

# A Comparative Study on Perceptions of English Teachers' Mediation Between Private University Teachers and Students

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## Abstract

Mediation theory facilitates teachers and students to tackle the barriers in English teaching and learning process. It offers a sound systematic theoretical fort on which teachers could rely, redefines teachers' roles and functionings in the process of learners' cognitive development and growing self-regulations. The famous psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978) raised notions in his ZPD theory, Feuerstein (1980) illuminates capable adults as mediators, and defined twelve main features of mediation, which has empirical study value for English teaching. Thus, through quantitative and qualitative research, this paper aims to investigate the perceptions of English teachers' mediation between private university teachers and students, analyze and compare the similarities and differences between them. The results reveal that both teachers and students coming from the two private universities have been aware of the importance of teachers' mediation, however, have different perceptions in the frequency of teachers' mediation. Teachers' actual employment on mediation is weaker than their beliefs on the importance of it.

**Keywords:** mediation, English teachers' mediation, perception, private universities English teaching

## 1. Introduction

Piaget (1966) put forward that in a certain level, the central concept of cognitive psychology is mediation. In the field of psychology, mediation is the essential notion of Vygotsky's theory. Perspectives on language teachers' mediation roles varied with the progress in educational concepts. Ellis (1984) stressed not on teaching content, second language teaching ought to be evaluated by the teachers' discourses and practices of mediation functioning in real classroom. Second language learning is established on suitable and reasonable interaction between teachers and learners. In a word, teachers are currently anticipated to bear mediation functioning, as mediators, who supply scaffolding to direct students instead of explicit declaration.

Mediation theory highlights a refreshing concept on language teachers' innovative development, however, few people concern about private universities' teachers and students, particularly about English majors. Yet, during 30 years' development, private universities have taken up an indispensable position in our educational system, especially, high-level private universities has been surfaced to an important part of our China's tertiary education development. Thus, it is of necessity to investigate English major teachers' and students' perceptions towards mediation in private universities, so that more successful researches will be made to reinforce mediation theory.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Concept and Features of Mediation

Lantolf (2000a) put forward that the central and distinguishing concept of sociocultural theory which is higher forms of mental activity are mediated..Lantolf and Thorne (2006) identify mediation as 'the process through which humans deploy culturally constructed artifacts, concepts, and activities to regulate the material world or their own and each other's social and mental activity'. From Vygotsky's point of view, learnt skills which is helped by another person for an individual to perform, and the mediation of language are utilized as the central objects in human communication (Vygotsky, 1981). Zhangzhi (2001) summarized that Vygotsky's mediation involves meta-cognitive mediation and cognitive mediation. Williams and Burden (2000) believed that mediation should be relevant to assist learners to acquire development, and master certain knowledge, skills, and strategies

so as to solving problems, adapting environmental changing and becoming a self-regulation. In addition, they extend more specific traits of mediation. With the passage of time, we can realize that there has been no unification on the definitions of mediation, though there had many famous research achievements. Lastly, Reuven Feuerstein (1980) defines that a kid's learning is formed by the intervention of significant adults, exactly from birth. Feuerstein deems these important persons in the kid's learning as mediators or mediating adults, and the experiences that they supply as mediated learning experiences. He raised the twelve main traits of mediation, which can be seen as mediation tools. In the twelve mediation tools, the first three features are basically appropriate for all learning cases. Therein, significance and shared intention are especially suitable for foreign language learning situation. The next six features, are related to be self-learning and self-control. The last three features are useful to promote learners social development.

### *2.2 Theoretical Basis of Mediation and Relevant Studies*

Social interactionism, which includes constructivism and humanism cognitive systems, brings about brand-new concepts and perspectives of teachers' mediation perceptions. Enlightened by social interaction theory, Long (1980) defined language learning achievement depends on the quality and types of interaction between learners and teachers. Williams and Burden (2000) concluded effective learning lies in the quality of interaction between learners and mediators. Mediation theory tells us that teachers' role is to help learners to find effective ways of stepping into their next levels of understanding of the language.

In Vygotsky's theory, the core theories include mediation and internalization (Lantolf, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) stressed the importance of development, and took the development as a learning process of utilizing cultural civilization for intelligent tools. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which has had a remarkable influence on second language acquisition is—the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development was evoked by Vygotsky (1978) as the metaphor to analyze the differences between an individual's actual and potential levels of development. Scaffolding comes from sociocultural theory, and Bruner (1960), an American distinguished psychologist raised a scaffolding teaching mode and extended some new teaching perspectives based on Vygotsky's cognitive developmental theory. Feuerstein believes that teachers as mediators are the foremost factors in cultivating self-regulation learners, but neglects bilateral interactions and learners' contributions. Williams and Burden (2000) take full consideration of learners' initiative functioning, give further explanations of mediators duties--lies in empowering learners, assisting learners, and reciprocating with learners.

Freeman, D.E and Freeman, Y.S (2001) considered that teachers' mediation roles embody "scaffolding", which means teachers should help students through asking questions and supplying suggestions. Wang (2002) initiated an investigation on 30 senior high school teachers for their perceptions and implementations of mediation functioning. From the survey, she found that there existed difference between teachers' perceptions and practices, which the former is generally more concerned than the latter. Under the help of the twelve tools of mediation raised by Feuerstein, and the questionnaire designed by Williams & Burden (2000), Lai (2004) as well as Qu (2004) made surveys on middle school teachers, students and university English teachers, English-major students respectively. They all pointed out a common similarity, that is, teachers' perceptions on the significance of mediation are not in accordance with their applications of mediation in their teaching process. Cheng (2015) collected 152 questionnaires in random and found that most university English teachers hold positive attitude to playing mediation roles in classroom by analyzing relevant data in the year of 2015.

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Study Questions*

In order to achieve the target of the present study, the below research questions will be answered:

- (1) What are the characteristics of English teachers' and students' perceptions of the importance on twelve mediation tools in private university?
- (2) What are the characteristics of English teachers' and students' perceptions of the frequency on twelve mediation tools in private university?
- (3) What are the differences and similarities between teachers' and students' perceptions of the importance of mediation in private university?
- (4) Do private university English teachers' perceptions of the importance of mediation match their actual behavior frequency? To what degree?

### *3.2 Study Subjects*

160 English major students and 40 English teachers from Nanchang Institute of Technology and Jiangxi

University of Technology are invited to attend the investigation. Both of two universities are private ones in Jiangxi Province. On students' aspect, 155 valid questionnaires have been collected, from which there are composed of 26 males and 129 females, aging from 18 to 23 with the average age of 20. They all have learned English for over 9 years. In terms of teachers, they aged from 25 to 50, including 5 males and 35 females. Among them, 3 are assistants, 32 are lecturers and 5 are associate professors. They have been teaching English in universities for over 10 years on average. And their feedback to the questionnaires have strong fidelity of their mediation perceptions.

### 3.3 Study Instruments

This study combines the quantitative and the qualitative methodology which involves two questionnaires (TMQ) and (SMQ) as well as two interviews for both selected teachers and students.

#### 3.3.1 Questionnaires

Teachers' Mediation Questionnaire (Williams & Burden, 2000) consists of three parts. Some individual information about the subjects, such as, age, gender, title, years of teaching are presented in the first part. In the second part, there embraces twelve items about twelve mediation tools, which are main features of teachers' mediation in a five-point Likert scale ranging from "absolutely important" to "not important at all". In the third part, the subjects were required to point out their mediation frequency perceptions in the form of a five point scale ranging from "very often" to "never used". On the basis of the frequency scale designed by Oxford (1990), the mean scores ranging from 1.0 to 5.0 are identified as low use to high use respectively. Students' Mediation Questionnaire (Williams & Burden, 2000) consists of three parts, twelve items, which is the same to teachers', but on students' part, and the contents were all translated into Chinese in the way students could comprehend them better.

#### 3.3.2 Interviews

In order to fortify the standpoint of this thesis, four teachers and ten students from two private universities were interviewed in accordance to the questionnaires results. The interview questions are as follows:

Part one: Interview with teachers:

- (1) Which mediation tool do you think is the most essential one? Why?
- (2) Which mediation tool do you think is the most frequently used? Why?
- (3) Do your perceptions of the mediation importance distinguish from your perceptions of the frequency? If yes, in which items? Why?

Part two: Interview with students:

- (4) Which mediation tool do you think is the most essential one? Why?
- (5) Which mediation tool do you think is the most frequently employed by your teachers?

### 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected from the teachers' mediation questionnaires and students' mediation questionnaires are analyzed by SPSS19.0.

## 4. Results and Discussion of the Research

### 4.1 Perceptions of the Importance on Mediation Tools

For describing the general circumstance of teachers' and students' perceptions on the importance of teachers' mediation functioning, descriptive statistics, involving means, numbers and standard deviation is implemented.

#### 4.1.1 Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance on Mediation Tools

Table 1. Total mean score of teachers' perceptions on mediation importance

Key Features of Mediation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total	38	3.97	.469

As it is indicated in Table 1, the total mean score of teachers' perceptions on mediation importance is 3.97 (M=3.97), it reveals that teachers in private universities highlight great importance to teachers' mediation during

teaching process. In other words, private universities' teachers commonly hold a positive attitude towards the transformation of their teaching dominant roles to scaffolders, facilitators, etc.

Table 2. Teachers' perceptions on mediation importance

Key Features of Mediation	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Shared intention	38	4	5	4.79	0.413
Significance	38	2	5	4.03	0.885
Transcendence	38	2	5	3.76	0.971
A sense of competence	38	3	5	4.45	0.686
Control of behavior	38	3	5	4.34	0.745
Goal- setting	38	2	5	3.76	0.852
Challenge	38	2	5	3.61	0.974
Awareness of change	38	2	5	3.45	0.921
Positive thinking	38	2	5	3.87	0.811
Sharing	38	2	5	4.32	0.904
Individuality	38	1	5	3.76	0.971
A sense of belonging	38	2	5	3.47	0.893

The mean scores of all the twelve mediation tools have been presented respectively in Table 2, from which most of their mean scores surpass 3.5, except "Awareness of change (M=3.45)" and "A sense of belonging (M=3.47)" are slightly lower than that. Furthermore, it is obvious to see that five items' mean scores of the whole are above 4.0, though the extent of importance varied from each other. The "Shared intention (M=4.79)" has the highest score, which is the same as the results of other researches by Lai (2004), as well as Yang (2005). "A sense of competence (M=4.45)" and "Control of behavior (M=4.34)" take the second and the third place successively. The results reveal that English teachers in private universities pay much attention to the importance of shared intention, a sense of competence and control of behavior, which are in line with the teaching objectives of private university.

On the other hand, "Awareness of change (M=3.45)" has been the least important tool, which is the same as Chi's investigation in 2009. Subsequently, "A sense of belonging (M=3.47)" and "Challenge (M=3.61)" are much less important items. The results remind English teachers in private universities of realizing the significance to facilitate students with monitoring their constant changes by dynamic assessment, to construct a sense of belonging for students and to encourage them to meet challenges.

#### 4.1.2 Students' Perceptions of the Importance on Mediation Tools

Table 3. Total mean score of students' perceptions on mediation importance

Key Features of Mediation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total	155	3.90	.659

In Table 3, the total mean score of students' perceptions of the importance on mediation tools is 3.90 (M=3.90), which is little lower than teachers' total mean score (M=3.97). It exposes the truth that students in private universities commonly pay great attention to the importance of mediation tools and have very high anticipation of their English teachers. The mean scores of twelve mediation tools are shown in Table 4. It shows that "Control of behavior (M=4.39)" enjoys the highest score, which is quite different from Chi's (2009) and Li's (2013) studies on colleges' students. "A sense of competence (M=4.37)", "Shared intention (M=4.34)", are graded as the second and the third important items. It is obvious that control of behavior, a sense of competence, and shared intention have absolute predominance for students' perceptions on mediation importance in private

universities. The results remind that students in private universities take their self-esteem seriously, and take responsibilities for themselves to control their learning behavior after receiving teachers' explicit directions. Therefore, teachers ought to satisfy students' highly expectations during their teaching process.

Table 4. Students' perceptions on mediation importance

Key Features of Mediation	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Shared intention	155	1	5	4.34	0.908
Significance	155	2	5	3.99	0.901
Transcendence	155	1	5	3.97	1.047
A sense of competence	155	1	5	4.37	0.948
Control of behavior	155	2	5	4.39	0.886
Goal- setting	155	1	5	3.85	1.146
Challenge	155	1	5	3.73	1.065
Awareness of change	155	1	5	3.19	1.228
Positive thinking	155	1	5	3.72	1.171
Sharing	155	1	5	3.98	0.97
Individuality	155	1	5	3.6	1.137
A sense of belonging	155	1	5	3.61	1.219

“Awareness of change (M=3.19)”, “Individuality (M=3.60)”, and “A sense of belonging (M=3.61)”, are the least three important mediation tools in students' consideration, which is close to other investigations, for instance, Lai (2014), Chi (2009), and Li (2013). Due to the traditional teaching and assessment modes, teachers in private universities generally have heavy burden to undertake various of tasks, so as to neglect monitoring changes and cultivating, respecting each student's personality, which constitutes a major factor contributing to success or failure in language learning, and fostering students' a sense of belonging becomes a difficult task in classroom.

#### 4.2 Perceptions of the Frequency on Mediation Tools

Descriptive statistics, including means, numbers and standard deviation is employed to describe the general picture of teachers' and students' perceptions on the frequency of teachers' mediation functioning.

##### 4.2.1 Teachers' Perceptions of the Frequency on Mediation Tools

Table 5. Total mean score of teachers' perceptions on mediation frequency

Key Features of Mediation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total	38	3.68	.443

As presented in Table 5, the total mean score of teachers' perceptions of the frequency on mediation tools is 3.68 (M=3.68), which is being a part of high frequency range. It is indicated that the mediation tools are commonly employed during their teaching processes in the view of English teachers in private universities.

Table 6. Teachers' perceptions on mediation frequency

Key Features of Mediation	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Shared intention	38	4	5	4.66	0.481
Significance	38	2	5	3.89	0.798
Transcendence	38	2	5	3.53	0.893
A sense of competence	38	3	5	3.87	0.811

Control of behavior	38	3	5	4.05	0.655
Goal- setting	38	2	5	3.42	0.858
Challenge	38	2	5	3.24	0.852
Awareness of change	38	2	5	3.26	0.921
Positive thinking	38	2	5	3.5	0.797
Sharing	38	2	5	4.03	0.822
Individuality	38	1	5	3.42	1.004
A sense of belonging	38	2	5	3.34	1.047

It shows the detailed results of teachers' perceptions on the frequency of twelve mediation tools respectively in Table 6. On the basis of the frequency scale designed by Oxford (1990), seven mediation items in Table 6 are always employed with the mean scores surpassing 3.5, which stands for generally used in private universities. However, this findings has a little bit difference from other similar researches in public colleges, such as, investigations in Jiangxi College of Foreign Studies (Fan, 2016), in which eleven mediation items enjoyed the mean scores exceeding 3.5. By contrast, the perceptions of the mediation frequency in private universities are lower than that in public colleges, which can be attributed to the lacking of related professional training opportunities and even worse working system. English teachers in private universities sometimes haven't got proper professional developments, strong beliefs about language, teaching and even learning.

Referring to the specific statistics analysis of twelve mediation tools, the top three mean scores tools are "Shared intention (M=4.66)", "Control of behavior (M=4.05)", and "Sharing (M=4.03)". The next three items are the lowest ones, they are "Challenge (M=3.24)", "Awareness of change (M=3.26)" as well as "A sense of belonging (M=3.34)", which represents sometimes used. From the Table 6, there is no item regarded as generally not used (M=1.5-2.4), and never or almost never used (M=1.0-1.4). It can be concluded that teachers in private universities generally pay great attention to their mediation importance functioning, at the same time, English teachers also apply mediation tools into their teaching practice mainly.

#### 4.2.2 Students' perceptions of the frequency on mediation tools

Table 7. Total mean score of students' perceptions on mediation frequency

Key Features of Mediation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total	155	3.26	.790

According to the Table 7, the total mean score of students' perceptions of the frequency on mediation tools (M=3.26) is lower than teachers' perceptions of the frequency (M=3.68, see Table 5). Therefore, generally speaking, from the students' perspectives, their English teachers sometimes use the mediation tools during the teaching, to a medium degree. Besides, comparing with the students' perceptions of the importance on mediation tools (M=3.90, see Table 3), the total mean score of their perceptions of the frequency (M=3.26) is lower than that as well.

Table 8. Students' perceptions on mediation frequency

Key Features of Mediation	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Shared intention	155	1	5	3.59	0.985
Significance	155	1	4	3.61	3.412
Transcendence	155	1	5	3.23	1.066
A sense of competence	155	1	5	3.37	1.014
Control of behavior	155	1	5	3.55	1.112

Goal- setting	155	1	5	3.18	1.072
Challenge	155	1	5	3.4	1.061
Awareness of change	155	1	5	2.61	1.182
Positive thinking	155	1	5	3.34	1.113
Sharing	155	1	5	3.47	1.065
Individuality	155	1	5	2.82	1.317
A sense of belonging	155	1	5	2.97	1.187

In students' opinions, the mean score (M=3.61) takes the first place of the twelve mediation tools, that is, "Significance". And then followed by "Shared intention (M=3.59)", "Control of behavior (M=3.55)", these three items occupy the highest mean scores. On the contrary, "Awareness of change (M=2.61)", "Individuality (M=2.82)" and "A sense of belonging (M=2.97)" become the lowest three mediation items (see table 4.8).

"Significance", "Shared intention", and "Control of behavior", whose mean scores are 3.61, 3.59, and 3.55 respectively, locate in the scope of 3.5 to 4.4, which is identified as highly used by referring to the frequency scale constructed by Oxford (see Table 1). Nevertheless, the left nine mediation items are inlaid in the range of 2.5 to 3.4, which is medium used. The data presents that no item is taken into account as low used by students. From the perspective of comparing the whole mean scores in Table 8 with that in Table 6, it is obvious that there has a distance between students' perceptions of the frequency on mediation tools and teachers' perceptions of the frequency. In general, teachers' perceptions of the frequency are stronger than that of students' perceptions to some degree.

#### 4.3 Comparative Analysis

In order to complete two comparative analysis, independent sample T-test and paired-sample T-test will be implemented via software SPSS 19.0. Through the statistical results, whether there exists notable differences between teachers' and students' perceptions on the mediation importance, as well as that between teachers' perceptions of the importance and their perceptions of the actual behavior frequency will be demonstrated afterwards.

##### 4.3.1 Comparison Between Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of the Importance on Mediation

In Table 9, it indicates that no notable differences existing between teachers' perceptions and students' perceptions on the importance of mediation ( $T=0.630$ ,  $P=0.530>0.05$ ). It can be found that teachers have a little bit higher anticipation of the importance of twelve mediation tools (M=3.97) than that of students (M=3.90) generally. However, "Transcendence", "Control of behavior", "Goal-setting", "Challenge", "A sense of belonging", etc, that the gap falls into these five items' mean scores shows students have slightly stronger perceptions of the importance than that of teachers.

From the statistical results of the twelve mediation tools respectively, it has been revealed that remarkable divergence only lies in two items for perceiving the importance of mediation between teachers and students. They are "Shared intention" and "Sharing", whose Sig. (2-tailed) are 0.000 and 0.049 ( $<0.05$ ).

Meanwhile, teachers and students commonly have no much divergence on other ten items' perceptions of the importance on mediation. They are "Significance", "Transcendence", "A sense of competence", "Control of behavior", "Goal-setting", "Challenge", "Awareness of change", "Positive thinking", "Individuality", and "A sense of belonging".

Table 9. Comparison between teachers' and students' perceptions of the importance on mediation

Key Features of Mediation	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-value	Sig.(2-tailed)
Shared intention	T	4.79	0.413	4.519	0
	S	4.34	0.908		
Significance	T	4.03	0.885	0.202	0.84
	S	3.99	0.901		
Transcendence	T	3.76	0.971	-1.094	0.275

	S	3.97	1.047		
A sense of competence	T	4.45	0.686	0.448	0.655
	S	4.37	0.948		
Control of behavior	T	4.34	0.745	-0.33	0.742
	S	4.39	0.886		
Goal- setting	T	3.76	0.852	-0.494	0.623
	S	3.85	1.146		
Challenge	T	3.61	0.974	-0.653	0.515
	S	3.73	1.065		
Awareness of change	T	3.45	0.921	1.194	0.234
	S	3.19	1.228		
Positive thinking	T	3.87	0.811	0.902	0.37
	S	3.72	1.171		
Sharing	T	4.32	0.904	1.933	0.049
	S	3.98	0.97		
Individuality	T	3.76	0.971	0.896	0.373
	S	3.6	1.137		
A sense of belonging	T	3.47	0.893	-0.76	0.45
	S	3.61	1.219		
Total	T	3.97	0.469	0.63	0.53
	S	3.9	0.659		

For “Shared intention”, there lies statistical significance ( $T=4.519$ ,  $P=0.000<0.05$ ), with teachers’ mean score ( $M=4.79$ ) is higher than students’ mean score ( $M=4.34$ ). It implies that when teachers in private universities give a task to their learners, they make great efforts to deliver their instructions clearly, but the students in private universities have no consensus with their teachers on the point. The reason for the phenomenon is that language teaching has a special difficulty in expressing instructions to learners fully in target language. As we all know, in English classroom, the target language is that what students are going to learn as well as what teachers are making use of to convey information (Nunan, 1991). And for private universities’ students, most of them have not got firm foundations of English learning during their learning process, even their attitude in learning is much more indolent than those students in public colleges, which may attribute to differences of current educational system between private universities and public ones. Therefore, in real English classroom teaching, many students in private universities may not understand the instructions fully or the information is not well delivered by teachers.

“Sharing” ( $T=1.933$ ,  $P=0.049<0.05$ ) becomes the second divergent item of twelve mediation tools. The mean score rated by teachers ( $M=4.32$ ) is little higher than students’ ( $M=3.98$ ). In English teaching process, groups working, cooperation discussion, etc, are so popular and regular methods for teachers to apply. But sometimes students are tired of involving themselves into such learner-centered activities, after all, the target students are individual youths, and they have not realized the significance of collaboration fully.

#### 4.3.2 Comparison Between Teachers’ Perceptions of the Importance and the Actual Frequency on Mediation

In this section, statistical significance between teachers’ perceptions of the importance and the actual frequency of mediation is shown in Table 10 via the employment of the paired-sample T-test. In Table 10, it shows a significant divergence ( $T=3.957$ ,  $P=0.000<0.05$ ), which signifies that teachers in private universities enjoy high perceptions of the importance of mediation, however, in reality, the perceptions of the frequency of mediation tools are to a much weaker degree.

It can be also implied from total mean scores in Table 10 ( $M=3.97$ ,  $M=3.68$ ), that teachers employ the mediation tools in actual practice during the teaching process to a less degree than their thoughts about the importance of mediation through descriptive analysis.

Table 10. Comparison between teachers' perceptions of the importance and the actual frequency on mediation

Key Features of Mediation	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-value	Sig.(2-tailed)
Shared intention	I	4.79	0.413	1.534	0.133
	F	4.66	0.481		
Significance	I	4.03	0.885	0.842	0.405
	F	3.89	0.798		
Transcendence	I	3.76	0.971	1.944	0.06
	F	3.53	0.893		
A sense of competence	I	4.45	0.686	3.883	0
	F	3.87	0.811		
Control of behavior	I	4.34	0.745	2.438	0.02
	F	4.05	0.655		
Goal- setting	I	3.76	0.852	2.122	0.041
	F	3.42	0.858		
Challenge	I	3.61	0.974	2.111	0.042
	F	3.24	0.852		
Awareness of change	I	3.45	0.921	1.362	0.181
	F	3.26	0.921		
Positive thinking	I	3.87	0.811	2.572	0.014
	F	3.5	0.797		
Sharing	I	4.32	0.904	1.867	0.07
	F	4.03	0.822		
Individuality	I	3.76	0.971	2.321	0.026
	F	3.42	1.004		
A sense of belonging	I	3.47	0.893	0.657	0.515
	F	3.34	1.047		
Total	I	3.97	0.469	3.957	0
	F	3.68	0.443		

Note: I: the importance of mediation; F: the frequency of mediation.

The Sig. (2-tailed) of six mediation tools are less than 0.05, remarkable discrepancies exist among the following six items, they are, "A sense of competence", "Control of behavior", "Goal-setting", "Challenge", "Positive thinking" and "Individuality" with their respective Sig. (2-tailed) scores ( $P=0.000$ ;  $P=0.020$ ;  $P=0.041$ ;  $P=0.042$ ;  $P=0.014$ ;  $P=0.026 < 0.05$ ). On the contrary, "Shared intention", "Significance", "Transcendence", and "Sharing" are commonly implemented by teachers in private universities, which is in line with teachers' beliefs accordingly. In addition, the notable discrepancy cannot represent that English teachers in private universities fail in applying mediation tools. Take "Control of behavior" for example, the mean scores of the importance and the frequency both surpass 4.0 ( $M=4.34$ ,  $M=4.05$ ). It reminds that teachers in private universities regard this mediation tool as not only important but also generally used. However, due to the clear distinction between the teachers' beliefs and their actual behavior in perceiving teachers' mediation, the notable discrepancy occurs. Moreover, in Table 10, it can be concluded that no mediation tools which is generally not used or almost never used by teachers in their teaching processes in private universities.

In terms of "Control of behavior" ( $T=2.438$ ,  $P=0.020 < 0.05$ ), teachers should teach learners the strategies, with which they can learn language effectively. The importance of this mediation tool is widely acknowledged by teachers, and the frequency of this mediation tool is also generally used by teachers in private universities. Nevertheless, in teachers' real teaching processes, students are always accustomed to accept knowledge and strategies passively, but not effectively. Students get used to regarding knowledge or skills purely as something

being transmitted by teachers rather than be discovered by themselves. Thus, the notable discrepancy occurs between the teachers' beliefs and their actual behavior on this mediation tool.

The next significant difference exists in "A sense of competence" ( $T=3.883$ ,  $P=0.000<0.05$ ) showing fostering learners a sense of confidence and self-esteem maybe neglected in English teaching process in private universities. Some researches indicate that a feeling of competence is positively relevant to English proficiency to a large degree. Both teachers and students coming from the private universities emphasize the importance of competence in this thesis. But due to the deficiency of autonomic learning ability for private universities' students, what teachers can do to help them to establish confidence in their learning process is less.

Teachers and students from the two private universities identify "Goal-setting" as the medium importance degree ( $M=3.76$ ), but actually, teachers have not implemented this mediation tool to such extent ( $M=3.42$ ). Many students in private universities have no goals for themselves in the future. They just obey their teachers' specific tasks. However, on account of the proportion of teachers and students, there has no possibility to strike a balance between teaching and concerning about every student's goal-setting in private universities. Teachers in private universities always have greater burden and various of tasks than those in public colleges to undertake, besides, students are in different levels, coming from different learning backgrounds and with different goals, in a word, it is difficult for teachers to achieve "Goal-setting" for satisfying every student.

"Challenge" in Table 10 ( $T=2.111$ ,  $P=0.042<0.05$ ) is known as an inner impulsion for a learner to meet new things. Williams and Burden (2000) raised that only teachers supply a proper level of challenge which is neither too difficult nor too simple, second language acquisition can occur for learners. Krashen (1985) also propounded "i+1" concept, which included in comprehensive input theory, and he even added that "i+2" or "i+0" even "i-1" may increase the risk of learning fossilization, which means no improvement in learning but a setback. Teachers in private universities deem challenge as a very essential mediation tool, but at the same time, they also realize that during the actual teaching process, what teachers could do is to attempt to set appropriate challenges for the average level of students, with some adjusting advanced knowledge in accordance with learners' impromptu reactions.

"Positive thinking" in Table 10 ( $T=2.572$ ,  $P=0.014<0.05$ ) means teachers should teach the learners to see that if they keep on trying to solve a problem, they will find a solution. To some degree, "Positive thinking", this mediation tool is relevant to "A sense of competence", which all demand learners have optimistic attitude as well as learning confidence during their learning lives. In the classroom teaching, what English teachers can do is less, especially for private universities' teachers. They are exhausted in dealing with various supervisions as well as accomplishing many kinds of tasks, including daily teaching tasks and students enrollment. Therefore, English teachers in private universities generally ignore this mediation tool.

In terms of "Individuality" ( $T=2.321$ ,  $P=0.026<0.05$ ), different learners have his or her own individualities. Horwitz (2000a) classified learners as 'good and bad, intelligent and dull, motivated and unmotivated', and recently, learners are referred to by a myriad of new terms such as 'integratively and instrumentally motivated, anxious and comfortable, field independent and field sensitive, auditory and visual' etc. Thus, Individuality can be identified as those characteristics of a person that 'account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving' (Pervin, 2001). In the eyes of language teachers, "Individuality" this mediation tool is important, but this trait should be fostered through a long process and can be affected by many complicated factors, so that English teachers in classroom teaching have no enough time to employ this mediation tool into practice, letting alone there are hundreds of students for an English teacher to instruct in one semester in private universities. These are all factors causing the teachers in private universities failing in practicing this mediation tool in teaching process.

#### 4.4 Interviews

##### 4.4.1 Interview with Teachers

Question 1: Which mediation tool do you think is the most essential one? Why?

*T1... well, from my point of view, "Shared intention" is the most important and the foremost step in my English class. I think, every task or cooperation work will take place under my clear instructions to students. However, you know, sometimes, students cannot interact with you well because they do not understand the exact meaning that I convey to them, therefore, I think it is a big challenge to make myself understood through target language by my students.*

*T3... I take the "Sharing" and "Individuality" as the primary elements in my teaching process. During my teaching process, well, I should respect every student's personality and that is really a great challenge for me.*

*After I demonstrate my concept about a specific subject, students always carry out group discussions, and next class, I demand every group present their ideas respectively. So, you see, I should take much time to instruct my students with their personal different concepts and even try my best to inspire them to interact with me. As the matter of fact, I do much industrious work to prepare the tasks and to give suggestions for every different student in order to satisfy their further development. You know, it is really not simple, especially for our private universities' students and teachers.*

The teaching contents and teaching methodologies have been determined by the teaching objectives of private university education. Accordingly, English teachers should express their intentions explicitly when conducting teaching activities. To assist learners' in comprehending the language input, teachers can speak target language clearly by means of gestures, facial expressions, and multimedia interaction.

Teachers in private universities take the role of organizing their classes in ways that inspire sharing behaviors effectively. Besides, teachers should arrange various tasks and create a harmonious classroom environment for learners to present their individuality, in the meantime, to be aware of the sharing importance. For instance, group discussions, role-play, and presentations, etc, can be commonly employed during teaching process.

Question 2: Which mediation tool do you think is the most frequently used? Why?

*T2... hum, let me see, it is "Goal-setting". Usually, in my English class, I often set instant goals, such as, teaching goals in every class for every unit, and then short-term goals as well as long-term goals. From my experience, students in private universities, many of them, I didn't mean all, are random in learning, often, I arrange them how many English classics should be read in a semester or how many new words and expressions ought to be acquired in a week even in a month, furthermore, students also aim at passing some important examinations to obtain certificates-CET 4, CET 6, TEM 4 and TEM 8 etc.*

*T4... Maybe "A sense of competence", I think, you see, in my classroom teaching, I demand my students achieve performances not only in class but also after class. I just transfer my role into a designer, a promoter and a facilitator but not teach them directly just like before. Therefore, some students, especially those with poor abilities, are so frustrated to follow me. In order to encourage them, I generally emphasize the sense of competence, a feeling of confidence, so that my students will believe that I am not so bad, I can do well if I try it.*

In private universities, language learning is aimed at grasping a certain practical skills with which learners can integrate into their further development. However, due to the limited autonomous and independent learning ability, learners in private universities commonly lack awareness to set goals by themselves. Thus, teachers are expected to be largely involved in setting goals, including both short-term goals and long-term goals during the teaching process. Through the habit-training and simulation, learners can be capable of setting goals independently and reach them gradually.

Most students in private universities consider that they are inferior to students in public universities. Their low language proficiency and learning interest make them perform anxiously in class. Therefore, teachers are bound to assist students in establishing the sense of competence and self-esteem through taking various measures. Teachers in private universities believe that only with constant encouragement and guidance, can students gain confidence, and achieve success.

Question 3: Do your perceptions of the mediation importance distinguish from your perceptions of the frequency? If yes, in which items? Why?

*T1... Yes, it is a good question, I think. Because I take "Goal-setting" this item for granted for its importance, but actually, I found I do not make use of it generally. Of course, I always guide my students with goal-setting in a medium extent, not leave it alone, however, due to the diversity of students' abilities, this item has not reached the level of its importance in my mind.*

From the teachers' perspective, students in private universities are grown-ups so they should try their best to set learning-goals for themselves. However, due to the expansion of private university enrollment, there appear many classes in large quantity of students. It's hard for teachers to set goals for students who with the diversities of learning ability.

#### 4.4.2 Interview with Students

Question 1: Which mediation tool do you think is the most essential one? Why?

*S1... hum, I think it is "Goal-setting", because as we all know that goals are directions for humans to steer a boat. I usually set my own goals in line with our English teachers' requirements.*

*S2... In my opinion, maybe "Positive thinking" is the most essential item of all. Anything in the world is not as*

*easy as pie to achieve it, we, as universities' students, are youths with rich vigor and have every possibility in the future, therefore, we should believe that if we keep trying to solve a problem, we will overcome it.*

*S6... Maybe I do not have firmly perception of it, nevertheless, I even perceive "A sense of competence" occupying the most important position in English class. As you know, there are so many presentations or demonstrations for me and my classmates to show ourselves than before. Accordingly, peers and teachers will give a lot of suggestions for us to have improvements. And this is a process both getting knowledge and fostering a sense of confidence.*

From the students' points of view, goal-setting, positive thinking and a sense of competence occupy important position in English class. In accord with teachers' perspective, students in private universities are youths with rich vigor and their own individuality, therefore, they concentrate on those mediation items which can help them to become self-directed learners in an internal way. The practice-oriented approach of work-integrated learning and school-company cooperation are remarkable characteristics of private university education. Goal-setting, positive thinking and a sense of competence take extremely significant position in successful learning and working process.

Question 2: Which mediation tool do you think is the most frequently employed by your teachers?

*S3... Let me see, it is "Control of behavior" often used by our teachers in class. For example, in terms of learning a new word or phrase, our teachers will teach us related useful prefix and suffix to expand the meaning of it, moreover, they also recommend APPs, official accounts and some learning strategies for us. They are really useful, I think.*

*S5... In my opinion, it is "A sense of competence". You see, in our university, our English major students are classified into one experimental class and four plain classes, in sophomore grade. Thus, as a student in plain class, I always perceive encouragement from our teachers to inspire us a feeling of confidence. We should never give up learning and moving forward with a sense of competence.*

*S8... "Significance", I select this item. Before we conducting a task, we should know more about it. Therefore, we should be told why we are going to do a particular activity, rather than just sitting there and taking some notes, we are bound to involve ourselves wholly into the class learning.*

*S9... "Sharing", I regard this item as the frequently used one by our teachers. We obviously have more opportunities to show ourselves in class, and we become the protagonists in classroom learning process, because we have undertaken more presentations and group works than before, which all need a good team work. Consequently, our English teachers generally supervise us to cooperate with other peers and learn to share our ideas with others. In such kind of classroom, I feel a sense of harmony.*

*S10... I think I can perceive something different in "Awareness of change". In our oral speaking class, we choose topics by ourselves, and whatever we want to present is purely depending on ourselves. Teachers merely give us some further suggestions and sometimes they take notes about our performances this time. Next time, we will avoid making similar mistakes again.*

Private university education is a part of tertiary education. Teachers believe that graduates from private universities are expected to master basic knowledge and practical skills, as well as learn to control their behavior, share with others, and be aware of their changes. Control of behavior, a sense of competence, sharing, awareness of change, etc, are in regard to cultivating social development and taking self-learning control, and not easy to be trained in classroom. Therefore, teachers usually lay emphasis on them during the teaching process.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the major findings of present study, here comes with some implications for teaching methodology and university administrators. For the part of teaching methodology, teachers ought to mediate the multiple interaction relationships with the core of students in classroom teaching and set compound learning goals in accordance with cognition, emotion, ability and quality, and direct students in a goal-oriented way. For setting challenges and tasks, teachers should select those with highly interactive and reciprocal, with diversified flexibility, as well as opening facilitation. Referring to cooperation, teachers should realize that peers intervention has distinctive superiority than teachers. In addition, mediators should improve and refine the teaching environment for second language acquisition, for ensuring plenty of comprehensible input and the frequency of pragmatic communication drills, cultural transfer as well. For the part of university administrators, it is much more imperative for them to provide more chances for teachers to train in private universities. Then, it is worth appealing to curtail the students' quantity in each class in expectation of controlling the large-scale class teaching in private universities. Furthermore, dynamic assessment, combined individual diagnose and teaching

ways, which can provide reference value for improving our private universities' English teaching evaluation system should be raised up to a new level.

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