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## A Survey Study of Middle School English Instruction in Four Rural Districts in Beijing

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**Abstract:** This survey study provides a holistic picture of English teachers' qualification and the status quo of English instruction in secondary school classrooms in four lowest-achieving rural districts in Beijing, China. It covers a wide variety of aspects related to language instruction, including teachers' professional background and credentials, lesson preparation and instructional materials, teachers' instructional languages, factors that limit English instruction, roles teachers play in classrooms, and classroom instruction on pronunciation and fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. Results show how inequality in resources and the lack of teaching standards and qualifications can negatively impact students, further hindering their academic and professional opportunities. The findings provide valuable information to the teacher preparation and professional development in these districts and hopefully bring attention to the Department of Education in China about the educational needs of the low achieving rural districts in Beijing.

**Keywords:** *English instruction, rural areas, secondary school in China.*

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### Introduction

The urban and rural gap has long been recognized as a main obstacle to China's national development. This inequality is reflected in social and economic fields as well as in education. A report by the New York Times (Gao, 2014) described China's Education Gap as:

Some 60 million students in rural schools are "left-behind" children, cared for by their grandparents as their parents seek work in faraway cities. While many of their urban peers attend schools equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and well-trained teachers, rural students often huddle in decrepit school buildings and struggle to grasp advanced subjects such as English and chemistry amid a dearth of qualified instructors.

Indeed, accompanied by the development of the economy, international trades, and intercultural communication, English has been the most popular foreign language in China and is a compulsory subject in the school curriculum starting from elementary school. While some schools in urban cities receive globalized English education, schools in rural cities are struggling with getting enough resources and qualified teachers of English. In fact, this education inequality not only exists between urban and rural cities in China, but also happening in big cities among the urban and rural areas. The inequality of education resources affects the education performance of the students.

As the capital of China, Beijing is one of the world's leading centers for politics, economy, finance, culture and education and the world's third most populous city. According to the most updated data in 2018, Beijing's population has reached 21.7 million and there are a total of 1504 elementary schools and 305 secondary schools scattered in 17 districts in Beijing. Yao (2012) reported that the economic development among Beijing's districts vary greatly between the urban and rural districts, and the basic education among these districts differ as well. The 2017 report (Jia, 2017) comparing the results of Beijing's High School Entrance Examination (a national examination to test 9<sup>th</sup> grade graduates' Chinese, Math, and English) among all districts suggested the four lowest-achieving districts, which are Fangshan District, Huairou District, Pinggu district, and Yanqing District. In particular, the report revealed the low testing scores on English in these four districts. As previous English teachers in China and now researchers who are interested in English

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education in China, we see the need to study how English is taught in middle school classrooms in these districts and the factors that caused students' low achievement in English in these four districts.

Yangqing, Huairou, Pinggu and Fangshan are considered as the rural areas in Beijing, where Yangqing and Huairou districts are located in the north west part, Pinggu district in the north east, and Fangshan district in the south west respectively. In order to acquire more information about the English education in these four districts, a literature review was conducted. However, it revealed very limited results. There are very limited empirical studies conducted by researchers investigating the status quo of English instruction in these districts. Instead, only a few teaching reflections written by the local teachers were found. This lack of information found in the literature shows the immediate need for more research, both qualitative and quantitative, to be conducted.

Because of students' low achievements in English in Huairou district, He (2016) suggested the "Four-in-One" teaching method, which divides instruction into 4 phases - students' knowledge intake, using homework to review, process evaluation, and multiple assessments to promote achievement. In Pinggu district, Yao, an English teacher in a local middle school, pointed out the 4 biggest barriers in that area that affect students' English performance, which were the lack of foreign teachers, insufficient English educational resources, inappropriate instructional focus (emphasis was on grammar knowledge, rather than communicative competence and fluency), and students' poor command of basic listening and speaking ability (Yao, 2014). What is more, Qi (2013) further emphasized a crucial problem in many rural areas, in particular, the Pinggu district, which is the mismatch between teachers' majors and the subjects they teach. Many English teachers in these rural areas are not highly qualified and have fewer opportunities to receive professional development.

The 2011 National Curriculum Standards highly promoted the importance of extracurricular reading practices in English (MOE, 2011). Wu (2007) found that many secondary schools, especially those in the rural areas, failed to successfully complete this requirement due to the pressure of high-stakes testing, insufficient time, and teachers' incapability of providing appropriate instruction. Hence, Wu (2007) used stratified instruction in a secondary school classroom in Fangshan district and found that students have increased reading interest and improved their English reading achievement to better meet the objectives in the 2011 curriculum standards.

The 2011 curriculum standards also suggested the communicative purpose of language learning and process-based evaluation (MOE, 2011). Guo, a head English teacher in a middle school in Yanqing District, led the English teachers in her school study their instructional practice under the 2011 curriculum standards and reported five problems: 1) out of date educational beliefs about English instruction among teachers, 2) lack of authentic experience of using English for both teachers and students, 3) insufficient preparation for assessment, 4) lack of differentiated instruction, and 5) scarce resources and time for extensive reading (Guo, 2016).

While problems have been reported at individual schools in those districts, no available literature can be found to reveal a holistic picture of the English instruction and the teachers' credentials in these four rural districts in Beijing. Hence, we designed this survey study in hope to provide a complete view of the English teaching and learning in secondary schools in these four districts. In particular, we looked at English teachers' qualification, factors that limit English instruction, and the status quo of English instruction.

## **Research Methodology**

### *Research Design*

Survey research was used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the English teachers' qualifications and the status quo of English instruction in secondary school classrooms in the four districts in Beijing. The data collected from surveys was then statistically analyzed to draw meaningful research conclusions. Survey research is the primary step towards obtaining quick information about mainstream topics and conducting more rigorous and detailed quantitative research methods like surveys/polls or qualitative research methods like focus groups/on-call interviews can follow. Survey research design was implemented in this study also because there was limited cost involved and there was a need to access details easily.

### *Instrument*

A survey aimed at gaining an understanding of the teachers' qualifications as well as English reading instruction practices was developed. Participating teachers were informed that it would take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the survey and that participation was completely anonymous and voluntary. The survey consisted of 14 questions encompassing three areas: teachers' background information and credentials, lesson preparation and materials, and classroom instruction (Appendix). And classroom instruction included questions about instructional language used in classrooms, factors that limit English instruction, teacher's role in classroom, pronunciation accuracy and reading fluency, vocabulary knowledge, grammar knowledge, and comprehension. The survey was piloted twice and yielded a high test-retest reliability (.90). The validity of the survey was ensured by two national experts in English reading instruction in China and one in the US.

### Sampling

A total of 120 middle school English teachers were recruited from a professional development workshop offered to all the English teachers in Yangqing, Huairou, Pinggu and Fangshan districts. These teachers were from 73 middle schools, with 46 seventh grade teachers, 42 eighth grade teachers, and 32 ninth grade teachers. Out of these 120 randomly selected teachers being invited to participate, 99 teachers completed the survey, representing a high response rate of 82.5%.

### Data Analysis

As the responses to the majority of the survey questions in this study are measured as a binary (e.g., yes, no) or a selection from multinominal categories (e.g., types of teaching materials), descriptive data analyses for categorical data are the primary analysis procedures used. The survey response data were entered into SPSS for quantitative analyses. Descriptive statistics including totals, frequencies, percentages, means, minimums, maximums, and standard deviations were obtained to describe the characteristics of the participants' responses to each survey questions and gain information on the participating English teachers' background information, lesson preparation, classroom instruction, and their perceived barriers for Chinese students to learn English. Graphs are created to provide better visual presentation of the information, and to aid readers' understanding. The results are presented in the following sections.

## Results

The aim of the study was to present a holistic picture of English teaching and learning in secondary schools in four lowest achieving districts in Beijing. Particularly, the researchers examined English teachers' qualification, factors that limit English instruction, and the status quo of English instruction. This section reported the research results in these three categories.

*English teachers' qualifications:* Among the 99 middle school English teachers, the majority of them (89) hold a bachelor's degree (89.9%), eight teachers hold a master's degree (8.8%), and two teachers chose not to answer this question (Figure 1). English (48) and English Education (42) were the two majors reported by most of the teachers with only three teachers indicating "Other" as their majors. Six teachers chose not to answer this question (Figure 2). In terms of the years of teaching, the result indicated that the average years taught was 11.59 with a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 33 years and a standard deviation of 6.9.

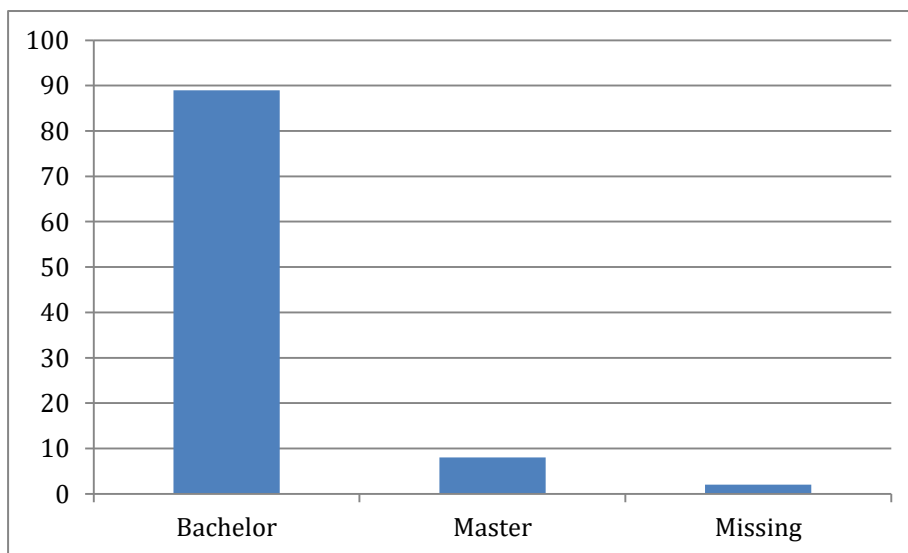


Figure 1. Teachers' Highest Degree

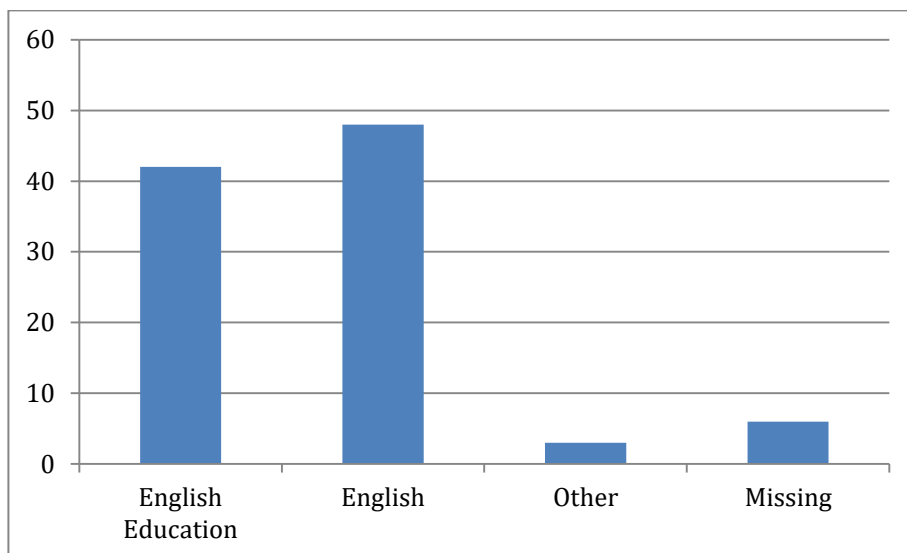


Figure 2. Teachers' Major

*Factors that limit English instruction:* According to the teachers, lack of opportunities to communicate and apply what students have learned in daily life is the biggest factor that limit these teachers' English instruction (38%). Next to this factor is the lack-of-English-atmosphere (37%), limited amount of vocabulary (29%), lack of interest (19%), lack of motivation (9%), scarce reading materials (8%), lack of understanding about the cultural differences (8%), students' learning attitude (5%), and grammar knowledge (2%). Twenty-nine teachers also pointed out other factors, such as students' listening ability, testing requirements, limited class time to practice cause unsatisfactory learning results (Figure 3).

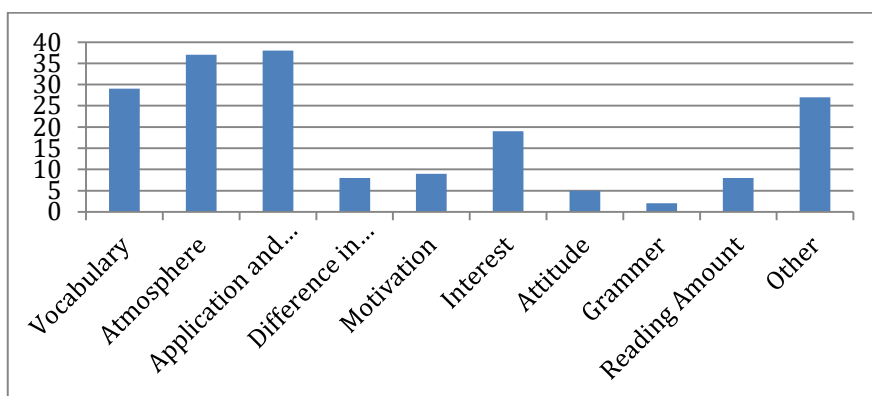


Figure 3. Limitation Factors

*Classroom Instruction:* Regarding classroom instruction, the feedback from the teachers can be grouped into six categories: lesson preparation and instructional materials, instructional language used in classrooms, punctuation accuracy and reading fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction, grammar instruction, and comprehension instruction.

*Lesson Preparation and Instructional Materials:* The middle schools in this study offered an average of 6 English classes (45 minutes long) every week and the teachers reported that they spent an average of 2 hours on the weekly lesson plans. The minimum answer was 0 with the maximum of 6 hours. Teachers consulted various resources for lesson preparation, including teacher's manual (52 teachers), textbooks (17 teachers), curriculum standards (9 teachers), workbook (6 teachers), newspapers (10 teachers), dictionary (4 teachers), and other supplementary materials (30 teachers), such as videos from Internet, magazines, restaurant menus, to prepare for instruction. About one-third of the teachers (31) also indicated that they collaborate with other English teachers at the same grade level in their schools for lesson preparation (Figure 4).

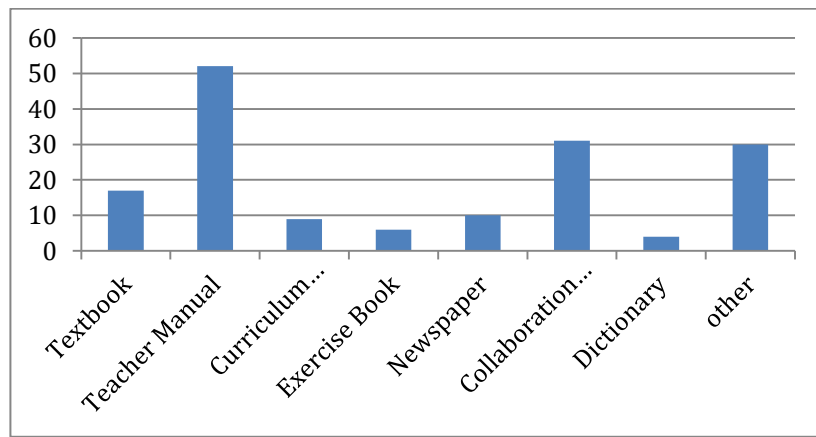


Figure 4. Teaching Materials

In terms of delivery tools for instruction, 71 teachers reported depending on PowerPoint as the major instructional tool and 30 teachers also mentioned using the videos and DVDs that come with the textbook to support teaching. What is more, 47 teachers indicated that they occasionally include resources found from the Internet, such as movie clips, nursery rhymes, or English music in their instruction (Figure 5).

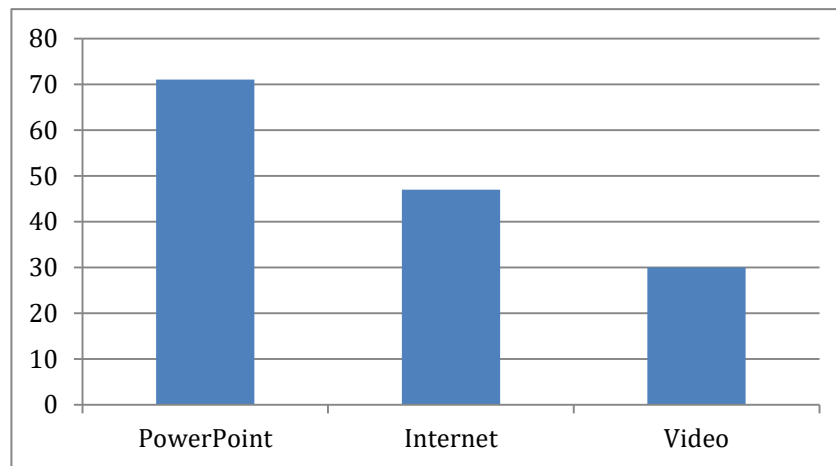


Figure 5. Instructional Tools

*Instructional language used in classrooms:* All the teachers indicated that they speak both English and Chinese during instruction. The majority of them (55) reported using English as the dominant instructional language and use Chinese to explain language points to support instruction. Forty-two teachers reported that both English and Chinese were essential instructional languages used equally in their instruction. Only 2 teachers mentioned using Chinese dominantly in their teaching of English (Figure 6).

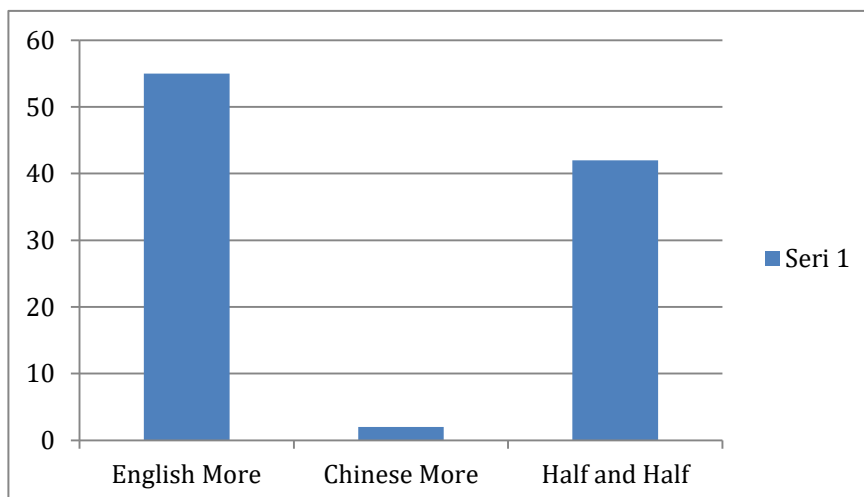


Figure 6. Instructional Language

*Teacher's role in classroom:* Teachers were asked to report the roles they play during English instruction. All the participating teachers mentioned about the multiple roles they play ranging from being a director (26%) or a leader (30%) in classrooms offering highly structured teaching to a facilitator (12%) or students' partner (48%) completing learning activities together with students. The other roles that the teachers mentioned including being a guide (28%) to answer students' questions and being a gardener (11%) taking care of students and to make sure they learn appropriately (Figure 7).

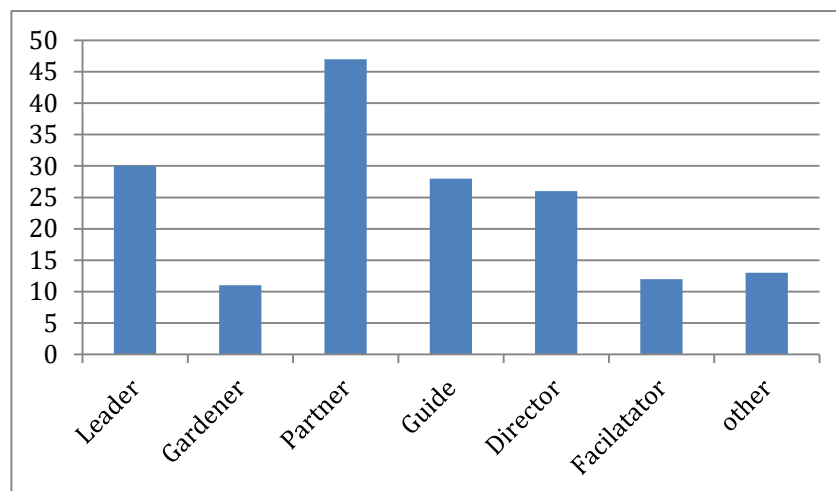


Figure 7. Teacher's Roles

*Pronunciation accuracy and reading fluency:* Teachers reported the importance of being able to read English accurately and fluently. The majority of the 99 English teachers used multiple approaches to teach pronunciation: teaching phonics 68 (68.7%), imitating the tape read-aloud 66 (66.7%), teaching International Phonetic Alphabet 58 (58.6%), echo reading 48 (48.3%), and other methods 12 (12.1%). An overwhelming majority of participants (93.9%) found reading aloud useful in helping student build fluency and required students to read aloud in and out of class. Only 1 person (1.0%) answered that reading aloud was not helpful in their teaching (Figure 8).

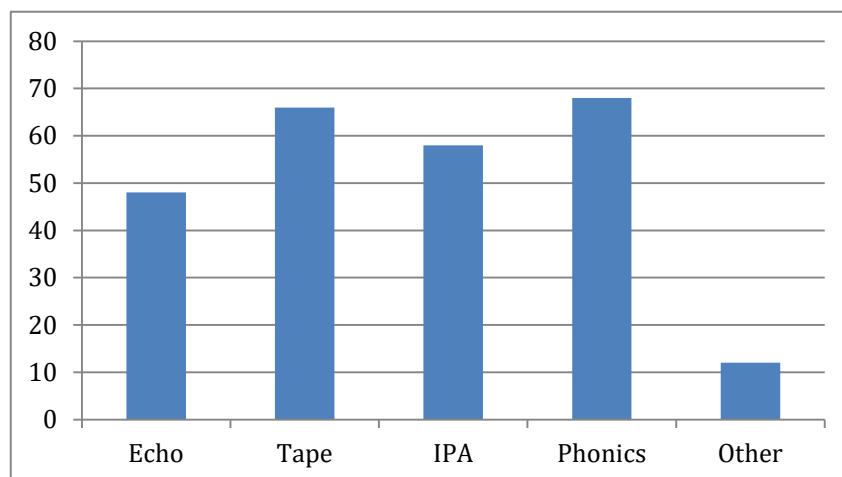


Figure 8. Pronunciation

*Vocabulary instruction:* Teachers were asked how they teach vocabulary from three aspects: spelling, meaning, and usage. Over half of the participants, 57 (57.6%), reported using phonic rules to teach word spelling. The next most popular method is repetition 52 (52.5%), which refers to repeated teaching and reviewing. Other instructional methods included extensive reading 32 (32.3%), read extensively to learn the correct word spelling; repeated-reading 16 (16.2%), repeatedly read the word out loud to memorize correct spelling; repetitive spelling 13 (13.1%), repeatedly spell the word 20 to 50 times to memorize; dictionary 6 (6.1%), asking students to consult dictionary for spelling errors; word formation 6 (6.1%), explaining letter combination and word knowledge such prefix and suffix to help spelling; and rote learning 5 (5.1%), asking students to memorize by themselves with no direct teaching (Figure 9).

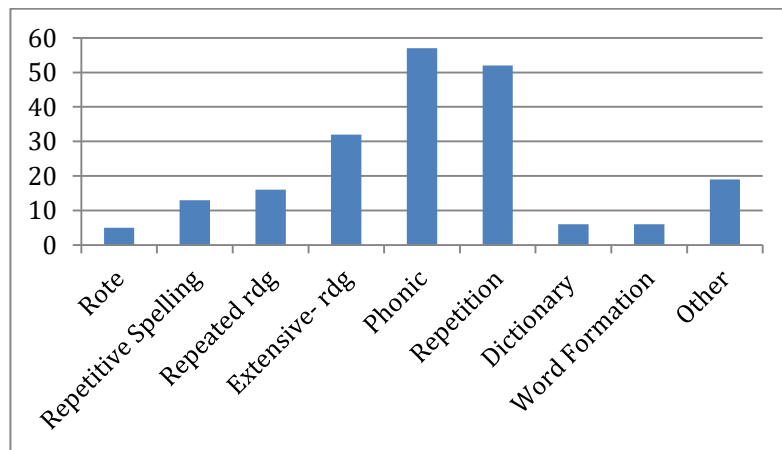


Figure 9. Word Spelling

In terms of vocabulary meaning, 75 out of the 99 teachers (75.8%) used context clues to teach word meanings. Other methods included using glossary 52 (52.5%), pictures 27 (27.3%), dictionary 24 (24.2%) to facilitate learning, providing English to Chinese 21 (21.3%) and Chinese to English translations 23 (23.2%); explaining word formation knowledge 13 (13.1%), and practicing sentence-making using the target word 13 (13.1%) (Figure 10).

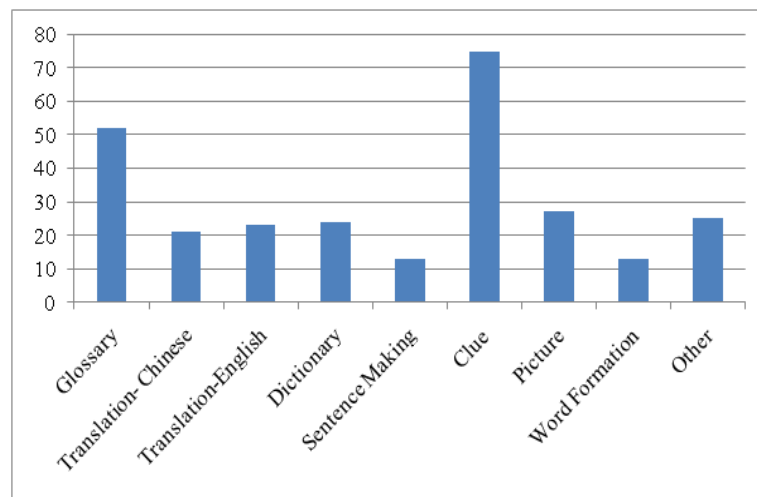


Figure 10. Word Meaning

As for vocabulary usage, the majority of participants 65 (65.7%) reported that the most commonly used activity in class was to ask students to make sentences using the newly learned vocabulary words. Participants also reported other effective ways for teaching vocabulary usage, including providing a direct explanation 57 (57.6%), analyzing the targeting word (nouns, verbs, adjectives...) within sentences 46 (46.5%), and reviewing and summarizing at the end of the unit 29 (29.3%) (Figure 11).

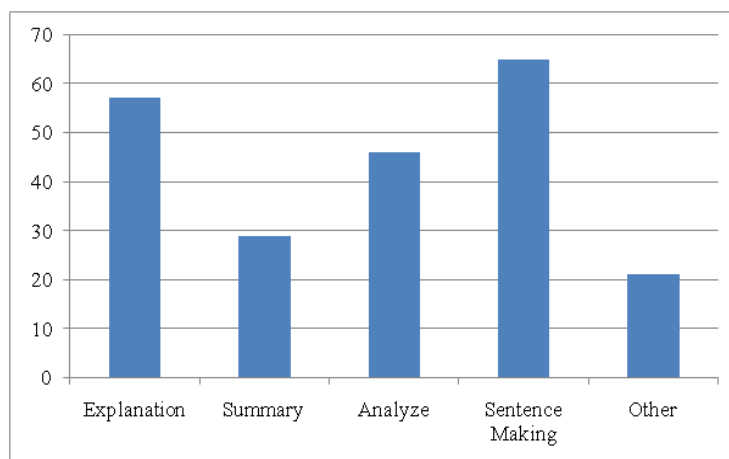


Figure 11. Word Usage

*Grammar Instruction:* All teachers reported that grammar was an important component in middle school English instruction. The most commonly used way of teaching was after-rules, which was to teach grammar rules after reading texts 82 (82.8%). Using context clues to introduce grammar rules was another commonly mentioned method 41(41.4%). Other methods reported were repeated exercises through workbooks, tests, and quizzes 29 (29.3%), monthly intensive grammar explanation lessons 28 (28.3%), pre - rules or explicit teaching grammar rules before reading 20 (20.2%), learning through examples 14 (14.1%) and by emerging into the English-only atmosphere 14 (14.1%) (Figure 12).

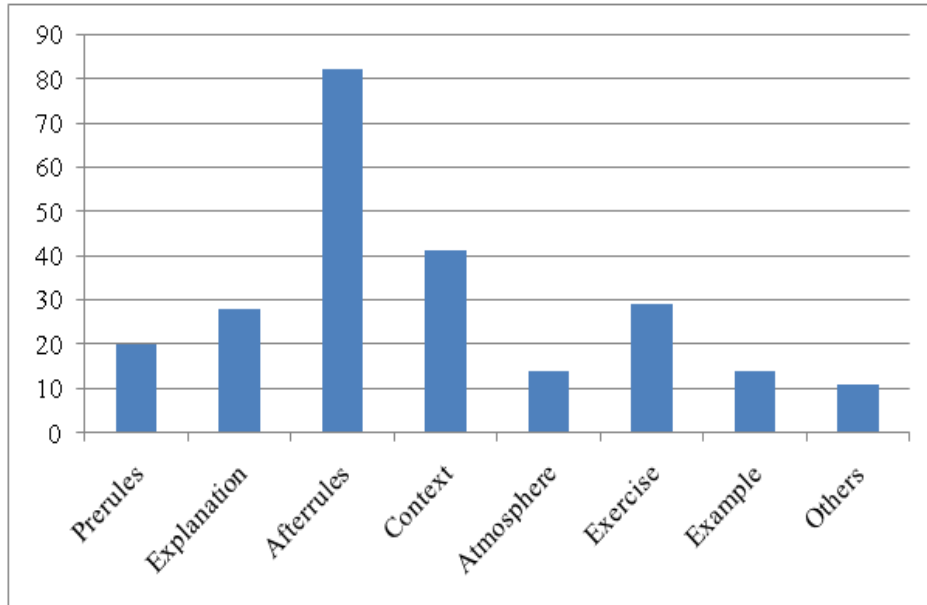


Figure 12. Teaching Grammar

*Comprehension:* Participating teachers were asked how to ensure students comprehend what they read. Teachers pointed out the following strategies, including teaching students to look for main ideas 68 (68.7%), analyzing text structures to facilitate comprehension 50 (50.5%), guessing the meaning of unknown vocabulary 48 (48.5%), using keywords to decide important information 40 (40.4%), prediction 35 (35.4%), reading comprehension questions before reading the passages 33 (33.3%), repeated reading 31 (31.3%), exam-oriented strategies such as skimming and fast reading to look for correct answers 28 (28.3%) (Figure 13).

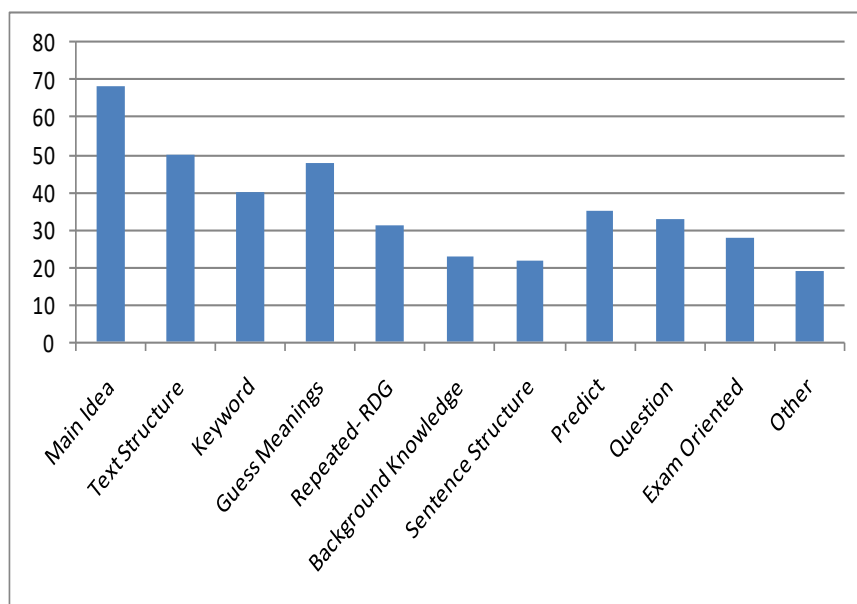


Figure 13. Teaching Comprehension



## Discussion

The findings of this study described English teachers' qualification, factors that limit English instruction, and the status quo of English instruction in 73 secondary schools in four lowest achieving districts in Beijing. These findings lend great insights into English teaching practices and point out ways in which policy makers and practitioners might work toward improving English teaching and learning.

*English teachers' qualifications:* The majority of the teachers have their Bachelor degree, meeting one of the requirements suggested by the 2017 revised People's Republic of China Teachers' Law (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2017 revised). However, less than half of the teachers in this group are professionally prepared, which is reflected by the fact that 48 teachers majored in English rather than English Education. The majors of English and English Education differ in many ways. English major prepares students to have competency in listening, speaking, reading and writing in English and focus on using English in different fields such as business, tourism, translation, and management. English Education, on the other hands, not only requires students to have a solid basic knowledge of the English language skills, but also helps students understand the English education curriculum and reforms in the country, and prepare students to be familiar with teaching pedagogies and instructional methods in primary and secondary schools. The fact that half of the English teachers in these rural districts did not have a degree in English education suggests that these teachers may have learned English as a foreign language and have a good command of basic language skills. Yet, they are not fully prepared in their Bachelor program in terms of their pedagogical knowledge in language instruction, further limiting their success in teaching students English at an acceptable rate.

*Factors that limit English instruction:* As one of the largest metropolitan cities in the world, Beijing is known for the plentiful educational resources. It is surprising to see that the top factor that limits English learning is the lack of opportunities to use the language. Obviously, when students have nowhere and no one to practice the language, it is hard for them to see the usefulness of the targeting language; hence, passive learning attitude and the lack of interest or motivation were mentioned as factors that limit English learning. A few other factors - lack of cultural understanding, limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge, poor listening ability, and the testing requirements were also reported that contribute to students' low achievement in English. However, we strongly believe that instead of regarding them as factors that limit language learning, they are the results of the limited educational resources provided to these rural areas and local English teacher's insufficient pedagogical knowledge. Since it is clear to all that students from rural areas in Beijing have limited English resources (Yao, 2012), what is needed at this point is to find way to support teachers and students in these rural districts with educational resources.

### *Classroom Instruction*

*Lesson Preparation and Instructional Materials:* Results suggested that the teachers have tried to incorporate a variety of teaching tools and materials in their instruction; however, authentic English learning materials were missing. There have been two voices regarding whether authentic English materials such as novels, textbooks, and other multimedia resources should be used in Chinese classrooms where students are learning English as a foreign language (Sun & Sun, 2007). The advantages of using authentic materials include a larger variety of topics covered, authentic language and culture presented, more native and richer vocabulary introduced, and interesting instructional games and activities that can motivate Chinese students. But there are also apparent disadvantages, such as the lack of grammar and language points for teachers to focus, Chinese students' inadequate background knowledge to understand foreign culture, and the large amount of vocabulary that exceeds the basic requirements. Even though the 2011 National English Curriculum Standards (MOE, 2011) did not explicitly require the use of authentic English materials in English instruction, many schools in the urban areas in Beijing have provided students with authentic learning materials (Hu, 2013). Hence, a gap exists between the schools in urban and rural areas in Beijing in this aspect.

*Instructional language used in classrooms:* The discussion on whether native language should be used in foreign language teaching has been ongoing. While some believed that the use of native language hinders foreign language acquisition, more researchers and teachers believed the positive effect the native language brings (Zhang, 2017; Zhu, 2004). According to Zhu (2004), the benefits of using native language are reflected in three aspects. First, teachers generalize some learning rules for students when comparing the foreign language with the native language, making it easy for students to understand (e.g. the accent when pronouncing English word/syllables). Second, students remember the meaning of some compound English words more accurately and efficiently when native language was used to explain (e.g. respectable, respectful, and respective). Lastly, teachers explain grammar rules easily and effectively. Compared with these research results, the majority of the English teachers in this study share similar perspectives regarding the use of native language in their foreign language instructional practice.

*Teacher's role in classroom:* All participating teachers reported that they have been playing multiple roles in classroom. The roles teachers play in classrooms vary depending on the functions they perform in different activities. Chen (2014) suggested that a teacher is a good organizer who plans and organizes classroom activities; a teacher is similar to an

orchestra conductor, who knows each student's individual needs and provides individualized instruction; a teacher is a preacher, who delivers not only the knowledge but also the appropriate ways and strategies to obtain knowledge; a teacher can be a creator, who is responsible for providing students with positive learning environment and opportunities. Xu and An (2014) further added that a teacher should be a consultant, who provides professional advice to students when they encounter challenges. A teacher should also be a resource manager, who can provide all learning resources for students. Regardless of how each role is named, it is evident to see that language teachers' responsibility is more than just to teach the language. A good language teacher is expected to play multiple roles in classrooms and should support students in all aspects. This multi-faceted role requires an individual to be able to handle a multitude of challenges, equipped with a plethora of solutions, both reactive and proactive within the learning environment.

*Pronunciation accuracy and reading fluency:* The teachers in this study reported that pronunciation accuracy and reading fluency are important aspects of instruction in their daily teaching practice. As a compulsory subject, English is taught in classrooms as early as first grade. Pronunciation accuracy and reading fluency are one of the most important instructional foci at the elementary level (Hu, 2009; Xia, 2019). According to Xia (2019), the ability to read accurately and fluently brings many benefits to students in elementary schools. It motivates students' learning interest, increases students' confidence to speak in English, helps students get a better understanding of the English language, and builds a solid foundation for English learning in later years. Studies focusing on secondary school English instruction, however, suggested a different learning focus. Hu and Baumann (2014) studied Chinese English teachers' instructional foci across all levels from Kindergarten to tertiary universities and pointed out that secondary school students were not given much opportunities to practice pronunciation and fluency, and English learning emphasis is on reading comprehension. Yang (2019) suggested that in secondary school setting, reading strategies should be the focus of instruction. Han (2019) also stressed the importance of vocabulary and grammar in secondary school instruction. These studies revealed the different learning foci between elementary and secondary school English instruction.

The findings in this study differed from the previous ones and we believe that it is not hard to explain this phenomenon. The issue of lack of qualification in the teaching force exist not only at the secondary school level, but also prevails at the elementary school level in these districts. Hence, students might not have a good command of English pronunciation and fluency when they enter middle school. They need extra time and support in order to improve accuracy in speaking and reading English.

*Vocabulary instruction:* The finding on vocabulary instruction revealed that similar to other studies (Hu, 2013; Hu & Baumann, 2014; Liu, 2019), teachers in these rural districts in Beijing have also adopted a variety of activities and methods for vocabulary instruction. However, it is also apparent to see that many of their activities or methods of teaching depend on using repeated practice to enhance memorization, which reflects the traditional Chinese Confucian-based ways of learning (Li & Cutting, 2011).

*Grammar instruction:* Grammar is the whole system and structure of a language and is usually considered as the hardest element in learning a foreign language. Traditional English language teaching in China is grammar translation-based (Hu & Adamson, 2012), which easily led students feel boring and hard to master. The 2011 English curriculum, however, has called for an instructional change. Instead of the explicit teaching and describing of grammatically rules, teachers were encouraged to provide authentic language environment to facilitate grammar learning, emphasizing on the functional and communicative aspects of language learning (Deng & Jiang, 2018).

A large number of the teachers in this study still depend on direct explanation of grammar rules before and after reading as well as providing explicit grammar lesson and drill exercises for students to learn English grammar. This finding revealed valuable information about grammar teaching in the secondary schools in these four lowest achieving rural districts in Beijing. Aside from the lack of qualification as well as professional development opportunities for the teacher (Qi, 2013), lack of educational resources and the inequality of educational materials between urban and rural areas are factors that should be taken into consideration.

*Comprehension:* Lan (2017) stated that comprehension is the most difficult aspect for language learning as it requires learners' all-around competency including vocabulary, grammar, logic thinking and memorization. An inter-disciplinary skill, reading comprehension is crucial in a student's learning from primary school onward (Kissau & Hiller, 2013). Reading strategies are of critical importance in secondary school English instruction (Hu & Baumann, 2014) and the teachers in this study also emphasized on this aspect. However, one thing that calls for attention is the fact that not a single teacher in this study mentioned the importance of increasing students' reading quantity, which is highly emphasized in the 2011 English curriculum (MOE, 2011).

The quantity and frequency of reading have proved to positively affect students' reading comprehension achievement (Zhang, 2018; Zhu, 2017). The more English materials students read, the better they were able to comprehend. The prerequisite, though, is that there are plenty of English materials available for both teachers and students to access. The limited English resources that the teachers in these schools can access provides an explanation for their strategy focused and test-based instructional approach.

## Conclusions

The study has provided research evidence about the status quo of English instruction in the middle schools in the four lowest achieving rural districts in Beijing, China. It covers a wide variety of aspects related to language instruction, including teachers' qualification, factors that limit English instruction, and lesson preparation and instructional materials, teachers' instructional languages, roles teachers play in classrooms, and instruction on pronunciation and fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension.

Half of the participating teachers lack a degree in Education and have never had formal teaching pedagogy courses. Qi (2013) only pointed out the teachers in Pinggu District were not fully qualified, but in fact, this study shows that half of the teachers in these four districts were not fully qualified. Although the teachers used various available teaching tools and materials, their available resources are still limited, lacking authentic instructional materials or advanced technical equipment to support teaching.

In terms of instruction, teachers in this study put the emphasis not only on vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, but also pronunciation accuracy and fluency, an aspect that shown to be the instructional foci at elementary school level (Hu & Baumann, 2014; Han, 2019; Yang 2019). This finding calls for the critical need to improve the quality of teaching force not only at the secondary school level, but more importantly at the elementary school level, so students can have a good foundation of English from beginning.

Middle school English instruction is majorly comprised of the teaching of vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. The instructional approaches and activities reported by these teachers reflected the Chinese traditional test-dominated teaching method, which emphasized on using rote learning and repeated practice to bring mastery. Interest and motivation, on the other hand, were not factors to be considered by the teachers. The 2011 English curriculum differs from the previous versions by elevating the importance of students' learning motivation, the communicative and practical competency of language learning, and pleasure reading for life (Hu & Adamson, 2012). And there are also numerous research studies suggesting how learning motivation and interest lead to better learning outcome (Abbott et al., 2017; Gorgoz & Tican, 2019). The instruction in the secondary school classrooms in these rural districts in Beijing, however, failed to address this important aspect.

Whether teachers primarily speak English or Chinese in the classroom when teaching students their compulsory English lessons has an impact on their student's comprehension and memorization. Using Chinese to relay the grammatical information is helpful, as shown by the teachers who participated in this study, because it introduces the new language in terms that the students will be familiar with and better understand. The comprehension of compound English words is also made easier by relating it to Chinese words, effectively connecting the languages together, allowing the students to use what they already know to better understand English. Further research is needed to better quantify the benefits of using both languages, at different frequencies, as well as how the focus of grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary actually impacts the students ability to obtain and apply English language skills in academic and professional realms.

To sum up, the instructional issues and problems shown in this study are, to a certain extent, resulted from teachers' lack of qualification and the scarcity of English educational resources. As the capital city of China and a top world metropolis, Beijing is in line with international standards in political, economic, cultural and education aspects. It is surprising to see the differences in English education between the urban and rural districts. The findings provide valuable information to the teacher preparation and professional development in these districts and hopefully bring attention to the Department of Education in China about the educational needs of the low achieving rural districts.

## Significance and Suggestions

This study is significant because it shows how inequality in resources and the lack of teaching standards and qualifications can negatively impact students, further hindering their academic and professional opportunities. It can be argued that the lack of resources, partnered with teachers not having formal training in how to plan a lesson and teach, has a negative impact on student learning outcomes. It is because of this that the information gathered and discussed above must be used to create and implement better educational standards, if all students in China are expected to successfully learn and speak English. Whether it be the better distribution of teaching resources, more strict education requirements for teachers, or both, something must be done.

Further research on the teacher qualifications in higher educationally ranked regions could provide insight into what teacher preparation and professional development standards should be implemented by the Department of Education in China to improve the overall quality of education in Beijing. Qualitative studies with in-depth interviews with the teachers of the high ranked regions may also provide information on how they teach their lessons, and what they feel is important for the students to learn. The results from these two comparative studies would provide a better basis of understanding for how to best teach students English, throughout their entire academic career, while giving insight into what changes should be implemented in not only English instruction, but teaching requirements and resource standards

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**Appendix***Teacher Survey*

授课年级 Grade you teach \_\_\_\_\_

1. 您教英语多久了? How long have you been teaching English?
2. 您从什麼专业毕业? 您的最高学历是什麼? What is your major and highest degree?
3. 您对现用的英语教材有何看法和建议? Your opinions about the current English teaching materials.
4. 您是如何备课的? 例如, 参考哪些资料, 花多长时间, 用那些辅助工具. How do you prepare for your lesson? How long it takes you to prepare for one lesson and what materials you use.
5. 在上课时, 您主要用哪种语言? 英语, 汉语, 还是英文中文互半? What is your dominant language used in class? English, Chinese or half and half?
6. 您认为中国学生学习英语最大的障碍或难点是什麼? 为什么? What is the most challenging aspect in English learning?
7. 您作为英语老师, 在课堂上扮演什麼角色? What roles you play during your teaching?
8. 您是怎样教英语单词的发音的? 请列举出几个您向学生传授的学习方法或策略? How do you teach students to read/pronounce accurately and fluently? Please give a few examples or strategies you use.
9. 您是怎样教英语单词的拼写的? 请列举出几个您向学生传授的学习方法或策略? 例如, 死记硬背, 重复拼写法, 多读, 提供单词多次复现机会等. How do you teach vocabulary spelling? Please list a few examples or strategies you use.
10. 您是怎样教英语单词的意思的? 请列举出几个您向学生传授的学习方法或策略? 例如, 用单词表, 提供中文翻译, 教用字典, 上下文推断等. How do you teach vocabulary meaning? Please list a few examples or strategies you use.
11. 您是怎样教英语单词的用法的? 请列举出几个您向学生传授的学习方法或策略? 例如, 重点讲解, 考试前总结归纳, 课文中分析, 造句练习等. How do you teach vocabulary usage? Please list a few examples or strategies you use.
12. 您认为朗读英语课文有用吗? 您要求学生每天朗读课文吗? 如果要求, 您要求学生每天都朗读吗? 或者多久需要朗读一次? What do you think about reading aloud? Do you ask you students to read aloud every day? If yes, how long and how often?
13. 您是怎样教英语语法? 请列举出几个您向学生传授的学习方法或策略? 例如, 提前告知语法规律, 重点讲解, 总结归纳其规律, 课文中分析等. How do you teach Grammar? Please list a few examples or strategies you use.
14. 您是怎样教英语阅读理解的? 请列举出几个您向学生传授的学习方法或策略? 例如, 找文章主旨, 分析文章结构, 重点词定位, 猜词义, 重复阅读, 联系自己的背景知识, 推断, 提问, 找句子主干等. How do you teach reading comprehension? Please list a few examples or strategies you use.