students' grammar ability for any items on the grammar section of the questionnaire. None of the participants who taught low level classes perceived any improvements for seven items on the grammar section of the questionnaire. For Item 3, 5, and 7, two participants (one taught high level and one taught mid level) perceived a slight increase in students' grammar ability for items on the grammar section of the questionnaire. In summary, more than half of the participants perceived no changes for all grammar items (Items 3 to 8).

The participants' perceptions of decline or no changes to their students' grammar ability are consistent with Sims' (2012) findings. According to Sims (2012), based on the scores of the TEPE, students' grammar scores have significantly declined from 2001 to 2005. Also, students' scores on the grammar section of the TEPE have remained stable from 2006 to 2010. In addition, Sims (2012) maintains that, for most items on the grammar section of the TEPE, students' scores have decreased from

2001 to 2005 and this decline has tapered off from 2006 to 2010. In summary, the

participants' perceptions seem to be consistent with Sims' (2012) conclusions.
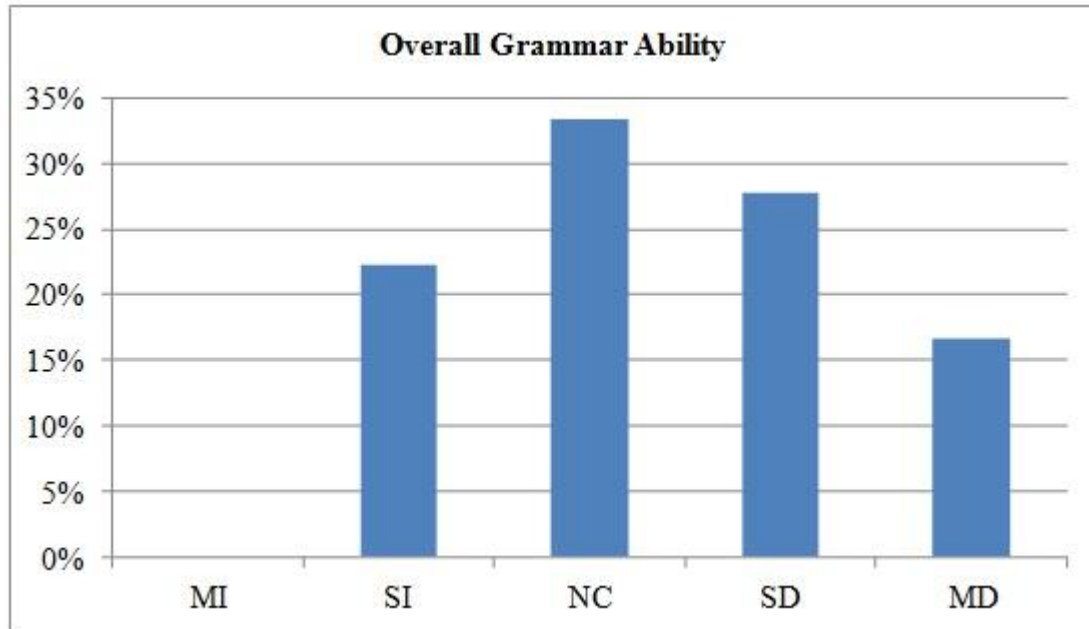
Figure 4.2
Participants' perceptions of changes in students' overall grammar ability
Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease;
MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics for Grammar

2. General overall grammar ability							
	MI	SI	NC	SD	MD	M	SD
Total	0	4 (22.2%)	6 (33.3%)	5 (27.8%)	3 (16.7%)	2.61	1.04
High	0	2	1	1	0	3.25	.96
Mid	0	2	3	2	3	2.40	1.17
Low	0	0	2	2	0	2.50	.58

3. Ability to use proper verb tense							
Total	0	2 (11.1%)	9 (50.0%)	3 (16.7%)	4 (22.2%)	2.50	.99
High	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82
Mid	0	1	4	2	3	2.30	1.06
Low	0	0	3	0	1	2.50	1.00
4. Ability to use proper subject-verb agreement							
Total	0	3 (16.7%)	10 (55.6%)	2 (11.1%)	3 (16.7%)	2.72	.96
High	0	2	1	1	0	3.25	.96
Mid	0	1	6	1	2	2.60	.97
Low	0	0	3	0	1	2.50	1.00
5. Ability to use count and non-count nouns							
Total	0	2 (11.1%)	11 (61.1%)	2 (11.1%)	3 (16.7%)	2.67	.91
High	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82
Mid	0	1	6	1	2	2.60	.97
Low	0	0	3	0	1	2.50	1.00
6. Ability to use appropriate prepositions							
Total	0	0	11 (61.1%)	4 (22.2%)	3 (16.7%)	2.44	.78
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	0	0	5	3	2	2.30	.82
Low	0	0	3	0	1	2.50	1.00
7. Ability to connect ideas (conjunctions)							
Total	0	2 (11.1%)	11 (61.1%)	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)	2.78	.73
High	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82
Mid	0	1	6	2	1	2.70	.82
Low	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
8. Ability to use conditional sentences							
Total	0	1 (5.6%)	12 (66.7%)	3 (16.7%)	2 (11.1%)	2.67	.77
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	0	1	7	0	2	2.70	.95
Low	0	0	2	2	0	2.50	.58

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease; MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

4.2.2 Qualitative Results

The interview findings corroborated the questionnaire findings. Most interviewees stated that they perceived their students' grammar ability from their students' writing, speech and vocabulary tests. Based on the data, the three most prevalent grammatical changes perceived by the interviewees were: 1) insufficient knowledge of grammatical rules, 2) failure to change word forms, and 3) failure to appropriately utilize past tense.

First, current students' insufficient knowledge of grammatical rules is one of the aspects that lead the interviewees to perceive that their students' overall grammar ability has declined. Most interviewees expressed the view that their students in the past were able to familiarize themselves with many English grammatical rules while current students might not recognize these rules. Jacob stated that "I don't think students' knowledge about grammar is as good as it was in the past. In the past, students knew grammar rules, and they knew grammar rules better than I did."

In addition to insufficient grammatical knowledge, Rosa pointed out current students' incomplete sentences were more noticeable than students in the past. Rosa remarked that her students were unable to produce complete basic word order in English, which contains subjects, verbs, and objects. She stated that "sometimes they

don't use complete sentences, and in writing, they don't have verbs. Sometimes they don't have subjects. The situation is getting worse."

Second, some interviewees perceived that their current students' grammar ability has decreased because their students were unable to choose word forms of the missing word to complete sentences on vocabulary tests. These word forms include a noun, a verb, an adjective, and an adverb. Crystal often provides vocabulary tests where students have to fill in the missing words in order to complete sentences. These missing words are vocabulary in each English lesson. In order to obtain good scores, students not only need to remember vocabulary but also must recognize word forms of each vocabulary word. However, Crystal noted that many of her students were unable to change verb forms into noun forms on their vocabulary tests. She contended that failure to fill in the correct word form in each sentence on the given vocabulary tests may be due to insufficient grammatical knowledge:

> I found that my students failed to fill in correct word forms on their vocabulary tests. They did not change word forms of vocabulary words. They replace the noun forms with the verb forms when the answer should be noun forms (Crystal).

Similarly, Janet stated that her students could not make a distinction between3 the verb form and noun form, for instance, [*present and presentation*]. Janet heard her students say "I will presentation [present] an oral report tomorrow."

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Third, the obvious grammatical change perceived by the interviewees is current

students' failure to utilize past tenses. English speakers utilize tenses to specify their

actions in time. There are tenses for the past, present, and future. However, Chinese

does not have these types of tenses. As a result, EFL Taiwanese learners may fail to

use appropriate verb tenses in English. For example, Curtis stated that "I often hear

that, I go [went] home last week, or I sleep [slept] in this morning." Also, Jeffery

observed that his students failed to use correct verb tenses to describe past events,

although he perceived that his students' grammar ability has improved. Jeffery stated

that "past tense is still the problem, like I go [went] to the store yesterday. I don't hear

that very often, but I still hear this occasionally, there's a still problem with the past

tense."

4.3 Teachers' Perceptions of Changes in Students' Reading Ability

This section will answer research question 2: What are FENM teachers'

perceptions of changes in their freshmen's reading ability over the last ten years. The

first part will report the quantitative aspect and the second part will report the

qualitative aspect.

4.3.1 Quantitative Results

Figure 4.3 and Table 4.3 shows that half of the participants perceived that students' overall reading ability has declined over the last decade. The data also show that half of the participants at each level of FENM classes reported a decline in their students' general reading ability. As can be seen in Table 4.3, no participants who taught high level classes perceived a major increase or a major decrease for any reading items. Two participants who taught at the mid level perceived a major decrease in students' reading ability for Items 10, 11, 15, and 16 on the reading section of the questionnaire. Likewise, one participant who taught low level classes perceived that there has been a major decline in students' reading ability for Items 10, 11, and 16. To conclude, most high-level and mid-level participants tend to report no changes for Items 12, 13, 14, and 15. Also, a majority of low-level participants appear to perceive no changes for most reading items.

Items 10 to 17 were designed to match the reading goals of the FENM programs and the test specifications of the TEPE. The participants' perceptions are consistent with Sims' (2012) results that incoming freshmen's reading ability has remained stable (from 1998 to 2000 as well as from 2006 to 2009) or declined (from 2000 to 2005) over the last decade.

Items 15 to 17 were created based on the teaching experience of Sims (2012). Sims (2012) found that over the last few years many of his students could not read cursive text written on the blackboard. As can be seen in Table 4.3, two third of the participants (66.7%) perceived no changes in students' ability to read cursive texts. Only twenty percent of the participants reported declines for the same item. Similarly, Sims (2012) noticed that current students' general vocabulary level and reading rate have decreased in comparison with the students ten years ago. As a result, Items 16 and 17 were added in order to explore whether other experienced teachers have the same perceptions. As shown, more participants (44.5%) reported declines than those (22.2%) reported no changes for Item 16. One third of the participants perceived improvements for the same item. For Item 17, more than half of the participants (55.6%) perceived no changes. For the same item, 27.8% of the participants reported declines, and 16.7% perceived improvements. In conclusion, since half of the participants perceived no changes in students' ability to read cursive text and in their general reading rate, Sims' (2012) initial perceptions might not be accurate. However, Sims' (2012) perceptions about a decline in students' general vocabulary level tend to be consistent with most participants' in the current study.
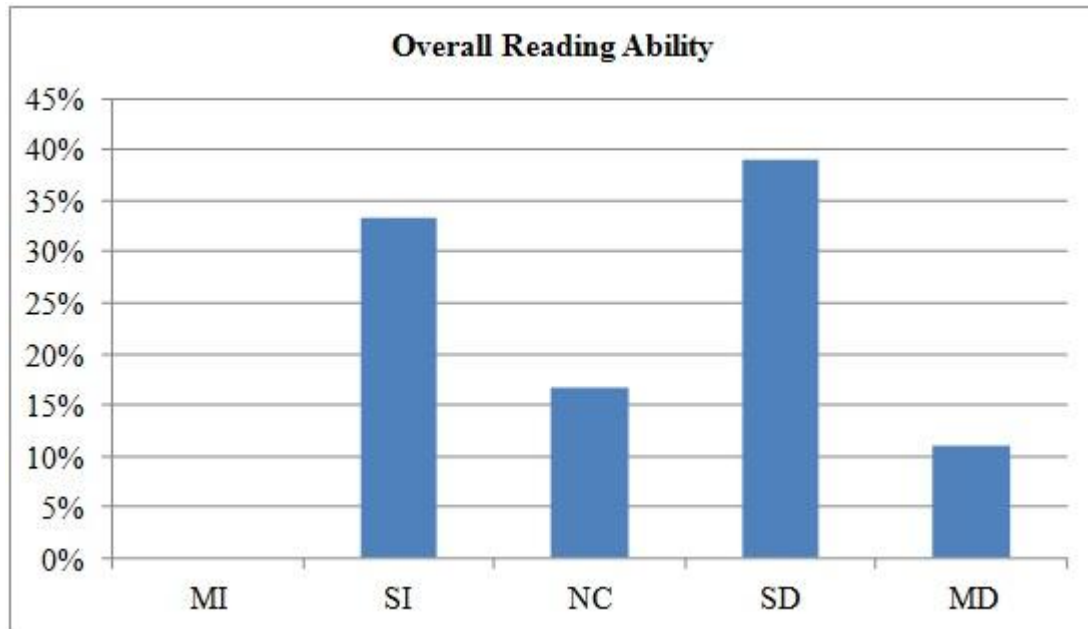
Figure 4.3

Participants' perceptions of changes in students' overall reading ability

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease; MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Table 4.3

Descriptive Statistics for Reading

	MI	SI	NC	SD	MD	M	SD
9. General overall reading ability							
Total	0	6 (33.3%)	3 (16.7%)	7 (38.9%)	2 (11.1%)	3.2	.51
High	0	1	1	2	0	2.75	.96
Mid	0	4	1	3	2	2.70	1.25
Low	0	1	1	2	0	2.75	.96
10. Ability to identify or understand main ideas							
Total	1 (5.6%)	4 (22.2%)	7 (38.9%)	3 (16.7%)	3 (16.7%)	3.22	1.06
High	0	1	1	2	0	2.75	.96
Mid	1	2	4	1	2	2.90	1.29
Low	0	1	2	0	1	2.75	1.26

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11. Ability to identify specific details

Total	0	4 (22.2%)	10 (55.6%)	1 (5.6%)	3 (16.7%)	3.22	1.06
High	0	0	4	0	0	3.00	.00
Mid	0	4	3	1	2	2.90	1.20
Low	0	0	3	0	1	2.50	1.00

12. Ability to refer to antecedents of pronouns

Total	0	5 (27.8%)	10 (55.6%)	3 (16.7%)	0	3.22	1.06
High	0	1	3	0	0	3.25	.50
Mid	0	3	5	2	0	3.10	.74
Low	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82

13. Ability to determine the meaning of a word from context

Total	0	4 (22.2%)	9 (50.0%)	5 (27.8%)	0	3.22	1.06
High	0	0	2	2	0	2.50	.58
Mid	0	3	5	2	0	3.10	.74
Low	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82

14. Ability to make inferences

Total	0	2 (11.1%)	11 (61.1%)	5 (27.8%)	0	3.22	1.06
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	0	2	5	3	0	2.90	.74
Low	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50

15. Ability to read cursive text (*handwriting style*)

Total	0	2 (11.1%)	12 (66.7%)	2 (11.1%)	2 (11.1%)	3.22	1.06
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	0	1	7	0	2	2.70	.95
Low	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82

16. General vocabulary level

Total	1 (5.6%)	5 (27.8%)	4 (22.2%)	5 (27.8%)	3 (16.7%)	3.22	1.06
High	0	2	1	1	0	3.25	.96
Mid	0	3	1	4	2	2.50	1.18
Low	1	0	2	0	1	3.00	1.63

17. General reading rate (speed)

Total	0	3 (16.7%)	10 (55.6%)	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)	3.22	1.06
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	0	3	4	2	1	2.90	1.00
Low	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease; MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

4.3.2 Qualitative Results

The interview findings expanded the questionnaire findings. Based on the data, the two most common changes in students' reading ability perceived by the interviewees were: 1) students' ability to comprehend reading texts, and 2) students' feedback about their textbooks. Also, another noticeable change in students' vocabulary level perceived by the interviewees was the depth and width of students' vocabulary knowledge.

One of the aspects used to evaluate students' reading ability is students' ability to comprehend texts in textbooks. Many interviewees perceived no changes in the ability to identify main ideas of texts. However, two interviewees' perceptions varied. Janet mentioned that students frequently failed to recognize the main ideas of texts and thus she perceived that her students' reading ability has declined. On the other hand, Curtis perceived that his students' reading ability has improved because his students could correctly answer reading comprehension questions after reading texts. As Curtis mentioned, "because there are questions after each reading, they usually get the answer correct."

Students' feedback about their textbooks is the second common change to the perception of their reading ability. Megan perceived that her current students' reading ability has declined since they were overloaded with the contents of simplified readers. Simplified readers are one of the reading requirements for FENM classes. Since Megan normally teaches low-level students, she often chooses basic-level simplified readers for her students. Based on the interview data, Megan stated that students in the past were able to understand basic-level simplified readers whereas her current students failed to comprehend them: "the book is at basic level, but for them [current students] it is still too long. The simplified reader is easier than the ones I gave years ago and I know because I still have those books."

Based on Item 16 of the reading section on the questionnaire, the interviewees who responded either improvement or decline were asked to give examples in order to compare the present situation with situations in the past. The interviewees held different perceptions about this interview question based on the depth and breadth of students' vocabulary knowledge. These deal with students' range and appropriate usage of vocabulary. Based on the interview data, Jeffery perceived that his students' vocabulary level has increased over the last decade because he found that current students could utilize complex words.

On the other hand, Crystal and Megan perceived that their students' vocabulary level has declined because their current students failed to understand some words that students in the past could recognize. Crystal stated that "when I was teaching new words, I talked about some words related to the new vocabulary. I found that my current students looked puzzled about these related words. However, in the past, my students knew these related words." Similarly, Janet noted that when she was speaking new words, her students in the past might recognize written forms of the words even though they failed to recognize the pronunciation of the words. However, Janet pointed out that her current students appeared not to have learned the words yet:

> When I talk about things, some students did not understand the words I used. But once I wrote on the board, they could understand more. But nowadays, they [current students] don't understand, even after I wrote them on the board, they still don't understand (Janet).

4.4 Teachers' Perceptions of Changes in Students' Listening Ability

This section will answer research question research 3: What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's listening ability over the last ten years. The first part will report the quantitative aspect and the second part will report the qualitative aspect.

4.4.1 Quantitative Results

The participants' perceptions of changes in students' listening ability are shown in Figure 4.4 and Table 4.4. As shown in Table 4.4, two thirds of the participants (66.6%) perceived that students' overall listening ability has increased over the last decade. It is worth noticing that no participants perceived any decrease in students' general listening ability. More specifically, all of the participants who taught high level classes perceived an improvement in students' overall listening ability, with three quarters perceiving a major increase. Six of the ten participants who taught mid level classes perceived that their students' ability has slightly increased. Half of the participants who taught low-level classes perceived a slight improvement. In addition, a majority of the participants perceived improvements for all of listening Items except for Items 22 and 25. For Items 22 and 25, "no change" is the most frequent response. Only one participant who taught mid level classes and one participant who taught low level classes reported a decline in their students' listening ability.

The listening section of the TEPE includes three parts: dialogues, stories, and appropriate responses. Item 18 corresponds to the overall listening scores of the TEPE. The participants' perceptions about improvements in students' overall listening ability tend to be consistent with Sims' (2012) results. Sims (2012) contends that students'

overall listening ability has significantly increased over the last decade. In addition, Items 19 and 20 were designed to correspond to the dialogue section of the TEPE. Items 21 and 22 were created to match the story section of the TEPE, and item 23 was designed to be consistent with the appropriate response section. The participants' perceptions about improvements for Items 19 to 22 appear to be consistent with Sims' (2012) findings that students' scores on dialogues and stories have significantly increased from year to year. However, for Item 23, the participants' perceptions appear to be inaccurate since students' scores on the appropriate response section have remained stable over the past ten years.

Items 24 and 25 were added to the questionnaire because the MOE is encouraging universities to offer English classes in order to promote students' English ability (W.C. Chang, 2007; Chen, Su, & Yu, 2011; MOE, 2002). For Item 24, more than half of the participants perceived improvements. All of the participants teaching high-level classes and three quarters of the participants teaching low-level classes reported an increase for Item 24. For Item 25, two thirds of the participants perceived no changes. Half of the participants teaching high-level and low-level classes reported no changes for Item 25. Eight out of the ten participants perceived no changes for Item 25. In summary, the participants tend to perceive that their students' ability to

understand English spoken at a normal rate has increased whereas there seems to be

no changes in students' ability to understand an academic lecture given in English.
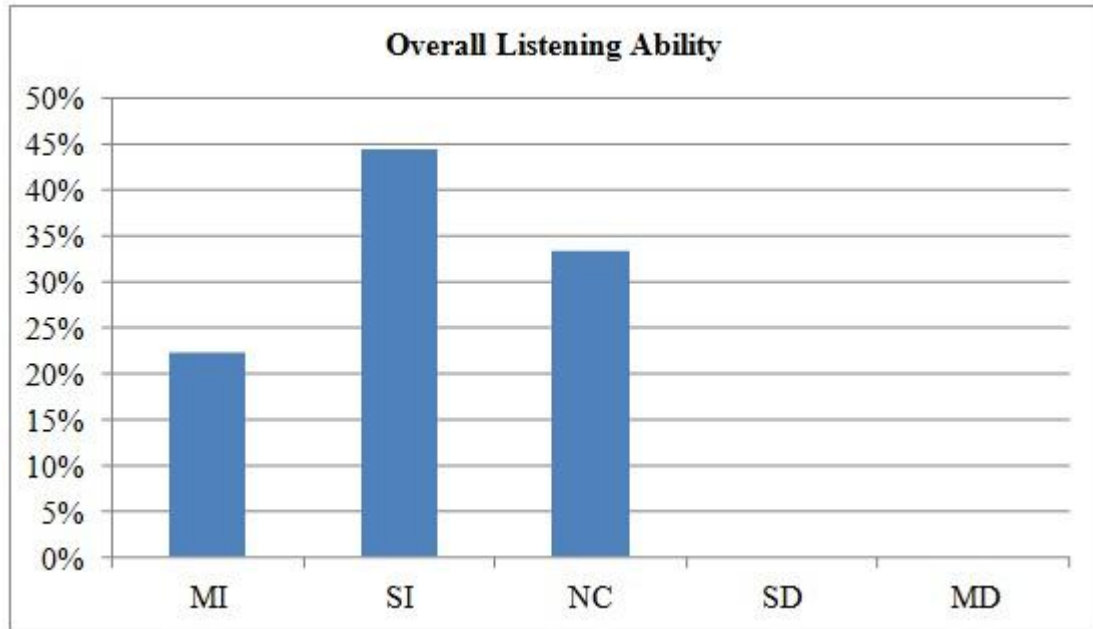
Figure 4.4
Participants' perceptions of changes in students' overall listening ability
Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease;
MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Table 4.4

Descriptive Statistics for Listening

18. General overall listening ability							
	MI	SI	NC	SD	MD	M	SD
Total	4 (22.2%)	8 (44.4%)	6 (33.3%)	0	0	3.89	.76
High	3	1	0	0	0	4.75	.50
Mid	0	6	4	0	0	3.60	.52
Low	1	1	2	0	0	3.75	.96

19. Ability to comprehend simple dialogues of a familiar nature

Total	2 (11.1%)	11 (61.1%)	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)	0	3.78	.73
High	1	3	0	0	0	4.25	.50
Mid	0	7	3	0	0	3.70	.48
Low	1	1	1	1	0	3.50	1.30

20. Ability to identify specific details from simple dialogues

Total	0	11 (61.1%)	7 (38.9%)	0	0	3.61	.50
High	0	4	0	0	0	4.00	.00
Mid	0	6	4	0	0	3.60	.52
Low	0	1	3	0	0	3.25	.50

21. Ability to comprehend extended texts of a familiar nature

Total	1 (5.6%)	8 (44.4%)	7 (38.9%)	2 (11.1%)	0	3.44	.78
High	1	2	1	0	0	4.00	.82
Mid	0	5	4	1	0	3.40	.70
Low	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82

22. Ability to identify specific details from extended texts

Total	1 (5.6%)	6 (33.3%)	9 (50.0%)	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.6%)	3.28	.90
High	1	2	1	0	0	4.00	.82
Mid	0	4	5	1	0	3.30	.68
Low	0	0	3	0	1	2.50	1.00

23. Ability to make an appropriate response based on what they have heard

Total	1 (5.6%)	9 (50.0%)	7 (38.9%)	1 (5.6%)	0	3.56	.70
High	1	2	1	0	0	4.00	.82
Mid	0	4	6	0	0	3.40	.52
Low	0	3	0	1	0	3.50	1.00

24. Ability to understand English spoken at a normal rate

Total	3 (5.6%)	9 (50.0%)	5 (27.8%)	0	1 (5.6%)	3.72	.96
High	2	2	0	0	0	4.50	.58
Mid	1	4	5	0	0	3.60	.70
Low	0	3	0	0	1	3.25	1.50

25. Ability to understand an academic lecture given in English

Total	0	4 (22.2%)	12 (66.7%)	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.6%)	3.06	.73
High	0	2	2	0	0	3.50	.58
Mid	0	1	8	0	1	2.90	.74
Low	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease; MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

4.4.2 Qualitative Results

The interview findings corroborated the questionnaire findings. Based on the interview data, all the interviewees commented that they emphasize listening skills in FENM classes. The interviewees also stated that they use the target language in class and communicated with their students in English. Four noticeable changes in students' listening ability perceived by the interviewees were 1) students' feedback about the listening sections of English Exams, 2) students' better listening performance while the listening sections are played once, 3) students' reactions to oral input, and 4) students' instant and correct reaction.

One of the noticeable changes in students' listening ability perceived by the interviewees is students' feedback about their midterm and final English exams. Crystal stated that her students tended to be satisfied with their performances on the listening sections of the English exams, even before the exam results were unknown:

> I usually ask students' opinions on midterm exams. In recent years, I have got an impression that students think the listening sections are easy. But, students in the past did not think so. For example, I bumped into two students who just finished their midterm English exams yesterday. I asked them, "How's your English test?" Both of them answered, "I think the listening sections were pretty easy (Crystal).

In addition, another change perceived by the interviewees is the reduction in the numbers of times the listening sections are played. In terms of the listening sections of English tests at Tunghai University, students in the past heard them twice during the listening components of the exams while current students only have one chance to hear the listening section. However, Jacob perceived that current students tend to comprehend more during listening sections than students in the past, even though current students have only one chance to hear the texts:

> We do our testing at Tunghai different than we did before. On the midterm and final exams, we used to have a story and dialogues that students hear twice. Now students only hear things once, and students seem to be able to comprehend it well. In the past, had we played the story only once, then they would not have been able to understand it. We had to play the story twice. Now we only play it once. Students seem to be able to comprehend it better than before (Jacob).

The third salient change perceived by the interviewees is students' reactions to oral input. Curtis perceived their students' listening ability based on their students' facial expression. Curtis stated that "when I talk, they [students] understand." Similarly, Jeffery was able to recognize whether his students could understand him based on students' facial expressions even though the students did not speak out:

> When I'm talking to them, it seems like most of them are getting it. Most of them seem like they know what I am talking about. But in the past, students would look at me, I see the question in their look, I had to repeat myself a lot, as the years go by, I don't have to repeat that as much (Jeffery).

Last, correct responses are the noticeable change perceived by the interviewees. Rosa observed that "when I talk, current students react quicker than students in the past." Rosa went on to state that "Their reaction is correct." As a result, Rosa perceived that their students' listening ability has increased on the basis of students' correct and instant responses to the interviewees' questions.

4.5 Teachers' Perceptions of Changes in Students' Speaking Ability

This section will answer research question research 4: What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's speaking ability over the last ten years. The first part will report the quantitative aspect and the second part will report the qualitative aspect.

4.5.1 Quantitative Results

Figure 4.5 and Table 4.5 show that a majority of the participants (77.8%) perceived improvement in students' overall speaking ability over the past ten years. As can be seen in Table 4.5, all the participants who taught high level classes perceived an increase in students' general speaking ability. Only two of the ten participants reported no changes, while one participant who taught mid-level and

low-level classes perceived declines. In summary, most participants at each level seem to report an increase in students' overall speaking ability.

Items 27 to 31 were designed to match the speaking goals of the FENM program. As can be seen in Table 4.5, more than half of the participants perceived an improvement for Items 27 and 28. However, half of the participants who taught low-level classes reported no changes for Items 27 and 28. The data also show that, for Item 29, half of the participants who taught high-level classes reported an increase while no participants who taught low-level classes perceived an improvement. Four of the ten participants who taught mid level classes reported no changes for Item 29 whereas four of the participants who taught mid-level classes perceived a decline for Item 29. For Item 30, no participants who taught high-level classes reported a decrease. The results for the participants who taught mid-level classes show an equal split between improvements and declines for Item 30. Lastly, no participants who taught high-level classes reported a decrease for Item 31. However, four of the ten participants who taught mid-level classes perceived a decrease for Item 31. Half of the participants who taught low-level classes perceived a decline for Item 31. In summary, more than half of the participants appear to perceive that students' pronunciation and

fluency have improved over the last decade, but the participants tend to perceive no

changes or a decline in students' accuracy.
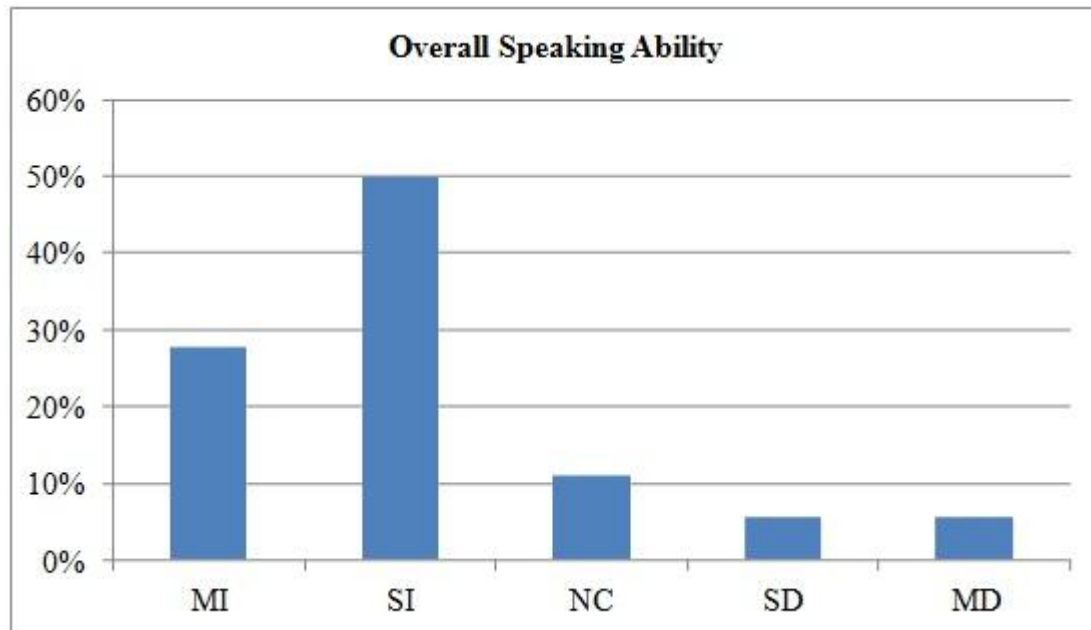
Figure 4.5
Participants' perceptions of changes in students' overall speaking ability
Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease;
MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Table 4.5

Descriptive Statistics for Speaking

26. General overall speaking ability							
	MI	SI	NC	SD	MD	M	SD
Total	5 (27.8%)	9 (50.0%)	2 (11.1%)	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.6%)	3.89	1.08
High	2	2	0	0	0	4.50	.58
Mid	2	5	2	1	0	3.80	.92
Low	1	2	0	0	1	3.50	1.73

27. Pronunciation							
Total	3 (16.7%)	7 (38.9%)	4 (22.2%)	2 (11.1%)	2 (11.1%)	3.39	1.24
High	1	3	0	0	0	4.25	.50
Mid	2	3	2	2	1	3.30	1.34
Low	0	1	2	0	1	2.75	1.26
28. Fluency							
Total	3 (16.7%)	8 (44.4%)	5 (27.8%)	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.6%)	3.61	1.04
High	2	2	0	0	0	4.50	.58
Mid	1	5	3	1	0	3.60	.84
Low	0	1	2	0	1	2.75	1.26
29. Accuracy/grammar							
Total	0	4 (22.2%)	7 (38.9%)	3 (16.7%)	4 (22.2%)	2.61	1.09
High	0	2	1	1	0	3.25	.96
Mid	0	2	4	1	3	2.50	1.18
Low	0	0	2	1	1	2.25	.96
30. Range in vocabulary							
Total	1 (5.6%)	6 (33.3%)	5 (27.8%)	5 (27.8%)	1 (5.6%)	3.06	1.06
High	0	2	2	0	0	3.50	.58
Mid	0	4	2	3	1	2.90	1.10
Low	1	0	1	2	0	3.00	1.41
31. Effective word choice							
Total	1 (5.6%)	3 (16.7%)	8 (44.4%)	3 (16.7%)	3 (16.7%)	2.78	1.11
High	1	1	2	0	0	3.75	.96
Mid	0	1	5	1	3	2.40	1.07
Low	0	1	1	2	0	2.75	.96

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease; MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

4.5.2 Qualitative Results

The interview findings expanded the questionnaire findings. Based on the interview data, each interviewee offers oral assignments to their students in each semester. These oral assignments involve individual speeches, dialogue practices, and

group plays. Two salient changes in students' speaking ability perceived by the interviewees were 1) students' active participation, and 2) students' confidence in speaking English. Additionally, two noticeable factors that might have influenced changes in students' pronunciation perceived by the interviewees were 1) exposure to foreign teachers, and 2) an early start in formal English education.

One of the two changes in students' speaking ability perceived by the interviewees is current students' active participation in FENM classes. Jeffery stated that "they [current students] will sometimes initiate speaking. In the past, they [students in the past] never initiated; they never started discussion." In addition, current students tend to actively participate in group discussion and attempt to communicate with each other in English. In contrast, in the past, students might avoid speaking English during group discussion. Based on the interviewees' past teaching experiences, students may instead use Chinese when they had peer discussion. Crystal heard her current students speak English during group discussion and these students appeared not to feel shy when Crystal attempted to listen to what they are saying:

> I always offer a discussion time for my students in class. While my students are doing discussion, I am walking around and checking if they are speaking in English. In the past, students would be quiet when I walked closer to them. But that situation rarely happens at present. When I walk closer to students, they still talk a lot in English (Crystal).

The other noticeable change perceived by the interviewees is their current students' confidence in speaking English in front of the whole class. Based on the interview data, each student in FENM classes has opportunities to deliver a speech either individually or in groups each semester. Roger stated that current students seem to confidently carry out an oral presentation in FENM classes whereas students in the past may hesitate or feel embarrassed to speak English in front of their classmates:

> They look quite confident when they speak in English. Of course they were anxious the first time, and I could understand because it is their first time to do it. But soon after that, they are getting better and looking more confident (Roger).

Based on Item 27 of the speaking section on the questionnaire, the interviewees who responded with either improvement or decline were ask to give examples in order to compare situations at the present with situations in the past. Many interviewees perceived that the pronunciation of their current students is better than students in the past. Only Janet perceived that her students' pronunciation is worse than before. Some interviewees suggested that exposure to English-speaking teachers might have influenced changes in students' pronunciation. Stanley stated that many students might have been exposed to foreign English teachers in cram schools before entering in formal English education and as a result, their accents might be corrected by English-speaking teachers and thus their accents could be native-like:

> I think they get more chances to use English, starting from cram schools. There are lots of foreign teachers teaching English there. No matter whether their English is good or not, at least they get to hear and speak more, that's the way I think their pronunciation has improved (Stanley).

In addition, some interviewees expressed the view that an early start in English learning might have effects on the changes in students' pronunciation. Howard stated that English education at the elementary levels pays attention to listening and speaking skills and therefore students have had opportunities to be exposed to and learn native-like pronunciation. However, the methods of English education put an emphasis on reading and writing since these two skills were being tested:

> Maybe they are exposed to English at their earlier age. I think also part of it is that curriculum in middle school, high school, and elementary school, has more focused on listening and speaking. In the past, we were not focusing on these. But now there seems to be (Howard).

4.6 Teachers' Perceptions of Changes in Students' Writing Ability

This section will address research question 5: What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's writing ability over the last ten years. The first part will report the quantitative aspect and the second part will report the qualitative aspect.

4.6.1 Quantitative Results

The participants' perceptions of changes in students' writing ability are presented in Figure 4.6 and Table 4.6. More participants (38.9%) perceived a decline in students' overall writing ability over the last decade than perceived (33.3%) an increase in students' general writing ability during this time period. Half of the participants who taught high-level classes reported no changes in students' general writing ability while half of the participants who taught low-level classes perceived either an increase or a decrease. On the other hand, for participants who taught mid-level classes, the results for overall writing ability are split between improvements, no changes, and declines.

Items 33 to 38 were designed to be consistent with the oral goals of the FENM program. As can be seen in Table 4.6, most participants who taught high-level classes perceived no changes for all the items on the writing sections of the questionnaire. Similarly, a majority of the participants who taught mid-level classes reported no changes for all the writing items except for Item 33. For Item 33, six of the ten participants who taught mid level classes reported a decline. The data also show that, unlike the responses for the participants who taught high-level and mid-level classes, most participants who taught low-level classes perceived an increase for Items 36 and 37. In summary, most participants appear to perceive no changes in students' writing

(Items 34 to 38). However, it seems that most participants who taught low level

classes perceived an increase for Items 36 and 37.
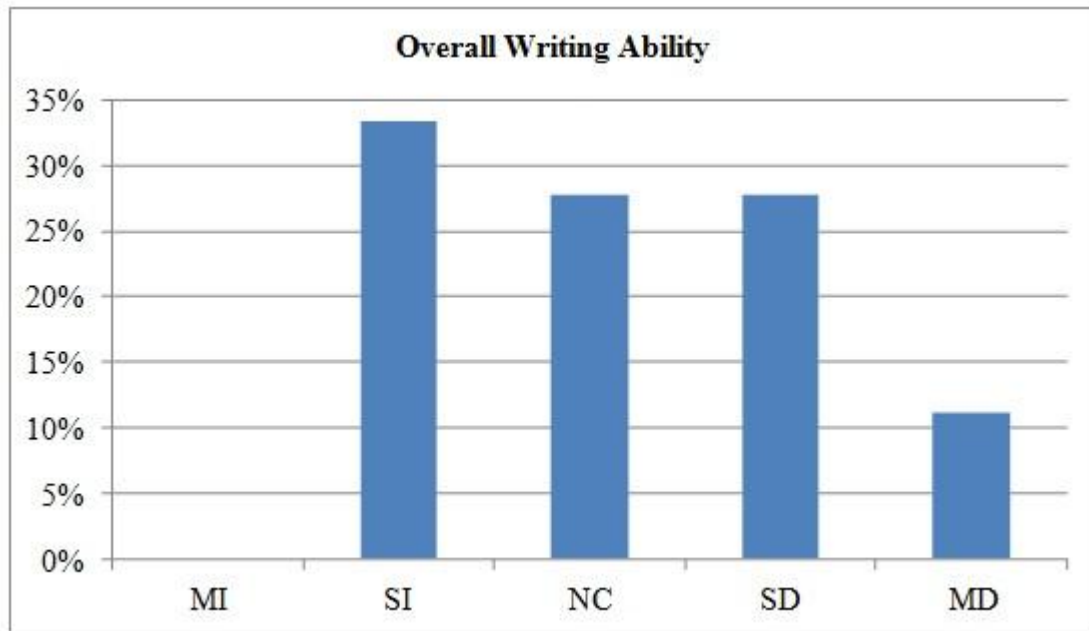
Figure 4.6

Participants' perceptions of changes in students' overall writing ability

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease;
MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Table 4.6

Descriptive Statistics for Writing

32. General overall writing ability							
	MI	SI	NC	SD	MD	M	SD
Total	0	6 (33.3%)	5 (27.8%)	5 (27.8%)	2 (11.1%)	2.83	1.04
High	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82
Mid	0	3	3	3	1	2.80	1.03
Low	0	2	0	1	1	2.75	1.50

33. Ability to write grammatical correct sentences							
Total	0	3 (16.7%)	6 (33.3%)	5 (27.8%)	4 (22.2%)	2.44	1.04
High	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82
Mid	0	2	2	3	3	2.30	1.16
Low	0	0	2	1	1	2.25	.96
34. Ability to write a well-structured essay							
Total	0	2 (11.1%)	10 (55.6%)	2 (11.1%)	4 (22.2%)	2.56	.98
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	0	1	6	0	3	2.50	1.08
Low	0	1	1	1	1	2.50	1.29
35. Ability to write a well-organized paragraph							
Total	0	2 (11.1%)	11 (61.1%)	3 (16.7%)	2 (11.1%)	2.72	.83
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	0	1	6	2	1	2.70	.82
Low	0	1	2	0	1	2.75	1.26
36. Ability to write clear topic sentences							
Total	0	5 (27.8%)	10 (55.6%)	2 (11.1%)	1 (5.6%)	3.06	.80
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	0	3	6	1	0	3.20	.63
Low	0	2	1	0	1	3.00	1.41
37. Ability to provide supporting details/information							
Total	0	5 (27.8%)	9 (50.0%)	4 (22.2%)	0	3.06	.73
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	0	2	6	2	0	3.00	.67
Low	0	3	0	1	0	3.50	1.00
38. Ability to write in cursive							
Total	0	0	13 (72.2%)	3 (16.7%)	2 (11.1%)	2.61	.70
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	0	0	7	1	2	2.50	.85
Low	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease; MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

4.6.2 Qualitative Results

The interview findings corroborated the questionnaire findings. Based on the interview data, all of the interviewees ask their students to hand in two or three writing assignments each semester. The topics of the writing assignments are related to either the content of the textbooks or students' opinions on characters from simplified readers. Three noticeable changes in students' writing ability perceived by the interviewees were 1) incoherent organization, and 2) lacking topic sentences in each paragraph, and 3) creative content in current students' compositions.

One of the noticeable changes in students' writing ability perceived by the interviewees is students' incoherent organization. Crystal and Jacob mentioned that current students were unable to convey logical organization in their writing in comparison with students in the past. Crystal stated that "I think the writings of students in the past were more coherent than current students' writings. I cannot understand ideas current students tried to convey in their writing. Their writings are inconsistent and even contradictory." Likewise, Janet mentioned that students combine irrelevant ideas in one paragraph: "current students pop out one new idea which does not go with the main ideas, with the topic of the paragraph."

In addition to students' incoherent organization, several interviewees pointed out that their current students failed to produce topic sentences in each paragraph. As

Rosa mentioned, "students wrote down many details in their work, but it's hard for me to understand their main ideas." As a result, Rosa spent her time teaching her students how to organize topic sentences, supporting details and conclusions.

On the other hand, some interviewees perceived that their students' writing ability has improved based on creative content. Roger stated that his current students tend to deliver their opinions on the simplified readers whereas students in the past usually did not do so. Students in Roger's class are assigned to express their opinions on one of the characters in the simplified reader as one of the writing assignments. Roger mentioned that "current students' opinions are very imaginative and creative."

4.7 Teachers' Perceptions of Changes in Students' Attitudes toward English Learning

This section will address research question 6: What are FENM teachers' perceptions of changes in their freshmen's attitudes toward English learning over the last ten years. The first part will report the quantitative aspect and the second part will report the qualitative aspect.

4.7.1 Quantitative Results

Figure 4.7 and Table 4.7 show that more than half of the participants (55.6%) perceived an improvement in students' willingness to use English. As can be seen, all of the participants who taught high level classes perceived an increase for Item 39. However, six of ten participants who taught mid-level classes reported no changes for Item 39. Half of the participants who taught low-level classes reported improvements for Item 39.   The data also show that, a majority of the participants perceived an increase for Items 42, 43 and 46. Also, all of the participants who taught high level classes reported that there has been an improvement among Items 42, 43, and 46. In addition, "no change" is the most frequent response for Items 41 and 44. Most participants who taught mid-level classes perceived no changes for Items 41 and 44. These results are consistent with the participants' perceptions about changes in students' listening and speaking ability. It is possible that the participants perceived that the more students are willing to listen and speak, the higher their listening and speaking abilities are.
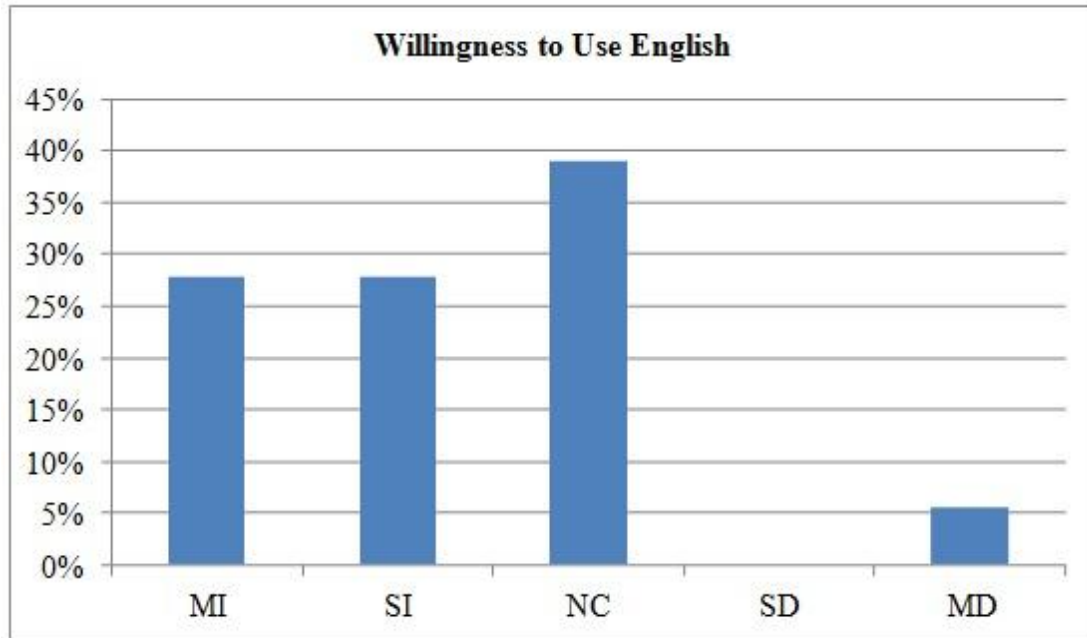
Figure 4.7

Participants' perceptions of changes in students' willingness to use English

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease;
MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics for Attitudes

	MI	SI	NC	SD	MD	M	SD
39. Willingness to use English							
Total	5 (27.8%)	5 (27.8%)	7 (38.9%)	0	1 (5.6%)	3.72	1.07
High	1	3	0	0	0	4.25	.50
Mid	2	2	6	0	0	3.60	.84
Low	2	0	1	0	1	3.50	1.91
40. Willingness to study/learn English							
Total	3 (16.7%)	4 (22.2%)	8 (44.4%)	2 (11.1%)	1 (5.6%)	3.33	1.08
High	0	3	1	0	0	3.75	.50
Mid	1	1	6	2	0	3.10	.88
Low	2	0	1	0	1	3.50	1.91

41. Willingness to read in English							
Total	2 (11.1%)	3 (16.7%)	10 (55.6%)	2 (11.1%)	1 (5.6%)	3.17	.99
High	0	2	1	1	0	3.25	.96
Mid	1	1	7	1	0	3.20	.79
Low	1	0	2	0	1	3.00	1.63
42. Willingness to listen to English							
Total	3 (16.7%)	8 (44.4%)	6 (33.3%)	1 (5.6%)	0	3.72	.83
High	1	3	0	0	0	4.25	.50
Mid	1	4	5	0	0	3.60	.70
Low	1	1	1	1	0	3.50	1.29
43. Willingness to speak in English							
Total	4 (22.2%)	9 (50.0%)	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)	0	3.89	.83
High	1	3	0	0	0	4.25	.50
Mid	2	5	3	0	0	3.90	.74
Low	1	1	1	1	0	3.50	1.29
44. Willingness to practice English grammar							
Total	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.6%)	11 (61.1%)	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)	2.83	.86
High	0	0	3	1	0	2.75	.50
Mid	1	0	7	1	1	2.90	1.00
Low	0	1	1	2	0	2.75	.96
45. Willingness to write in English							
Total	1 (5.6%)	3 (16.7%)	7 (38.9%)	7 (38.9%)	0	2.89	.90
High	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82
Mid	1	1	4	4	0	2.90	1.00
Low	0	1	1	2	0	2.75	.96
46. Comfort with English being the language of instruction							
Total	2 (11.1%)	10 (55.6%)	5 (27.8%)	1 (5.6%)	0	3.72	.75
High	0	4	0	0	0	4.00	.00
Mid	2	5	3	0	0	3.90	.74
Low	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	.82

Note. MI = major increase; SI = slight increase; NC = no change; SD = slight decrease; MD = major decrease; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

4.7.2 Qualitative Results

The interview findings expanded the questionnaire findings. Many interviewees said that a common change in students' attitude over the last decade can be seen in current students' behaviors. These interviewees pointed out that they have more verbal interaction with current students than they had with students in the past. Stanley stated that current students would smile when telling jokes. Students nodded their head when they agreed with what Stanley said. Stanley and Jeffery even mentioned that some students spontaneously answered their questions in class, whereas in the past, students passively answered their questions only when assigned. But Stanley mentioned that some students in the past just kept silent: "When I ask questions, some of my students answer my questions. But for students in the past, they may not answer my questions even though I think they have answers in mind."

4.8 Teachers' Perceptions of Possible Factors That Might Have Influenced Changes in Students' Language Ability

This section will answer research question research question 7: What are FENM teachers' perceptions of possible factors that might have influenced changes in their freshmen's English language ability over the last ten years. Based on the interview data, the interviewees' perceived possible changes were 1) increased focus on

listening and speaking skills, 2) increased exposure to English Internet resources on the Internet, and 3) the increased exposure to western media such as television programs and movies.

First, during the interviews, several participants expressed the view that the increased focus on listening and speaking skills might have influenced changes in students' English ability. The interview data show that the interviewees perceived that their students' general listening and speaking abilities have improved over the last decade. Based on the interview data, several interviewees mentioned that in the past, English teachers tended to focus on reading and writing skills while at present, since communication is emphasized, students tend to receive more listening and speaking instruction.

Also, some interviewees perceived that the listening and speaking abilities of their present students are better than those in the past because their current students started learning English at earlier age than those in the past. For example, current students officially started their English education in elementary school whereas students in the past received their initial formal English education in junior high school. Additionally, Crystal stated that current students tend to receive listening input at an early stage of their English learning and this may have had an effect on their

listening ability: "I think listening and speaking have improved over the last ten years because they started receiving listening and speaking skills at early age, especially lots of listening input. As a result, they have better listening and speaking ability." Similarly, Jacob perceived that their students tend to receive listening and speaking instruction from their elementary and high school teachers: "I think there has been increased focus on listening and speaking in education, especially at the elementary school level. I think most elementary school English teaching has been focused on listening activities and speaking activities."

In addition, several interviewees stated that the focus of formal English learning at the initial stage has changed. Students at present develop their listening and speaking skills first whereas students in the past learned reading and writing skills at the start. In the past, teachers and students considered English as a subject to be tested. Therefore, paper-pencil tests of English were very prevalent in the past, which emphasized reading and writing skills. However, nowadays, English is viewed as a tool for communication. As a result, teachers tend to pay more attention to listening and speaking instruction. Roger pointed out that the different focus of English instruction may have influenced changes in students' English ability:

> I think their teachers are emphasizing speaking more than was the case many years ago. So when I first came to Taiwan, when people learned English, they had a book, they used to sit down, read the sentences, and

used to learn the grammar. I think the teachers now, especially the younger teachers, are emphasizing speaking more than they used to (Roger).

The interviewees perceived that their students may have received listening and speaking instruction from their elementary and high school teachers and this might have influenced changes in their English language ability. These results are in accord with Lai's (2008) findings, that elementary school teachers spend forty percent of class time on listening and speaking instruction. Similarly, the findings of the interview data correspond to Wu & Chin's (2006) results that speaking and listening occupied about one fifth of instructional time in high school English classes. In summary, the interviewees' perceptions are consistent with the conclusions that students' English ability may have changed due to increased focus on listening and speaking instruction from their elementary to high school English teachers.

The second factor perceived by the interviewees is increased exposure to English resources on the Internet. Several interviewees perceived that the Internet might have influenced changes in students' English ability over the last decade because the Internet makes the world into a global village and English is a global language in this universal village. Jeffery stated that "I think a lot of them are more, we called, worldly, they know more about the world because of the Internet." Likewise, Howard believed

that "I think the Internet is a wonderful resource that makes the world so much smaller."

The Internet not only shortens the apparent distance of the world, but also offers an English environment for learners to explore. Several interviewees perceived that their students' English ability may have been enhanced by communicating with others in English because their students might have used English to make friends with others who are not native Chinese speakers. For instance, Howard stated that "I think students are meeting friends, and chatting with them in other countries on the Internet, and they are doing it in English."

In addition to communication in English, Curtis perceived that students at present have many opportunities to obtain English information on the Internet which students in the past may not have had. In the past, computers and the Internet were not as convenient as they are now. As a result, students' English ability may have changed because they have exposed themselves to English by means of the Internet:

> In the past, although *Formasa News* [Taiwan TV news channel] had English news, you could not find it on the Internet. But nowadays, you can search for local news on the Internet. The content is about Chinese, but what they hear is English (Curtis).

The interview data show that some interviewees perceived that increased exposure to the Internet might have had an influence on changes in students' English

ability over the past ten years. These findings support several researchers' conclusions that Taiwanese EFL university students tend to be exposed to English resources on the Internet outside of the class in order to enhance their English ability (Shen, 2008; Shen, Tseng, Kuo, Su & Chen, 2005).

In addition to the Internet, several interviewees perceived that other exposures to English media such as western television programs may have influenced changes in students' English ability over the last decade. Based on the interviewees' opinions, it might be more motivating for their students to pick up English words or phrases by watching western programs than by going to English classes at school. Rosa stated that "they [learners] think that probably movies or TV programs are more interesting and more exciting." Similarly, Jacob mentioned that "I think also there are much more sources to English material, cable TV, there are so much more sources available for English."

Some interviewees perceived that watching western television programs may have effected changes in students' English ability. These results are in line with the findings that Taiwanese EFL learners tend to watch English movies or listen to English radio programs in order to improve their listening ability (Shen et al., 2005).

In summary, the interviewees perceived that two factors, increased focus on listening and speaking skills and increased exposure to English, might have had an influence on changes in students' English language ability. The participants perceived that elementary and high school English teachers at present pay more attention to listening and speaking instruction than English teachers did in the past. In addition, the participants perceived that many students are exposed to the Internet and western media and this might have an effect on their English ability.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will present a summary of the major findings. In addition, the pedagogical implications for language teaching will be discussed. Finally, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research will be provided.

5.1 Summary of the Major Findings

This study aimed to investigate Taiwanese university EFL teachers' perceptions of possible changes in their students' grammar, reading, listening, speaking and writing abilities as well as their attitudes towards English learning over the last decade. A total of 18 experienced teachers participated in this study, all of whom have taught at Tunghai University for at least 10 years. A mixed-method design was employed, including a questionnaire and interviews. The results showed that the participants perceived changes in their students' language ability over the past ten years. The major findings of this study are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Based on the questionnaire responses, most participants perceived that their students' general grammar ability has remained unchanged or declined over the last decade. Also, according to the interview data, three major grammatical changes the interviewees perceived were their students' insufficient knowledge of grammatical

rules, their students' failure to change word forms as well as their failure to properly utilize past tense.

Secondly, the results of the questionnaire indicated that half of the participants perceived that their students' overall reading ability has declined over the past ten years. However, the interview data shows that the interviewees' perceptions were varied in terms of their students' ability to comprehend reading texts and their students' vocabulary level.

Thirdly, the responses to the questionnaire revealed that two thirds of the participants perceived that their students' general listening ability has improved over the last decade. In addition, many interviewees pointed out several salient changes that they perceived: 1) their current students appear to be confident about their performance on listening sections of the English exams, even though the results of the exams have not been announced; 2) their current students tend to be content with their performance on the listening sections of the English exams; 3) their current students' instant and correct reactions enable the interviewees to establish that their students' listening ability has improved.

Fourthly, according to the results of the questionnaire, nearly eighty percent of the participants perceived that their students' overall speaking ability has improved

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over the past ten years. The two most common changes perceived by the interviewees were 1) their current students actively participate in group discussions and 2) their current students look confident when they speak English whereas students in the past seemed embarrassed. Moreover, according to the results of the questionnaire, more than half of the participants perceived that their students' pronunciation has improved. Based on the interview data, many interviewees perceived that their current students' exposure to native English speaking teachers might have had an effect on the students' pronunciation. They also perceived that an early start in formal English education may have influenced students' pronunciation.

Fifthly, the responses to the questionnaire indicate that more than one third of the participants perceived that their students' general writing ability has decreased over the last decade. In addition, the interviewees perceived that their current students were unable to produce coherent organization in their compositions. They observed that their current students' writing often lacked a topic sentence in each paragraph. Nevertheless, several interviewees believed that their current students write more creative content than their past students.

Sixthly, the results of the questionnaire revealed that more than fifty percent of the participants perceived an improvement in students' willingness to use English

over the past ten years. Additionally, based on the interview data, several interviewees perceived that their current students have more discourse with them than students in the past. They also perceived that their current students tend to spontaneously answer their questions whereas their students in the past seemed quiet.

Finally, the interviewees perceived that three factors might have influenced the changes in their students' language ability. Many interviewees expressed the view that the increased focus on listening and speaking skills, increased exposure to English resources on the Internet, and increased exposure to western media like TV programs and movies may have influenced on the changes, especially for the changes in their current students' listening and speaking abilities, as well as their attitudes toward English learning.

Sims' (2012) conclusions support the findings of the present study. Over the last decade, university teachers perceive that their students' English language grammar and reading abilities have declined or remained stable while also perceiving an improvement in their students' English language listening ability. To conclude, the results of this study suggest that most teachers at Tunghai University have accurate perceptions of changes in their students' English ability over the last decade since the

teachers' perceptions are consistent with the hard data of students' scores on the

TEPE from Sims' (2012) research.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

Based on the results of the study, several pedagogical implications can be drawn.

First, teachers should provide comprehensible English inputs for their students in

order to achieve successful second language learning. Teachers should also be aware

of the changes in their students' English ability over the last decade. With this

knowledge, they can provide appropriate inputs for their students. Teachers'

perceptions of their students' language ability will influence teachers' curriculum

design and methods of instruction (Torres, 2011). Accordingly, this study found that a

majority of the participants perceived changes in their students' English ability and as

a result teachers should take these changes into account when making instructional

and curriculum decisions. This will help teachers select appropriate materials for their

students.

Second, based on the interview data, three salient factors perceived by the

interviewees can be incorporated in the curriculum of the FENM program. The first

factor is to teach students how to utilize proper past tense. The interviewees perceived

that their current students frequently fail to use past tense in English. Second language learners may transfer their native language interference and thus fail to use correct forms of the target language (Hermans, Bongaerts, Bot, & Schreuder, 1998). Since there is no past tense verb in Chinese, Taiwanese EFL learners may transfer this concept to their English use. Therefore, the findings of the present study indicate that teachers can offer materials that describe the past events in order for students to become more familiar with past tenses in English.

The second factor is to improve students' vocabulary level. The interviewees perceived that the vocabulary level of their current students is lower than students in the past. The interviewees also mentioned that their students might cease to learn new vocabulary after they have taken the college entrance exams. According to Yip & Kwan (2006), teachers might be able to motivate their students to study new vocabulary words by introducing interesting online vocabulary learning games.

The third factor is to help students organize and structure their English writing since the interviewees perceived that their current students often fail to understand how to organize their English compositions. Research has shown that implementing the teaching learning cycle improves learners' English writing (Alward, Mooi, & Bidin, 2012; Chaisiri, 2010; Gao, 2007; Hyland, 2003a; Yayli, 2012). According to

Hyland (2003b), teachers can help students recognize writing stages by using the model of the "teaching learning cycle" (p.21, see Figure 5.1). The teaching learning cycle consists of three stages: modeling, joint construction and independent construction of the text.
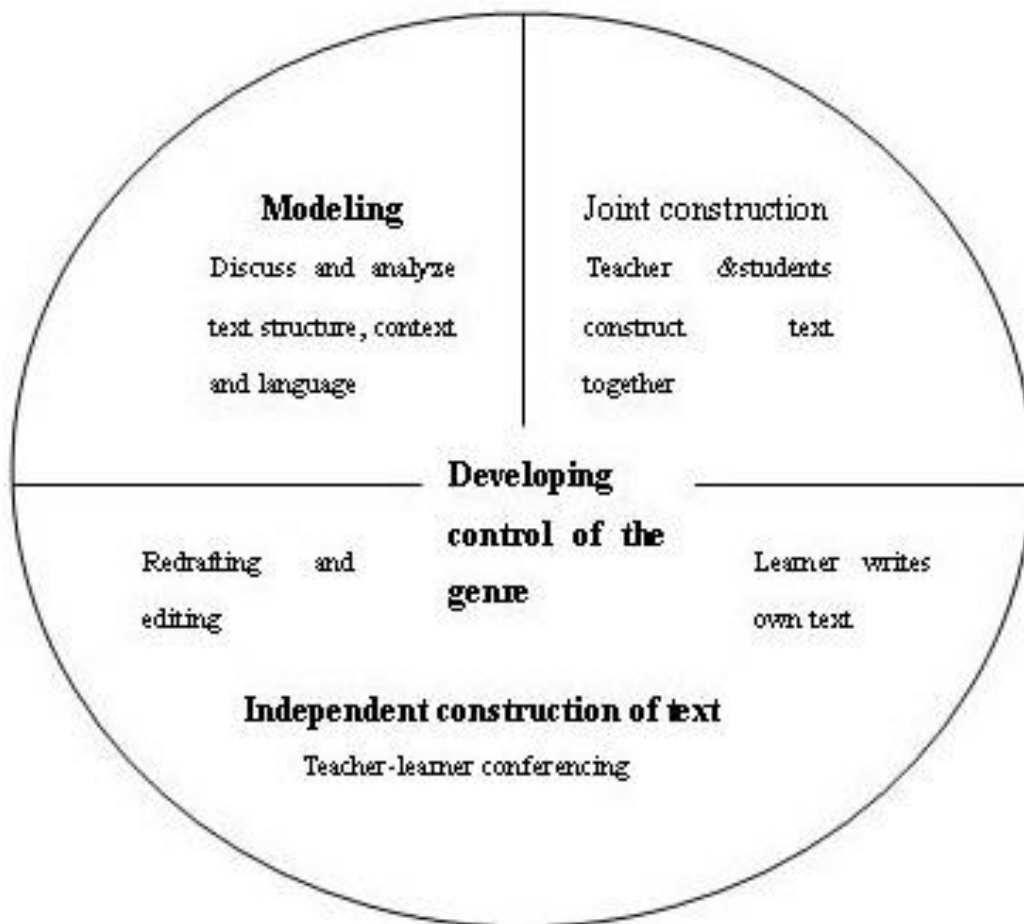

Figure 5.1
The teaching learning cycle (Hyland, 2003, p. 21)

Based on Hyland's model, a lesson plan can be specified such as the example in Figure 5.2. In the first stage, teachers help students identify the purpose, structure, and language features of texts. For example, teachers present students a model text, *A Visit to Our Grandparents*. The purpose of the modeling stage is to encourage students to discuss and analyze the texts. In the second stage, teachers and students produce a composition collaboratively. For instance, teachers and students do brainstorming in order to elicit ideas on the topic, *A Visit to Our Extended Family*. Teachers also give advice on the generic structures and language features of the texts in order to raise students' awareness of English writing styles. Finally, students write their own compositions. At the independent construction stage, students are asked to compose their own writing independently. As a result, the teaching learning cycle may enable learners to recognize English writing structures and to produce more coherent and cohesive compositions.
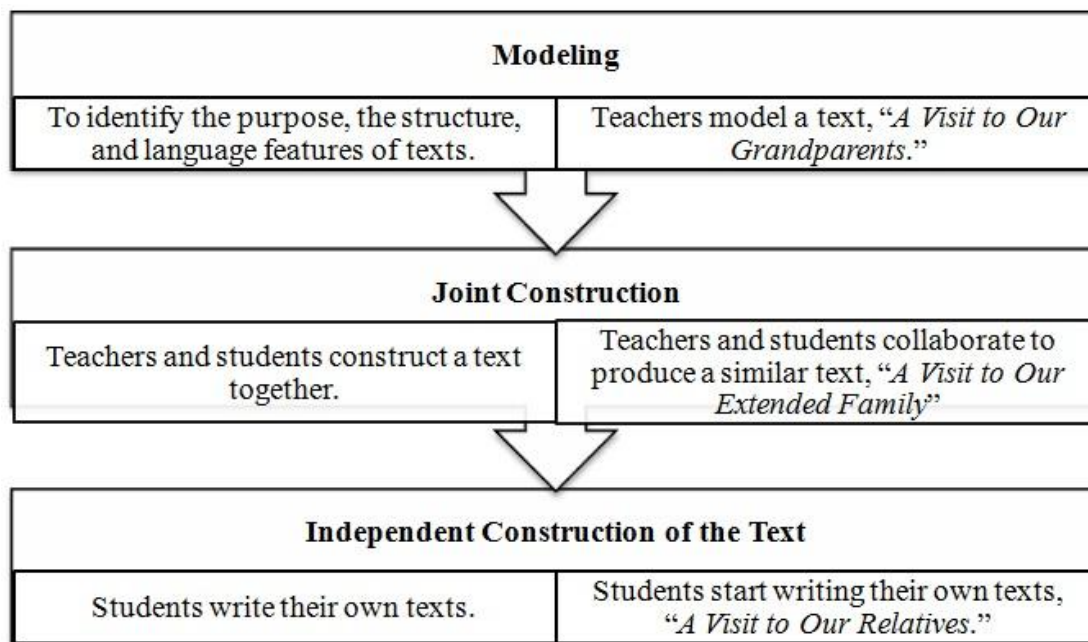
Modeling	
To identify the purpose, the structure, and language features of texts.	Teachers model a text, "*A Visit to Our Grandparents.*"

Joint Construction	
Teachers and students construct a text together.	Teachers and students collaborate to produce a similar text, "*A Visit to Our Extended Family*"

Independent Construction of the Text	
Students write their own texts.	Students start writing their own texts, "*A Visit to Our Relatives.*"

Figure 5.2

Lesson plan on teaching learning cycle

5.3 Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

This study has attempted to provide some insights on university teachers' perceptions of possible changes in their students' English ability over the last decade. However, there are several limitations. Firstly, the results of the present study may be difficult to generalize to other Taiwanese EFL learners who attend other universities with different levels of English proficiency from Tunghai University. The English level of students at Tunghai University might not be representative of the total population of the freshmen in Taiwan. It is expected that teachers from other universities will have different perceptions of changes in their students' English

ability. As a result, there is a need for further studies to investigate teachers'

perceptions from a range of universities in Taiwan, from universities that attract the

upper level students to universities that attract the bottom level students, to investigate

whether there have been changes in the English language ability of students from

different levels. That is, it is suggested that further research can explore teachers'

perceptions of the changes in their students' English ability at other universities,

especially those institutions that use English placement exams.

Secondly, the present study has addressed only the question of the changes in

students' English ability from teachers' perspectives. It is possible to explore whether

students' individual factors are related to the changes in students' English ability over

the past ten years. The individual factors involve students' demographic information,

their English learning experiences, and their motivation for learning English. As a

result, there is a need for further studies to shed light on correlations between

students' individual factors and the changes in students' English ability.

Thirdly, the present study has focused on teachers' perceptions of possible

factors that might have influenced students' English ability. The results have shown

that teachers perceived online English resources and western television programs

influence students' English ability. Some issues related to this may be worth

investigating: To what extent do learners enhance their English ability by means of English sources on the Internet (Shen, 2008)? How do teachers understand what their students have learned from watching western television programs (Shen et al., 2005)? How do university teachers provide consulting and learning strategies for students in order to help them apply these strategies when watching English movies (Shen et al.,2005)?

Lastly, there is no hard data on students' speaking and writing scores to support the findings of this study. The hard data used in this study was from Sims (2012). However, Sims (2012) employs students' scores on the grammar, reading and listening sections of the English exams. Therefore, there is still a need for further studies to examine students' speaking and writing abilities with objective data.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire of Teachers' Perceptions of Changes in Freshmen's English Language Abilities

Name: _____

Number of years teaching at Tunghai: _____

Which level of FENM have you mostly taught at Tunghai (please circle one below)?

High   Mid   Low

This study aims to investigate teachers' perceptions of possible changes in the language ability of incoming university freshmen over the last decade.   All your responses should be based on your professional opinion and experience teaching **at the level indicated above.**

Please use the scale below to check A, B, C, D, or E for each of the following statements.   If you have **no opinion** on a particular item, please **leave it blank**.

A = Major improvement or increase
B = Slight improvement or increase
C = No noticeable change
D = Slight decrease or decline
E = Major decrease or decline

Over the last decade, has there been any perceived change in FENM students in the following areas?

Overall Language ability	A	B	C	D	E
1. General overall language ability					

Reading	A	B	C	D	E
1. General overall reading ability					
2. Ability to identify or understand main ideas					
3. Ability to identify specific details					
4. Ability to refer to antecedents of pronouns					
5. Ability to determine the meaning of a word from context					
6. Ability to make inferences					
7. Ability to read cursive text (*handwriting style*)					
8. General vocabulary level					
9. General reading rate (speed)					

Listening	A	B	C	D	E
1. General overall listening ability					
2. Ability to comprehend simple dialogues of a familiar nature					
3. Ability to identify specific details from simple dialogues					
4. Ability to comprehend extended texts (stories) of a familiar nature					
5. Ability to identify specific details from extended texts					
6. Ability to make an appropriate response based on what they have heard					
7. Ability to understand English spoken at a normal rate					
8. Ability to understand an academic lecture given in English					

Speaking	A	B	C	D	E
1. General overall speaking ability					
2. Pronunciation					
3. Fluency					
4. Accuracy/grammar					
5. Range in vocabulary					
6. Effective word choice					

Grammar	A	B	C	D	E
1. General overall grammar ability					
2. Ability to use proper verb tense					
3. Ability to use proper subject-verb agreement					

	A	B	C	D	E
4. Ability to use count and non-count nouns					
5. Ability to use appropriate prepositions					
6. Ability to connect ideas (conjunctions/transitions)					
7. Ability to use conditional sentences					

Writing	A	B	C	D	E
1. General overall writing ability					
2. Ability to write grammatically correct sentences					
3. Ability to write a well-structured essay					
4. Ability to write a well-organized paragraph					
5. Ability to write clear topic sentences					
6. Ability to provide supporting details/information					
7. Ability to write in cursive					

Attitudes	A	B	C	D	E
1. Willingness to use English					
2. Willingness to study/learn English					
3. Willingness to read in English					
4. Willingness to listen to English					
5. Willingness to speak in English					
6. Willingness to practice English grammar					
7. Willingness to write in English					
8. Comfort with English being the language of instruction					

Appendix B

Background Information about Teachers

1. Teacher's name: _____

2. How long have you taught at THU?

3. Which level of FENM have you mostly taught at THU?

4. What majors of students have you mostly taught at THU?

5. What aspects of English do you mostly emphasize in FENM at THU? For example, reading, listening, speaking, writing.

6. What language do you use mostly in class?

7. What language do students use mostly in class?

8. In addition to the midterm and final exams, what kinds of tests do you use in FENM?

9. How long have you used these tests?

   A. If teachers change the test every year, ask why they change.

   B. If not, ask them whether there is any difference of overall performance over the past ten years.

10. How many writing assignments do students need to do in FENM per semester?

A.   What are the topics?

B.   What is the word count?

C.   What kinds of criteria do you use for writing assignments?

Open Questions of Teachers' Perceptions

Overall language ability

1. You think students overall language ability has _____ (depends on the participants' responses). Why do you think that?

2. What factors do you think that might have influenced the changes in students' English language ability?

Reading

1. You think students overall reading ability has _____ (depends on the participants' responses). In what way do you perceive that?

2. On Item _____, you filled out _____ (depends on the participants' responses). Can you please give me any examples?

3. On Item 7, "ability to read cursive text." You filled out _____ (depends on the participants' responses). Do you use cursive texts?

Listening

1. You think students overall listening ability has _____ (depends on the

participants' responses). Why do you think that?

2. On Item _____, you filled out _____ (depends on the participants' responses).

   Can you offer any examples or experiences?

Speaking

1. You think students overall speaking ability has _____ (depends on the

   participants' responses). In what way do you perceive that?

2. On Item 2, you think that students' pronunciation has _____ (depends on the

   participants' responses). What possible factors that may have influenced

   students' pronunciation?

3. On Item _____, you filled out _____ (depends on the participants' responses).

   Can you please give me some examples?

Grammar

1. You think students overall grammar ability has _____ (depends on the

   participants' responses). Why do you think that?

2. On Item _____, you filled out _____ (depends on the participants' responses).

   Can you offer any examples or experiences?

Writing

1. You think students overall writing ability has _____ (depends on the participants' responses). In what way do you perceive that?

2. On Item _____, you filled out _____ (depends on the participants' responses). Can you please give me some examples?

Attitudes

1. You think students' willingness to use English has _____ (depends on the participants' responses). Why do you think that?

2. On Item _____, you filled out _____ (depends on the participants' responses). Can you please give me any examples?