An Investigation into How Chinese Undergraduates' Learning Experiences Influence Their Attitudes, Values and Beliefs about English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract:

Over the past 20 years, there has been a growing expectation in China that young people learn English throughout the different academic levels – most especially in Chinese Higher Education (CHE). This is predominantly due to China's endeavours to modernise and step into globalisation in the past two decades. English as a global language has become an indispensable communication tool for modernisation and globalisation in China (Zheng, 2015; Sun, Hu & Ng, 2017). Accordingly, there has been a growing interest in the way English is taught and how Chinese students learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A large number of studies (e.g., Peng, 2011; Chew, 2013; Zhong, 2015; DE BOT, 2016) have sought to show the most important factors which influence students' attitudes, values and beliefs in English learning, such as Chinese traditional culture, students' intrinsic and extrinsic language learning motivation, individual differences and classroom affordances. However, studies into students' previous learning experiences, which have been identified as central to influencing students' attitudes, values and beliefs in other countries (e.g., Amuzie and Winke, 2009; Kolb, 2009; 2014; Yang and Kim, 2011), are surprisingly fewer in the Chinese context.

To better understand the teaching and learning of English in China, this study seeks to fill the research gap to get an 'inside picture' (Jin and Cortazzi, 2011, p. 53) of Chinese students' by analysing how their previous learning experiences influence their attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how students' EFL learning attitudes, values and beliefs are shaped by learning experiences, I conducted a qualitative study focusing on fifteen undergraduates from three universities in Mainland China. Data was collected through the two phases of semi-structured interviews with each participant. During the interviews, I encouraged the participants to provide a narrative of their past learning experiences. The analysis and interpretation of the findings were conducted through an adapted narrative and inductive analysis approach, which allowed me to focus on the narratives and views of the participants.

The findings reveal the pervasive influence of Chinese undergraduates' previous learning experiences on EFL learning attitudes, values and beliefs. The primary implication of the findings is that emotions and cognitions, originating from previous learning experiences – whether positive

or negative – impact students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. Positive emotional reactions reported by the participants had a positive impact, whereas negative emotional reactions had both negative and (occasionally) positive impacts. It can thus be concluded that Chinese students' previous learning experiences must be both acknowledged and valued. Finally, the results of this study suggest that EFL acquisition in China does not need to focus so heavily on formal learning. Indeed, taking the findings of this study into consideration, I would argue that exploring and investigating Chinese students' diverse range of non-formal and informal learning experiences can reveal insights with which to mitigate formal learning shortcomings.

Keywords: Attitudes, Values and Beliefs; English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Chinese EFL Learners; Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning

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List of Abbreviations

Attitude/Motivation Test Battery	AMTB
Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory	BALLI
British Educational Research Association	BERA
Chinese Higher Education	CHE
Confucian Heritage Culture	CHC
Economic and Social Research Council	ESRC
English as a Foreign Language	EFL
English Language Learner	ELL
Exploratory Factor Analysis	EFA
Foreign Language	FL
Foreign Language Acquisition	FLA
Foreign Language Attitude Scale	FLAS
General Certification of Secondary Education	GCSE
Group of Twenty	G20
International English Language Testing System	IELTS
Learner Attitudes for Pronunciation	LAP
Longitudinal Qualitative Data Summary Matrix	LQDSM
Ministry of Education	MOE
National College English Test-Band 4	CET-4
National College English Test-Band 6	CET-6
National College English Test-Spoken English Test	CET-SET
National English Curriculum Standards	NECS
National Science Foundation	NSF
Rokeach Value Survey	RVS
Second Language	SL/L2
Second Language Acquisition	SLA
Social Networking Site	SNS
Total Physical Response	TPR
World Trade Organization	WTO

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

For the sake of improving the quality of English teaching and learning today, many advanced educational theories pertaining to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) developed in foreign countries, have been introduced in Chinese classrooms. One of the most notable changes made by China's Ministry of Education (MOE)[1] is the new focus on student-centred EFL teaching and learning. Student-centered teaching and learning is an approach to focus on the needs of students, rather than those of others, such as teachers, educators, and adiministrators, who are envolved in the educational process (Larasati, 2018). In the Chinese discourse, student-centred learning is typically considered the antidote to the excesses of teacher-centredness. In other words, the educational ideas behind student-centred learning refer to a wide variety of educational programmes, instructional approaches, and academic support designed to meet students' learning needs, interests, and aspirations. However, its lack of practicality in Chinese education has been criticised. For example, Chen (2007), concerns about the gap between theories and practices of student-centeredness, argued that student-centeredness is more of an ideology than a specific set of practices within Chinese EFL classrooms. In China – home to the world's largest population – teachers are faced with various problems, such as large class sizes, limited instruction time, shortages of materials and examination-oriented learning (Zheng and Davison, 2008; Kilinc, 2014; Han and Yin, 2016; Zhao, 2022). Many teachers, in other words, do not know how exactly to implement student-centeredness. In contrast to previous studies (e.g., Zheng and Davison, 2008; Kilinc, 2014; Zheng, 2015) which have focused on the linguistic perspectives of teaching and learning, this study takes a non-linguistic approach by examining student-centeredness. Rather than focusing upon delivering English knowledge to students, I, therefore, instead arguing that educators and teachers can develop teaching and learning approaches based on acquiring a better understanding of their students.

Additionally, many Western educators and researchers (e.g., Ballard and Clanchy, 1991; Carson, 1992; Biggs, 1996; Bond, 1996; Rao, 1996; Chang, 2001; Luk & Lin, 2007) have identified problems in English education in Chinese Higher Education (CHE). The chief problems in EFL in

CHE include improper English communication approaches, teacher-centredness, and exam-oriented university assessments (Zheng, 2015). Although English education reforms have sought to improve the quality of English language learning in China, the most significant obstacles remain that Chinese EFL learners are typically unmotivated and feel anxious in their learning. Previous studies (e.g., Peng, 2011; Chew, 2013; Zhong, 2015) have indicated that Chinese traditional culture, students' intrinsic and extrinsic language learning motivation, and students' attitudes, values and beliefs about English language learning contribute to their classroom performance. However, less research has explored what influences Chinese students' motivation, attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. For example, in the West, learning experiences have been identified as significant to determining changes in language learners' attitudes, values and beliefs (i.e. Sakui and Gaies, 1999; Richardson, 1996; Towles-Schwen and Fazio, 2001; Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002; Sutherland and Teacher, 2004). Unfortunately, the majority of previous studies focusing on this issue have been set in study-abroad contexts (e.g., Zhang and Hu, 2008; Zhong, 2015; Gibello, 2017; Chen and Chen, 2021) or with native English speakers (Yu, 2010; Chew, 2013). Indeed, there is a notable research gap in the traditional Chinese context. Little is known about how the experiences of Chinese EFL students contribute to changes in their attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning. Therefore, this study emphasises the importance of forming a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese university students through exploring how their attitudes, beliefs and values about EFL learning have been influenced by their experiences.

1.2 Background to the Study

This study is set against the backdrop of the growing expectation of quality English language teaching in CHE due to the dual pressures of globalisation and the development of Chinese society. In today's higher education in China – especially in the universities – improved English language teaching would help students further develop their academic careers. For example, passing the Chinese National English Tests, such as the Chinese National College English Test Band-4/6 (CET-4/6)[2], would enable students to easily find a satisfactory job (Appendix 17 presents the criteria of CET-4/6). Conversely, those who fail such examinations run the risk of being rejected from both jobs and post graduate study, regardless of their other academic achievements. Moreover, the efforts of China's educational department to promote English have been partly motivated by

the aspiration to gain 'international stature' (Bolton and Graddol, 2012). Chinese English language learning in compulsory education has radically developed since the 'Open Door' policy[3] of the late 1970s. Since then, due to China's economic shift towards international trade and tourism, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed an increase in the number of English – Chinese interpreters and translators – particularly compared to the 1970s (Bolton and Graddol, 2012). Over the past 20 years, English has been widely used since China joins the World Trade Organization (WTO)[4] in 2001, hosts the Olympic Games in 2008, 2010 Shanghai Expo, and hosts the Group of Twenty (G20)[5] Hangzhou Summit in 2016. Indeed, these events evidence China's endeavours to modernise and globalise – signalling that English is an indispensable tool (Zheng, 2015). Therefore, the quality assurance and improvement of English language education in Chinese universities is considered crucial for the further development of Chinese society.

Due to this study's context within the Chinese education system, it is necessary to provide readers with an overall understanding of this system by differentiating it with that of the United Kingdom (UK). Within the Chinese education system, students are enrolled in pre-school at the age of three, and primary school at age six. Students then spend six years in primary school, followed by three years in junior school, and a further three years in high school. Junior and high school education is typically referred to as academic-oriented secondary education (Zhai and Sun, 2012). In China, pre-school education, primary, and academic-oriented secondary education comprises the basic education (Zhai and Sun, 2012). CHE is a variety of specialised education implemented after the secondary stage (Dai, Cai and Zhu, 2021). Higher education includes two types: full-time and adult higher education (Dai, Cai and Zhu, 2021). The participants of this study have all completed basic education and were undertaking full-time higher education. This means that these participants have spent 15 years in basic education and were undertaking the fourth (last) year of university (Ministry of Education, 2021). The UK's education system differs from that of China. In the UK, primary school runs between ages 5–11 (Year 1 to Year 6). Then, Year 7 and 8 are the first two years of secondary school education in the UK. In some independent schools, however, the secondary education is included in the Junior School, whereas in most others it forms part of the Senior School. Most British students move from primary to secondary school at age 11 (year 6 to year 7). Most UK university courses take a minimum of three years to complete (Scotland has 4 year

undergraduate degrees), and the majority are awarded at honours level (British Education System, 2021).

English education in China follows the Chinese educational system. English as a foreign language (EFL) is an integral part and compulsory subject in China's nine-year (six years in primary school and three years in junior school) compulsory school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2020). As the development of English learning has become the focal point of Chinese education, changes to EFL have been implemented nationally across China (Zheng, 2015; Sun, Hu & Ng, 2017). The most apparent change is that the number of English learners has risen unprecedentedly since the 1990s. By 2013, the number had grown to over 400 million, approximately one-third of the population (Gamlam, 2016). 'English learners' here refers to students from non-English-speaking backgrounds who take English language courses from primary school. Although EFL, as a compulsory subject, is from Grade 1 to Grade 9; Chinese students are required to learn English throughout the whole K-12 learning process (Sun, Wu, Yi and Zhang, 2022). According to a 2013 survey, the earliest starting age at which Chinese children begin to be exposed to English learning is three years old. Approximately 86.39% of the children had English classes from either nursery or early primary school (Chinadaily.com.cn, 2013). Hence, from the sheer number of Chinese EFL learners and their early starting ages, we can clearly see the growing attention China is placing on English language learning.

In addition, there is a growing interest in establishing educational co-operation between China and Western countries (Fang and Wang, 2014; Xie, 2022). For instance, student exchanges, cooperative research among scholars, mutual exchange of delegations, international conferences, the transactions of education materials, and employing foreign teachers in different academic levels are practices highly welcomed in China. The Ministry of Education of China (2018) has stated its wish to engage in more future co-operation with Western countries. Furthermore, China's MOE has invested £6.2 million in the UK for developing online English education (from early childhood to higher education) since 2003 – with remarkable results (Yan and Wang, 2022). Online English teaching and learning is accessed as an option for Chinese EFL leaerners (Murphy, Zhang and Perris, 2003). Taking Chinese university students as an example, they do not only acquire English at school, but increasingly from outside of their formal curricula through online activities, such as

music, games, films, and television series (Botha, 2014). Morever, a recent study, conducted by Yang and Salam (2022), discovers that computer- and internet-based virtual English classes provide more opportunities for Chinese EFL learners to practice oral English effectively. It means that the Chinese government is attempting to provide more available resources and develop strategies to support the teaching and learning of English in China. Related research and practice have been conducted to show that the use of modern technologies, such as computer and network technology, is one of the most phenomenal strategies in promoting English education in China (Teo, Huang amd Hoi, 2018; Zhang, 2022). Especially in the year of 2020, which is a year of educational crisis in history because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The MOE of China enforces schools in the name of *Suspending Classes without Stopping Learning* during the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Yan and Wang, 2022). Chinese teachers, hence, starts online teaching in the spring semester 2020. Although Chinese schools re-open and start to face-to-face classroom teaching after the first wave of Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic in the autum semester 2020, Chinese students and their parents report that they are satisfied with online learning (Zhu and Liu, 2020). More and more Chinese teachers, educators and administrators, therefore, pay further attention to improve the quality of English online teaching and learning (Zhu and Liu, 2020).

Before nationwide reforms begin, the characteristics of the Chinese traditional learning approach, including rote learning (RL), insufficient learning support, and the characteristics of Chinese students influenced by Confucian heritage culture (CHC)[6], have been under debate (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Gan, 2009). With an increasing discussion of traditional CHC learning approaches (e.g., Carson, 1992; Watkins and Biggs, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Gan, 2009), Chinese education – particularly English in CHE – has seen continuous development. In 2001, the Chinese MOE promotes to launch the '*Suzhi Jiaoyu'* (translated as education for quality) campaign, in opposition to the traditional model of *'Yingshi Jiaoyu'* (translated as education for exam preparation) (Zhao, 2022). The term of *'Suzhi Jiaoyu'* encompasses a range of educational ideals, which attempted to cultivate Chinese students' creative, critical, and independent thinking skills, integrated practical skills, problem-solving skills and co-operation (Zheng, 2015; Zhao, 2022). The Chinese MOE conducts extensive education reforms on a national scale, shifting the excesses from a traditional teacher-dominated, knowledge-based, and exam-oriented transmission mode to a more learner-centred, experience-based, and quality-

oriented education since 2001 (Ministry of Education, 2006; Zheng, 2015). Simply put, *'Suzhi Jiaoyu'* generally refers to 'a moral holistic style of education' (Dello-Iacovo, 2009, p. 241), which concerns developing well-rounded students. In other words, the desired 'high quality' person is gained by 'a disciplined practice of cultivation', which leads to 'an overall physical, mental and moral superiority entitling one to high social status and power' (Dello-Iacovo, 2009, p. 242). Under the banner of *'Suzhi Jiaoyu'*, the National English Curriculum Standards (NECS) proposes college English curriculum reform in 2002 (Han and Yin, 2016). The contents and characteristics of the college/university English curriculum reform are summarised as follows:

1. 'Enhanced Teaching objectives':
   Learner-centeredness should be advocated, and individual differences are respected. In addition, English education should focus on developing students' overall competence, especially in listening and speaking abilities. This is a distinctive difference from previous English teaching objective, which is overwhelming stress on reading skills.
2. 'Decentralised National Guideline':
   Competence-based objectives are designed for each level with flexibility and adaptability. Also, NECS requires colleges/universities to develop an English course system in forms of either required or optional courses to meet students' needs at different levels. The English course system is suggested to develop as a combination of comprehensive English language skills, English for practical use, language and culture, and English of specialty. In another word, English learning resources should be optimised to provide maximal opportunities for learning and using the language
3. 'Innovated Teaching process':
   New teaching models, such as teaching with modern information technology, employing the task-based approach to teaching, and focusing more on experiential learning and participation, are emphasised. Also, the centredness of students and the leading role of teachers are highlighted in the teaching and learning process.
4. 'Multiple Evaluation System':
   A new evaluation system of students' learning, which combines formative assessment and summative assessment, is advocated. Formative assessment includes students' self-assessment, peer assessment, teachers' assessment in forms of record of students'

performance in schools; whereas summative assessment focuses on evaluation of students' all-round ability to use English. In addition, this new evaluation system consists of an overall evaluation of teachers, with a focus on teachers' attitudes, teaching contents, teaching approaches, and teaching process.

5. 'Concern about Teacher professional Development':

   NECS advocates that teachers' professional developmet should be taken into consideration by encouraging the establishment of faculty development system. Universities/colleges are encouraged to build a faculty team with appropriate structure of teachers' age, educational background and professional titles; strengthening teacher training; encouraging teachers to conduct research to improve the quality of teaching; creating suitable teaching activities; promoting teachers' effective cooperations, enabling teachers to adapt to new teaching models.

(Han and Yin, 2016, pp. 3-4)

Although this reform has been implemented over 20 years, many argue that it has not achieved its aims (e.g., Lixu, 2004; Zhang, Zhao and Lei, 2012; Tan and Hairon, 2016). Indeed, according to a 2018 survey, most parents and students still believe that students are motivated only by the required entrance examinations for being accepted into senior high schools, universities, or overseas study (Ministry of Education, 2020). 82.94% of parents said their children learn English only for entering into better schools or preparing for a future career, while only 9.67% expected their children to master a foreign language (Chinadaily.com.cn, 2013). Hence, having recognised the importance of developing EFL teaching and learning in China today, there is an urgent need to research the underlying issues surrounding the quality of the social and educational development of English education. As 'quality education' in China promotes a paradigm shift towards emphasising student-centric learning, some educators (e.g., Jin and Cortazzi, 2011) have advocated reflecting upon what we can learn from Chinese learners. Prior research has explored the low motivation and high anxiety of EFL learning (e.g., Pan, Zhang and Wu, 2010; Hu and Cai, 2010; Zhou and Wang, 2012). Instead of studying the factors that lead to Chinese university students' failing their EFL learning, I focus instead on increasing our understanding of the students themselves, and providing a positive view of exploring other factors which influence their EFL learning through their narratives. Furthermore, prior studies have focused on the narrow aspects of students' learning motivation and

anxiety in EFL classrooms. However, how students' learning experiences influence their attitudes, beliefs and values about EFL learning has not been comprehensively explored.

1.3 Research Motivation

Within English education in modern China, it has been widely acknowledged that significant attention has been paid to developing English language teaching and learning. As a foreign language, English actually acts as a second language in China. In contrast to other foreign languages, English is compulsory in China's education system. This means that English is as important as the main subjects of Chinese, mathematics, and science. Not only have teachers and educators focused on improving students' English language skills, but so has the government. The government has emphasised developing English education through expanding its market size in China. For example, there was a steady growth between 2016–2017 in China's English education market size, meaning that approximately 500 billion RMB has been spent on English language teaching and learning in one year alone. Despite these efforts, Chinese students' English proficiency is not as high as one would expect.

Taking myself as an example, I have been studying English since I was eight years old. I now find myself dividing my EFL learning time into English study in China and improving my English language skills in Western countries. I have consistently worked very hard in English learning and achieved a high score in the CET-6 test during my undergraduate years in China. I am motivated to do so because I know I have to learn English well as I plan to go to the US for my master's degree. If someone ask me if I love to learn English, I would probably have said, 'I have to learn English'. Before I go to the US for further study, I have to take the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)[7] test. I achieve a score of 7 out of 9 on average, which is perceived as an excellent score with which to enter an American university for a master's degree. However, during my first month in New York, I do not dare to open my mouth to talk in English. I believe my oral English to be akin to baby talk. It makes me recognise that my English is not as strong as I once thought. After four years studying and living in New York, I find that I have fallen in love with English. I am pleased to speak with my supervisors, classmates, and friends in English. This unconsciously changed situation not only happened to me, but also to my Chinese classmates in

New York. As I have stated above, the different experiences of learning English in China and the West influence our beliefs, values and attitudes towards EFL learning. That is to say, my attitude towards English learning go from positive to negative, and back again during my graduate study in New York. I realise that my attitude towards English learning is influenced by my own learning experience in the United States. Hence, I find myself eager to explore whether and how Chinese university students' different learning experiences prior to, in and beyond classes affect their beliefs, values and attitudes about English language learning. My main reason for researching this relationship is to improve English education in CHE, help teachers know more about their EFL learners, and support Chinese educators in their generation of effective English teaching and learning styles.

1.4 Research Aim and Specific Research Questions

From what has been stated above, there has been a growing expectation for young people to learn English throughout their academic careers. Therefore, a large number of studies have been conducted to explore Chinese students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning, as well as how to determine their optimal learning conditions (e.g., Peng, 2011; Chew, 2013; Zhong, 2015; DE BOT, 2016). Among these studies, individual differences, classroom affordances and government policies have been identified as factors that influence Chinese EFL students' attitudes, values and beliefs. However, learning experiences (both formal and informal) have been identified as a main determinant influencing these factors in other countries (e.g., Kolb, 2014; 2009; Yang and Kim, 2011), although this has been relatively under-explored in China.

Therefore, the current study seeks to fill the research gap and attempts to acquire an 'inside picture' (Jin and Cortazzi, 2011, p. 53) of Chinese university students' English language learning by analysing how their learning experiences lead to changes in students' beliefs, values and attitudes toward EFL learning through exploring their perceptions. Thus, the overall research aim is to use this knowledge to develop recommendations with which to support Chinese educators, teachers and parents in understanding the various factors which might influence students' achievement in English study. This study emphasises the shifting ground in the relationship between students' experiences and their attitudes, values and beliefs of EFL learning. I employed a phenomenological

approach, whereby I explicate in a field context to name a new phenomenon in a research context. In light of this, I develop one overaching study aim and four specific research questions (SRQs) around this phenomenon raised in a narrative inquiry as the basis for the study:

The overaching study aim is to look into Chinese university students' previous learning experiences – formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences – and investigate how these contribute to students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning.

Four SRQs are as follows:

SRQ1: What are Chinese undergraduates' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning?
SRQ2: What are students' salient experiences of learning English formally, non-formally and informally?
SRQ 3: How do students see the respective roles and contributions of learning experiences in their English language development?
SRQ 4: How do students explain any influences of learning experiences on their attitudes, values and beliefs about learning English?

1.5 Overview of Thesis

The thesis is organised across seven chapters as follows:

Chapter One. This has been split across four parts, which part one illustrates the statement of research problem; part two states the research background; part three explains my motivation in doing rhis research; and part four presents the research aims and questions.

Chapter Two. This chapter will provide an overview of the literature from the background to this study by introducing learning, including foreign/second language learning and English language learning in China. Also, the literature includes the explorations of learners' attitudes, values and beliefs. Moreover, I foreground a section with a theoretical overview of experiential education and experiential learning theory. By drawing on interdisciplinary literature of learning experiences, it

has allowed me to broaden my knowledge and understanding of three types of learning experiences: formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences. Followed by, eight selected previous studies about EFL learning in China, which help me justify my study and set my research questions, will be discussed and presented.

Chapter Three. This chapter will present my theoretical background to this phenomenological qualitative study by introducing ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations of this study. It will also introduce the narrative research method, the research design, the stages of data collection, the interview schedule, and the profile of three universities and fifteen participants of this project. The ethical considerations and my positionality in this study will be illustrated afterwards.

Chapter Four. The data analysis will be elaborated upon in this chapter. A full discussion of thematic analysing stages and the thematic network will be presented. In addition to the thematic analysis, students' narratives will be aligned with participants' self-made line graphs and presented across two charts. The two charts are 'The Weighting Chart' and 'The Tree-Map'. The thematic network, the line-graph and the two charts serve as connecting threads because they are supplementary tools in the analysis stage.

Chapter Five and Chapter Six. Based on the analysis of collected narratives, students' self-made line graphs and the two charts, these two chapters will illustrate the findings from their formal learning narratives (Chapter Five), their non-formal and informal learning narratives (Chapter Six). Findings presented in these two chapters are to answer the research questions.

Chapter Seven. I have split the final chapter to four parts. Part one will summarise the key elements presented in previous findings chapters. Part two presents my reflections on the whole processes this research. My personal perspective on what I have found significant will also be presented. Part Three is a discussion of the current study and recommendations for future studies. Part four is the significant contributions to knowledge based on the findings of this project.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provides the overarching context of this study. This research aims to look into Chinese university students' previous learning experiences – both inside and outside schools – and investigate how these contribute to students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. Hence, this chapter will review and discuss the literature in the following fields: learning and language learning; attitudes, values and beliefs about language learning; and learning experiences. The first section (section 2.2) reviews the literature on learning, foreign language/second language learning, and English language learning in China. Section 2.3 reviews language learners' attitudes, values and beliefs. This includes a critique of exploring language learning motivation, as well as learners' attitudes, values and beliefs regarding language learning. Building on the previous literature, the relationship between people's attitudes, values and beliefs will be discussed and justified in Section 2.3.5. Afterwards, Section 2.4 explores the nature of experience (2.4.1), presents a critical review of reflections in experiences (2.4.2), and discusses experiential learning issues (2.4.3). Based on these reviews, I will redefine formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences, which can provide a more comprehensive understanding for this project (Section 2.4.4). Once done, I will present, and discuss the limitations of, eight selected studies about EFL learning in China in Section 2.5, with a focus on the explorations of Chinese English language learners' learning experiences, and their attitudes, values and beliefs about learning. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings from the literature, an evaluation of the exiguous research area, and a justification for this study (Section 2.6).

2.2 Learning and Language Learning

2.2.1 Learning

Learning is something that we all have an understanding of, and in which we have all participated. Varying conceptions of learning may be held by different individuals, or by the same people in differing circumstances for different purposes. People typically participate in a wide range of

learning environments, from school classrooms to open spaces in courtyard, or within the family context and so on. Learning can also happen well before school, and tends to continue long after it all throughout one's life course (Pritchard, 2017). Much research has been conducted into students' understandings of learning (e.g., Marton et al., 1993; Mayer, 2001; Peterson, Brown, and Irving, 2010). Marton et al. (1993) gathered different meanings of learning from adult students. Six conceptions of learning have been repeatedly identified in prior research (e.g., Peterson, Brown and Irving, 2010), which are: the acquisition of more knowledge, memorisation and reproduction, the application of facts or procedures, understanding, the viewing of things in alternate ways, and personal change or growth (Watkins, Carnell and Lodge, 2007). These conceptions all imply learning to be an individual activity. The conceptions of learning as acquiring more knowledge, and memorising and reproducing, suggest that knowledge is separate from the individual and must be conducted in a mechanical manner. Afterwards, applying facts or procedures, understanding, and making meaning represents the value of learning (Watkins, Carnell and Lodge, 2007). In sum, Watkins, Carnell, and Lodge (2007) consider learning to be understanding and interpreting knowledge, applying it in different circumstances, and constructing new meanings. The last conception of learning, changing as a person, emphasises the outcome of learning. Children who are taught and initiated into accepting knowledge are to further develop and become more skilled and knowledgeable.

As Pritchard (2017) states, learning is the domain of an education system. Children usually follow a normal pattern of learning within an educational system, known as formal learning. Other researchers have argued that the features of formal learning include all learning that is highly institutionalised, implemented in prescribed curricula, and conducted within a hierarchical educational system (Schugurensky, 2000; Malcolm, Hodkinson and Colley, 2003). Formal learning is always intentional – though not always voluntary – and occurs within an environment specifically designed for learning. Vetter (2014) considers non-formal learning to be purposive but voluntary. Although it is less organised than its formal counterpart, it may still have learning objectives. Schugurensky (2000) distinguishes between non-formal and formal learning by arguing that the former refers to 'all organised educational programs that take place outside the formal school system, and are usually short-term and voluntary' (Schugurensky, 2000, p.2). Schugurensky (2000), Vetter (2014) and Pritchard (2017) believe both types to be intentional learning. On the

other hand, learning also routinely occurs unnoticed. This is incidental learning, which could happen inside or outside of schools due to it occurring predominantly by chance and in an unplanned manner (Pritchard, 2017). Schugurensky (2000), Vetter (2014) and Pritchard's (2017) clarification of intentional and incidental learning is based on definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning provided by the European Commission in 2001. In the European Commission's Agenda 2020, ministers of the European Conference highlight the importance of recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning, which hugely contribute to young people's education.

The European Commission differentiates between formal, non-formal, and informal learning:

> ***Formal*** *learning that is typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and that is leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.*
>
> ***Non-formal*** *learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from learner's perspective.*
>
> ***Informal*** *learning that results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. In most cases, informal learning is non-intentional (or "incidental"/random).* (2001, pp. 32–33)

Based on the above definitions, there are two interpretations. Firstly, both non-formal and informal learning refer to all learning that is not formal. Secondly, all three types are in varying degrees on the learning continuum. Rogers Learning Continuum (2013) clearly shows relations between these three learning types (see Figure 1). Rogers's (2013) figure also demonstrates how the three types interact with each other and are closely interdependent. This is consistent with Melnic and Botez's (2014) finding that formal learning could provide favourable conditions for non-formal and

informal learning, and that these latter types could, in turn, offer the necessary achievements inside the formal learning system.

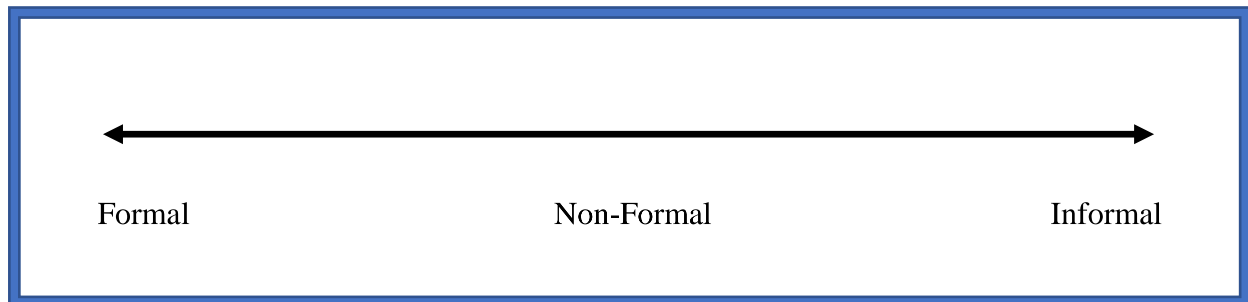


Figure 1: Learning Continuum (Rogers, 2013)
Source: Non-Formal Learning in Museums and Galleries (Elwick, 2013, p. 16)

In the above, I have highlighted the 'what' and 'how' aspects of learning as its original conception. Scholars have extended these conceptions by including building social competence and exploring the 'why' aspects of learning (Entwistle and Peterson, 2004; Peterson, Brown and Irving, 2010). Building social competence means that learning enables children to socialise constructively with others, communicate effectively, and construct experience-based understanding (Purdie and Hattie, 2002; Chen, 2005; Davies, 2017). Moreover, according to Peterson, Brown and Irving (2010), the inclusion of the reasons for learning overlaps with work on learning orientations and motivations. Hence, a range of definitions of the content, process and reasons of learning have been re-defined in recent years. Pritchard (2017, p. 1) shows a sample of these definitions:

1. *A change in behaviour as a result of experience or practice.*
2. *The acquisition of knowledge.*
3. *Knowledge gained through study.*
4. *To gain knowledge of, or skill in, something through study, teaching instruction or experience.*
5. *The process of gaining knowledge.*
6. *A process by which behaviour is changed, shaped or controlled.*

These re-defined conceptions highlight researchers' persistence in seeking to understand them. Some have explained that identifying major conceptions of learning is 'the underlying belief that conceptions of learning have the potential to explain different learning behaviour' (see Peterson, Brown and Irving, 2010, p. 168). Although exploring the nature of learning is not the current research topic, the changes in learning attitudes, values beliefs, and learning experiences are the heart of this study. Compared to the original conceptions of learning, a reduced emphasis on mechanical learning and an increased championing of learning experiences can be seen in new definitions. One can infer from this that a deeper understanding of learning experience is essential for those who intend to develop effective learning methods, activities, or educational curricula. This idea has been supported by a number of educational researchers who have conducted studies to explore students' learning experience (e.g., Amuzie and Winke, 2009; Yang and Kim, 2011; Kolb, 2014). To contribute to the development of English language teaching and learning in China, my perspective is to investigate Chinese students' formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences.

2.2.2 Foreign Language Learning/ Second Language Learning

Foreign Language (FL) or Second Language (SL/L2) learning has long been investigated and classified (e.g., Dörnyei, 1990; Zhang, 2010; Johnson, 2017). Various focuses for FL/SL learning, such as learning strategies, objectives, achievements, learning motivations and language proficiency have been (and continue to be) explored. Initial studies explored and investigated how languages are learnt. Dodson (1984) states that language is learned through message-oriented talk or medium oriented talk (cited in Speidel, 2021). The message-oriented approach means 'understanding the messages of others and on putting one's thoughts into words'; while medium-oriented talk refers to the focus on 'learning the separate components of language, its grammatical forms and structures and its lexicon' (cited in Speidel, 2021, p. 99). Many key scholars believe that our first language is learned through message-oriented talk, and our second is acquired through medium-oriented formal FL/SL instruction (e.g., Vygotsky, 1962; Oxford, 1990; Dörnyei, 1990). These scholars have emphasised the importance of applying message-oriented talk in FL/SL learning. Hence, some scholars have considered the message-oriented approach as practicing the target language in an informal, communicative way, and the medium-oriented method as a likely

way of learning a language in a formal way (Malcolm, Hodkinson and Colley, 2003; Marsenille and Aimee, 2015).

Following the European Commission's (2001) above three definitions, we understand formal language learning as being typically organised, structured, and institutionalised in a formal education system, as in schools and universities. If formal language learning is defined as something that occurs within a formal education curriculum, informal language learning would occur outside of one. Vetter (2014) argues that informal language learning usually results from daily life activities, and is not organised or structured. Non-formal language learning occurs outside of formal education systems, but can occasionally include learning support and planned activities (Vetter, 2014). Eaton (2010) includes various age groups in her analyses and used the examples of 'learning through experiential learning while on holiday' for describing informal contexts, and 'taking a summer immersion course in another language' and 'taking an evening course to learn another language' to define non-formal learning (p. 16–17). In the FL/SL learning context, formal learning is intentional whereas informal learning is largely incidental, and non-formal learning lies somewhere in-between (Brebera, 2018). In building the FL/SL competence, Brebera (2018) strongly recommends combining intentional and incidental learning, since 'incidental learning may lead to the intentional learning' and, at the same time, 'intentional learning always contains also unplanned learning' (p. 54). In terms of EFL education in China, non-formal and informal learning is mostly seen as interchangeable. Most studies have sought to use both informal and formal language learning instructions to improve the quality of English education (e.g., Botha, 2014; Zhou, 2016). With a focus on exploring Chinese EFL phenomena, I shall review and discuss English learning in greater detail in the Section 2.2.3.

In recent years, an increasing number of researchers have shown their interests in researching the impact of informal language learning in formal education systems. Informal learning has clearly long been highlighted as being as valid as formal learning (Borau et al., 2009; Botha, 2014; Zhou, 2016). Indeed, in the 1960s, both formal and informal language learning have already been taken into account in the field of FL/SL acquisition. Upshur (1968) compares three groups of ten ESL students and examines whether formal ESL classes would contribute to more effective learning. Upshur concludes that formal ESL instruction might be less effective on adult second language

learning, whereas an informal learning environment can be efficiently used by adult SL learners. Krashen, Seliger, and Hartnett (1974) confirm these findings, and further claimed that informal and formal environments may contribute to different aspects of SL competence. Informal ESL learning environments affect SL competence, while formal environments are significantly more efficient in increasing SL proficiency (Krashen, 1976). However, it is worth noting that these studies have ignored the individual's self-identities, as their internal causes may have contributed to their SL efficiency as well as their particular learning environments. Although these studies (Krashen, Seliger, and Hartnett, 1974; Krashen, 1976) highlight the place of the informal learning environment and experiences in a language learner's learning process, they also argue that informal language environments have little-to-no effect on benefiting adult SL proficiency. The informal and formal language learning environments compared in these studies mainly refer to the impact of informal and formal SL teaching. Recently, researchers have been more likely to explore the impacts of combining e-learning in a formal class (e.g., Luo and Gui, 2019; Viberg, Andersson and Wiklund, 2021).

Given the broadness of 'informal' as a term, many researchers (e.g., Falk et al., 2009) have accepted the further category of 'non-formal' learning. For instance, e-learning is a kind of non-formal learning (e.g., Falk et al., 2009; Kukulska-Hulme, 2015), while Barrot (2021) indicates that technology, especially social media, is an informal language learning environment. Barrot (2021) argues that social media as an informal FL/SL learning platform has exponentially grown in the past 12 years. Recent studies (e.g., Manca, 2020; Barrot, 2021) have adopted the definition of social media as internet-based applications, including image or video sharing platforms (e.g., Instagram/TikTok), information organisation (e.g., Pinterest), photo or video messaging (e.g., Skype/TengXun Shipin in China), instant messaging (e.g., WhatsApp/WeChat in China), or a combination of all of the above (e.g., Facebook). In China, similar social media apps have been applied to traditional language teaching and learning boundaries based on the notion that language learners perform most optimally when immersed in engaging and enjoyable activities (Labus, Despotović-Zrakić, Radenković, Bogdanović and Radenković, 2015; Okan, 2003). This has been supported by Chugh and Ruhi (2018), Manca (2020) and Barrot (2021), who further explain that the increasing popularity of integrating social media into language teaching and learning is due to the flexibility with which it can meet learners' needs and provide a venue for socially engaging

activities. In contrast, Bugeja (2006) researches the purpose of using social media in language teaching from language learners' perceptions, and concludes that the use of social media is seen by students as an entertainment and social networking platform rather than as an academic platform. From these studies, one can infer that the rise of social media has significantly impacted language teaching and learning. However, some research has highlighted such criticisms as technical problems, teachers' and students' resistance, and appropriateness as an academic platform (e.g., Toetenel, 2014; Hsu and Beasley, 2019; Luo and Gui, 2019). The interest in researching technology applied in language learning has unexpectedly expanded and seems set to continue growing in future (e.g., Hu, 2007; Dizon, 2021; Ahn, 2021; Viberg, Andersson and Wiklund, 2021), but this is not the focus of this thesis.

2.2.3 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning in China

As I have introduced the background of English education in China in last chapter, it is known that developing English education has become the focal point of Chinese education, many EFL teaching and learning changes have been implemented in China. The most apparent change in EFL learning in China is that the number of English learners has risen unprecedentedly since the 1990s. By 2013, over 400 million Chinese are learning English, approximately one third of the population (Gamlam, 2016). In addition, according to a 2013 survey, the earliest starting age for Chinese children's learning of English is at age three. Approximately 86.39% of children take English classes from nursery or early primary school (Chinadaily.com.cn, 2013). Furthermore, the Chinese government has been attempting to provide more available resources for students to learn English outside of the classroom context. Moreover, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) has stated its desire for further cooperation with Western countries, including student exchanges, cooperative academic research, mutual delegations, international conferences, transactions of education materials, and employing foreign teachers throughout different academic levels are practices highly welcomed in China (Ministry of Education, 2018). Besides the above-mentioned facts, this section will discuss the literature on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning within traditional Chinese education. Language learning is an integration of cognitive and sociocultural aspects (Hu, 2001; Wen and Clement, 2003). According to Wen and Clement (2003, p. 18), it is important to recognise 'the linguistic, communicative and social psychological variables that may affect students' willingness

to communicate in a Chinese setting'. Hence, Chinese culture will also be taken into consideration due to its impact on Chinese learners and their English language learning process (Wen and Clement, 2003; Yu, 2006).

In China, the characteristics of the traditional English learning approach—regarding the role of teachers and Chinese students, and insufficient learning support—which are influenced by CHC[4] have been under debate (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Gan, 2009). Firstly, because of the teacher's traditional role as an authority figure, English learning is predominantly teacher-centred (Hu, 2001; Wen and Clement, 2003). Due to China's culture of learning, and in particular its Confucianist influence, teachers have been authoritative in the teaching and learning process (Hu, 2001). The basic tenets of Confucianism are: *benevolence (Ren 仁), righteousness (Yi, 义), propriety (Li, 礼), filial piety (Xiao, 孝)*, and *loyalty to one's ruler (Zhong, 忠)* (Fan, 2010). These core values involve respecting one's ancestors, strengthening basic human relationships, and implementing family determination over individual motives (Fan, 2010). Influenced by Confucianism, learners are required to respect their teachers, and obey their arrangements and decisions (Littlewood, 2000). This requirement underlines the dominating authority of teachers in the classroom, and often results in limited learner interaction and discussion. The more active learners wish to interact and communicate with teachers frequently, whilst less active or more passive learners would rather be quiet – further exacerbated by time constrictions and fewer opportunities to build and develop interactive relationships with teachers (Shi, 2006). According to Nunan (2012), language learning should consider the learner's needs and the learning process should thus involve more learner participation. In the absence of this, the dominant teacher-centred instruction may result in English language learners not developing their communicative competence because of having fewer practice and interaction opportunities. Yu (2006) argues that the teacher's authority in the classroom constrains learner interaction, thereby hindering the development of students' communicative competence. As languages, English and Chinese are completely distinct, with different cultural aspects, and thus language learning is suggested to emphasise the development of actual application in real social contexts (Yu, 2006). Although the English curriculum requires a focus on such development, it may not provide adequate opportunities for the students to communicate and practice within the classroom.

Additionally, passing exams is treated as the main learning goal of the traditional English education curriculum (Zhou, 2013). For example, some of the most popular English language tests in China are the National College English Test Band 4 (CET-4), Band 6 (CET-6), and Spoken English Test (CET-SET)[8]. The CET test is a standardised exam administered by China's MOE. Students in Chinese colleges and universities must pass the CET-4 in order to graduate (Anne, 2010). Since China's imperial period, exams have been used by government ministers as a way to select students who can contribute to China's economy, politics, culture, and society (Zheng and Cheng, 2008). Due to Confucianism's history and influence, China has a culture of exam-oriented education in English language learning and teaching (Shi, 2006). Within this culture, the teacher is considered to be a knowledge transmitter. This shares attributes with teacher-centred teaching methods and tends to concentrate on lecturing, thereby providing identical teaching regardless of the diverse needs of the students (Zheng and Cheng, 2008). Due to the exam-oriented goal, the teaching and learning processes include little consideration of the learners' practical communicative needs (Yu, 2006; Hu, 2001). In this case, there is more teacher-centred instruction and fewer communication opportunities. Simply put, the exam-oriented learning methods are similar to those of the teacher-centred approach (Hu, 2001). Teachers are the dominant authority in the classroom, which may limit learners' participation.

With traditional learning approaches being increasingly discussed (Carson, 1992), Chinese education (English in particular) is continually developing. Since 1980s, the Chinese MOE reforms English language education on a national scale, shifting from the excesses of traditional teacher-dominated, knowledge-based and exam-oriented education to a more learner-centred, experience-based and quality-oriented approach (Zheng, 2015; Sun, Hu & Ng, 2017). Consequently, in 2001, the MOE aims to promote the concept of *Suzhi Jiaoyu* (Zheng, 2015; Han and Yin, 2016; Sun, Hu & Ng, 2017). It encompasses a range of educational ideas and generally refers to a more holistic style of person-centred education (Dello-Iacovo, 2009, Zhao, 2022). Hence, this reform showcases the desire to raise personal qualities. This is the first time in Chinese educational reform in the twenty-first century. Accordingly, the National English Curriculum Standards (NECS) for Chinese education proposes six principles (listed in the section 1.2 *Background to the Study*) for EFL teaching and learning. The goal of those english educational reform principles attempt to cultivate

creative, critical and independent thinking skills, integrated practical skills, problem-solving skills and co-operation.

Although the education quality reform has been implemented since 2001, the achievement backfires on the expectations (e.g., Lixu, 2004; Zhang, Zhao and Lei, 2012; Tan and Hairon, 2016). According to the survey in 2013, most parents and students believe that students are caught up with the English language classes because they have to face the required entrance examinations for getting into senior high schools, universities, or overseas study. 82.94 per cent of parents said their children learn English just for entering a better school or preparing for a future career, while only 9.67 per cent of them merely expect their children to master a foreign language (Chinadaily.com.cn, 2013). However, Chinese scholars and educators are becoming increasingly concerned with the importance of developing communicative competences in English language development (Hu, 2001; Yu, 2006). According to the College English Curriculum Requirements developed by MOE (Ministry of Education, 2006), one of the aims of English language education is to develop learners' communicative skill in order to further both social and international communication. However, developing communicative competence requires more practical opportunities for learners to practice their English language skills in real social contexts. The CET test – the fundamental purpose of which is to comprehensively evaluate Chinese students' English proficiency – consists of four sections: listening comprehension (35%), reading comprehension (35%), cloze or error correction (10%), and writing and translation (20%) (Zheng and Cheng, 2008). Listening, cloz, reading and error correction are considered 'receptive' skills, and contribute to the test's largest part (70% of the total). The writing and translation sections are seen as 'productive' skills, which contribute to a smaller part of the overall score. While the CET-SET can assess English learners' speaking skills as part of their 'productive' skills, the CET-SET is not mentioned as a compulsory test for candidates (National College English Testing Committee, 2006). Therefore, CET tests learners' 'receptive' language skills tend not to be emphasised as 'productive'. As a result of limited speaking opportunities, as well as the traditional role of the teacher as an authoritative figure, the communicative competence of Chinese English learners may be somewhat underdeveloped (Yu, 2006). Accordingly, this leads one to question whether the curriculum requirements in practice have been achieved.

Based on the recognition of the importance of developing EFL teaching and learning in China, there is a continuing need to research the underlying issues surrounding the quality of the social and educational development of English teaching. For example, some studies have argued that Chinese EFL education may be restricted by the limited teaching time (Hu, 2002; Zheng and Dai, 2013), and that English speaking environments are helpful to language learning (Zhang and Cui, 2010). As 'quality education' in China is shifting towards emphasising students' needs and competence, Jin and Cortazzi (2011) have advocated learning from the learners themselves. Previous studies have explored the low motivation and high anxiety of EFL learners (e.g., Pan, Zhang and Wu, 2010; Hu and Cai, 2010; Zhou and Wang, 2012). Instead of studying the factors leading to failure, I instead focus on learning more about the students and providing a positive view of exploring other factors which influence their EFL learning. Furthermore, previous EFL studies have focused on narrow aspects of learning motivation and anxiety in EFL classrooms. However, the relation between Chinese EFL learners' prior learning experiences and their attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning has not been researched in-depth. Accordingly, I shall now review these factors.

2.3 Attitudes, Values and Beliefs about Language Learning

2.3.1 Language Learning Motivation

In Chinese education, English language learning plays a significant role in determining students' academic achievement. However, many problems in English education in CHE have been raised and identified by Western educators and researchers (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991; Carson, 1992; Biggs, 1996; Bond, 1996; Rao, 1996; Chang, 2001; Luk and Lin, 2007). However, the 2001 reforms, miscommunication in English, teacher-centred teaching styles, exam-oriented assessment, and low motivation for English learning in Chinese universities are still the crucial issues for CHE (Sun, Hu & Ng, 2017). Among these problems, Chinese students' demotivation and anxiety in EFL learning remain the core problems. Meanwhile, there is also a tendency to explore various factors that might determine students' demotivation in EFL learning.

The role of motivation and its effect on FL or SL/L2 learning have been a concern for educators across the globe (e.g., Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986; Dörnyei, 1994, 1998, 2001; Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2010; Lee and Lo, 2017). According to Dörnyei's motivational theory, there are three primary sources of motivation for SL learning: the learner's internal desire to become an effective L2 user; social pressures to master the L2; and the actual experiences of being engaged in the L2 learning process (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017). In terms of regional and cultural differences, L2 motivation research tends to be conducted according to the specific country's unique educational tasks, especially in higher education. For example, a study in China conducted by Warden and Lin (2000) revealed that Chinese students' learning motivation is effectively influenced by CHC. However, Wallace (2015) finds that most Western teachers ideally strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation by helping them discover the pleasure of acquiring knowledge and skills. In terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (1989) provide a clear definition for distinguishing between them. The former relates to the likelihood of the experience of doing something generating interest and enjoyment of the activity in itself, such as private interests, self-confidence, and personal goals. The latter refers to gaining something outside of the activity itself like passing an exam, obtaining rewards, and getting a better job.

Under the influence of Gardner and Lambert's (1972) social psychological perspective of learning motivation, L2 motivation research in China begins in the 1980s (You and Dörnyei, 2016). English teachers in China often face many students in one class and a limited number of weekly teaching hours. Since such a context differs from Western culture, there remains a need to examine motivation in this cultural setting. In China, an increasing number of studies have begun to analyse factors that influence students' learning motivation, such as traditional Chinese culture, personal confidence, interests, and other extrinsic motivators which can also impact English performance (i.e., Chen, Warden and Chang, 2005; Pan, Zang and Wu, 2010; Li and Zhou, 2017). In Western countries, it has been reported that students with positive attitudes towards English language learning tend to display higher levels of enthusiasm and motivation (Shams, 2008; Al-Mamun, Rahman and Hossain, 2012). Likewise, other research indicates that analysing language learners' learning attitudes, beliefs and their learning capabilities can enhance learning possibilities by exploiting the most effective strategies (Ehrman and Oxford, 1990; Oxford, 1990). For the sake of stimulating Chinese students' learning interests and implementing effective English strategies, it is

advisable to pay attention to previous studies about Chinese students' attitudes, values and beliefs about language learning, and then fill the identified research gaps.

2.3.2 Attitudes Exploration in Language Learning Context

Learners' attitudes have been identified as 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour' (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993, p. 1); a personality trait which must be inferred from measurable responses (Ajzen, 2005); and a psychological construct that defines a particular behaviour (Al-Mamun, Rahman and Hossain, 2012). In a later view, the most important attitude is the desire to continue one's learning (Beard and Wilson, 2018). In the field of SL/FL acquisition, Brown (1994) added that 'attitudes, like all aspects of the development of cognition and affect in human beings, develop early in childhood and are the result of parents and peers' attitudes, contact with people who are different in any numbers of ways, and interacting affective factors in the human experiences' (p. 168). Language learners' attitudes, in other words, are the most salient to future learning, and can be seen as reasoned actions that could be split into three components: (a) a 'cognitive component', which reflects language learners' beliefs and perceptions of the target (e.g., 'I believe more emphasis should be given to speaking practice in class); (b) an 'affective component', which relates to learners' feelings and emotions of the target language (e.g., 'I am afraid of making mistakes in English class'); and (c) a 'behavioural component', which refers to learners' behavioural intentions (e.g., 'if I know how to improve my English pronunciation, I would love to spend 30 minutes every day practising it) (Fishbein and Ajzen,1975; Eshghinejad, 2016; see also Sardegna and Kusey, 2018).

Language learners' attitudes have been explored since the 1970s, and various attitude assessments have been widely used as tools to investigate and assess FL/SL learning attitudes. For instance, scholars created such important instruments as the Foreign Language Attitude Scale (FLAS) (Bartley, 1970), the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985), and the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1988). Based on these traditional instruments, learners' attitudes can be investigated. For example, Sardegna et al. (2018) explore English learners' attitudes toward pronunciation skills using the Learner Attitudes for

Pronunciation (LAP) inventory with an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The LAP items are originally constructed on Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) attitudinal model, and Wigfield and Guthrie’s (1997) self-efficacy scale (Sardegna et al., 2018).

Furthermore, a growing number of studies on the significance of learners’ attitudes towards a language have emerged as a new research area (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Krashen, 1992; Dörnyei, 2001). As Young (2006) indicates, language learners’ ‘positive attitudes may lead to increased motivation, which, in turn, may lead to successful attainment of proficiency due to increased input and interaction’ (p. 480). More recently, Abidin et al. (2012) attempt to examine 180 Libyan EFL students’ cognitive, emotional, and behavioural attitudes toward English learning. These authors present three primary findings. Firstly, participants show negative attitudes towards learning English, which imped their successful acquisition. Secondly, the majority of participants hold negative cognitive attitudes in their ability to summarise the essential points of English content. Thirdly, students prefer to study in their native language, and would often feel nervous when having to speak in class. Some of them considered English to be either unnecessary or unimportant. In contrast, Eshghinejad’s (2016) qualitative and quantitative study reveals the attitudes of Kashan University students to English learning – also in cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects. The results show that undergraduates’ positive EFL attitudes were considered a fundamental component for improving language learning. Moreover, the study also provides insights into the relationship between learners’ personalities (gender differences) and their attitudes toward EFL learning, and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors which influence learners’ attitudes. Similarly, Othman (2009) highlights that learners’ prior educational experience and cultural factors also impact attitudes.

As this research area has grown, many studies on Chinese EFL students have reported a wide appreciation of English education, and that their attitudes about English learning are closely related to their motivation (e.g., Zhang and Hu, 2008; Yu, 2010; Liu, 2011; Chew, 2013). For example, 30 Chinese postgraduates studying in the United States participate in Zhang and Hu’s (2008) study which aims to investigate L2 learners’ attitudes toward three varieties of English: American English (AmE), British English (BrE), and Australian English (AuE). Two findings are worthy of attention. First, the students were generally more favourable towards AmE and BrE than AuE, and

no dramatic differences are found in their attitudes towards AmE and BrE. Secondly, the participants' attitudes towards the three varieties are not closely related to the understandability of each dialect. These two findings indicate that Chinese students' difficulties in understanding English native speakers' accents do not influence their attitudes towards these three varieties. Similarly, Liu (2011) and Chew (2013) reveal that 'Chinese university EFL learners hold positive attitudes towards English, are motivated to learn the language, and valued their association with English-speaking culture and people' (Chew, 2013, p. 89). Yu (2010) also finds that Chinese university students are willing to learn English, and that the majority realise that English education in China is interrelated to the traditional education system, itself rooted in Chinese culture. These students display their complex attitudes towards English learning in China. They acknowledge that the Chinese government hasattached great importance and attention to English education in China, while also reporting dissatisfaction with their current English instruction which is heavily exam-oriented and neglected to develop their interest or communication skills. Simply put, traditional culture and the characteristics of the education system seem to heavily impact Chinese EFL students' attitudes. Additionally, Yu (2010) also indicates that students' experiences with native English-speaking teachers and friends influence their attitudes about English. Among these studies, it is evident that Chinese learners' EFL attitudes are interrelated with learning motivation and behaviours. However, such factors as personalities, cultural characteristics, and experiences with native speakers should also be investigated due to their likely influence.

2.3.3 Values Exploration in Language Learning Context

Values are frequently used as social and personal principles within sociological and psychological theories. Personal value systems are formed by individuals' interpretation and understanding in social interactions with others, while social value systems are constructed through the internalisation of shared values in society (Zhu, 2011). Parsons (1961) stresses that personal values are internalised through those of society, although he does concede that values are 'as personalities', and an individual may be considered as 'a system' with its values, goals and so forth (p. 41). Put simply, there is a certain overlap between personal and social values. Different to more general definitions, some researchers consider the term 'value' to be synonymous with 'belief' (Rokeach, 1973; Gert, 1998; Johnston, 2003). Indeed, Rokeach (1973) defines value as 'an enduring belief

that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence' (p. 5). Gert (1998) and Johnston (2003) assert that it is difficult to find a philosophical use of the noun 'value'. Johnston (2003) further explains that values could refer to beliefs about what is right and good in education. Following this definition, one could infer that values are abstract in nature. Mansyur (2021) states that values are stored in people's minds and expressed through language, symbols and messages both verbal and nonverbal. Concepts related to the values of SL/FL learning explored in the current study consist of two elements, namely values and SL/FL learning. Values, in other words, related to 'good' or 'bad' values are abstract in nature and used as a 'benchmark' by humans to determine the morality of an action (p. 210). As discussed in previous sections, SL/FL learning is a process of integrating cognitive and sociocultural aspects of target language into individuals and society in order to become civilised (Wen and Clement, 2003; Mansyur, 2021). Combining the concept of values and SL/FL learning, I assume that whether there are studies have been done with a focus of persons' values of the target language culture, learning process or learning approaches.

With such an idea, a number of studies have focused on researching individual cultural values, economic values of learning processes, and practical values of learning approaches. For instance, Chuang (2012) investigates the impact of acculturation experiences on an Asian person's cultural values in learning. Similarly, Tarhini[a], Hone, Liu, and Tarhini[b] (2017) also examine individual cultural values, but focuse upon the inter-relation between students' individual-level cultural values, and their adoption and acceptance of e-learning tools in Lebanese higher education. Regarding foreign language acquisition, Hanushek (2011) explores the economic value of higher teacher quality, whereas Singh (2015) investigates the economic value of studying in a private school, in order to consider the practical values of target language learning strategies and approaches. Iglesias Xamani (2013) explores the practical values and implications of a constructivist approach to EFL teaching in a higher education context, and Lancho Perea (2021) examines the practical values of Spanish as a foreign language strategy through the perceptions of learners. Although few studies have explored learning values in a Chinese context, these international studies imply that it is valuable to explore Chinese students' personal values and how they perceive the value in learning.

Moreover, an increasing number of studies have investigated language learners' values due to their being a manifestation of their learning motivation (Dörnyei, 1998; Chen and Chang, 2005). Since learners' motivation is determined by their values, researchers have sought to examine the factors that might contribute to changes in personal values. Johnston's (2003) seminal work, *Values in English Language Teaching*, further identifies language learners' values as 'inherently subjective, highly personal, essentially ambiguous, and context dependent' (p. 873). The terms: 'subjective', 'ambiguous', and 'context dependent' reflect that values are based on diverse personalities and different contextual settings. Similarly, Dörnyei (2005) believes that SL learners' values (especially instrumental ones) are 'generated by a sense of duty or a fear of punishment' (p. 103). Hayes (2016) finds that Thai university students' values in learning English are based on accumulated social interactions. Moreover, Zhu (2011) finds that Chinese high school students' EFL values are promoted by confucian heritage culture and the education system, built into academic curricula, and conveyed by teachers. These studies assert that such factors as individual differences, traditional culture, education systems, and class experiences are closely related to learners' values. However, due to the limited studies on Chinese university students' values about EFL learning, I cannot definitively conclude that personalities, cultural characteristics, and class experiences are likely to contribute to learners' changeable values. Hence, again, further research into Chinese learners' values, especially the values about EFL learning, must be conducted.

2.3.4 Beliefs Exploration in Language Learning Context

Regarding beliefs significant to people's lives, numerous definitions of the term can be found within academia. Some research suggests that 'people possess some preconceived ideas about various issues and that these beliefs can influence their understanding of the reactions towards new information' (Stevick, 1980, p. 4). Puchta (1999) explaines that beliefs 'are generalisations about cause and effect, and [that] they influence our inner representation of the world around us. They help us to make sense of that world, and they determine how we think and how we act' (pp. 68–69). Sakui and Gaies (1999) identify beliefs as 'central constructs in every discipline which deals with human behaviour and learning' (p. 474).

Within FL/SL acquisition, early studies define beliefs as 'student opinions on a variety of issues and controversies related to language learning' (Horwitz, 1988, p. 284); 'notions about language learning that students have acquired' (Kuntz, 1997, p. 4); and 'opinions and ideas that learners (and teachers) have about the task of learning a second/foreign language' (Kalaja and Barcelos, 2003, p. 1). Dörnyei's (2005) statement that language learners' individual belief differences substantially affect the language learning process and determines its success has drawn academic attention. It has been argued that language learners develop their beliefs either to facilitate their language learning process or determine the optimal conditions for such learning (Koichi and Ellis, 2014; Kaymakamoğlu and Atmaca, 2016). These types of beliefs can be identified as individual differences, formed and influenced by such various factors as genetic traits, inner personalities and other environmental conditions (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005; Matsumoto et al., 2013; Kaymakamoğlu and Atmaca, 2016). Since people's beliefs on how language learning should be conducted differ, many specific beliefs currently exist. For example, some believe that language learning depends on personal ambition, determination, and effort (e.g., Cui, 2014; Johari, 2017); while others instead ascribe it to natural or gender tendencies, such as the belief that females are more capable in language learning (e.g., Daif-Allah, 2012; Herlina, 2022). Moreover, some think acquiring a language should focus on the accuracy of its use by emphasising grammar and vocabulary (Sam, 2018); whereas others think to focus on the practical use by listening and speaking (e.g., Renukadevi, 2014; Nabiyev, 2022). It would here be appropriate to state that language learners are not empty vessels, and that they already possess certain beliefs about learning before entering a language class.

In addition, learners' beliefs have been increasingly explored in FLA/SLA contexts. Some researchers have focused on investigating the importance of beliefs in the learning process (e.g., Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Rifkin, 2000; Cui, 2014) whereas others have foregrounded investigating factors that might influence learners' beliefs (e.g., Amuzie and Winke, 2009; Peng, 2011; Mercer, 2011; Zhong, 2015). Studies about the effects of beliefs on language learning processes show how positive beliefs benefit the process, whereas negative ones impede it (Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Rifkin, 2000; Cui, 2014). Scholars have further argued that language learners who hold positive beliefs will undertake challenges willingly, demonstrate lower learning anxiety, expend considerable effort, and persist in the presence of obstacles to attain higher academic achievement.

On the other hand, students with negative beliefs would prefer to take uncomplicated academic tasks, demonstrate higher learning anxiety, and spend limited effort (Zhou, Xi and Lochtman, 2020; Aslan and Thompson, 2021).

On the other hand, some researchers have moved beyond emphasising the importance of beliefs in the language learning process to examine the relationship between learners' beliefs and the factors which might influence them. Early studies have identified that language learners' beliefs are stable and unchanging (e.g., Horwitz, 1988, 1999; Wenden, 1998), whereas more recent ones have examined learners' beliefs as dynamic and changing (e.g., Peng, 2011; Zhong, 2014). Despite these handful of studies, Mercer (2011) and Zhong (2015) argue that to emphasise one over the other would be to take an unbalanced approach. Their results showed that learners' beliefs have a dual nature. Furthermore, significant changes in learners' beliefs have been found relating to learners' choices of learning strategies (Park, 1995; Yang, 1999; Zhong, 2008), learners' autonomy (Amuzie and Winke, 2009; Zhong, 2010; 2013a), learners' efforts outside the classroom (Amuzie and Winke, 2009), the role of teachers (Amuzie and Winke, 2009), and different learning environments (Peng, 2011; Kaymakamoğlu and Atmaca, 2016). Consistent with these findings, both Amuzie and Winke (2009) and Zhong (2014; 2015) reveal that language learners' beliefs arise from their experiences, such as those relating to different learning strategies, learning contexts, and new learning environments. Their studies corroborate Hosenfeld's (2003) findings that learners' beliefs are 'embedded in experiences continually changing and dynamic' (p. 38). Therefore, language learners' learning experiences, discussed here, were examined as one of the main factors contributing to changes in their beliefs.

Drawing on studies conducted within the Chinese EFL context, some findings reveal that the beliefs of Chinese EFL learners have traditionally been considered stable and static. For instance, Horwitz's (1985) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) questionnaire has been used as a normative approach to measure the efficiency of the CHE's Rote Learning (RL) strategy. Indeed, in 1990, Gardner narrated the understandings of Chinese students' beliefs about RL: 'If we recite it but don't think it over, we still won't appreciate its meaning, if we think over but don't recite it, even though we may understand it, our understanding will be precarious' (p. 38). Although RL has recently been the subject of much criticism (e.g., Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Gan, 2009),

Chinese EFL learners believe it to be an effective way to learn English vocabulary and grammar (Huang, Hoi and Teo, 2018). Indeed, Huang, Hoi and Teo (2018) show that the majority of Chinese university students who have achieved satisfactory scores on writing compositions usually exerte reasonable efforts in memorising words, phrases, and patterns. The same is true in other countries, such as in Myanmar, where it is popularly believed that RL in vocabulary learning strategies benefits Burmese undergraduate students (Sinhaneti and Kyaw, 2012). Therefore, beliefs about RL's positive contribution to successful English vocabulary and grammar learning are primarily accepted by Asian students. In other words, language learning strategies are shaped by learner's beliefs, whereas learners' beliefs are deeply rooted in their cultural backgrounds (Li and Cutting, 2011).

In contrast, Peng (2011) examines the classroom affordances, including teaching methods, lesson goals, meaningful activities, and teacher and peer support as factors influencing changes in EFL learners' belief systems. The data is collected from a first-year university student over seven months during the transition from secondary school to a tertiary language classroom. The focal participant's positive EFL beliefs diminished near the end of the first semester but raised again in the middle of the second. His interests in English communicative activities declined due to his belief that communicative EFL learning has been replaced by exam-oriented learning. His interest later rises because he receives enough support from teachers and peers to help him achieve a clear goal. These findings indicate that learners' beliefs are complicated and dynamically mediated by classroom affordances. In comparison, Zhong (2015) studied the beliefs of Chinese EFL learners at a language school in New Zealand. Corroborating Li and Cutting's (2011) and Peng's (2011) studies, Zhong (2015) finds that some learners' beliefs evolved and changed over time, while others rooted in traditional cultures remained relatively stable. He further explains that changeable beliefs are firmly related to their previous learning experiences. One participant changes from focusing on accuracy to frequency after having experienced more collaborative learning in a new environment. In summary, it seems evident that an increasing amount of studies intend to examine Chinese EFL learners' beliefs, while insufficient studies have explored the factors influencing their beliefs.

2.3.5 The Relationship between Attitudes, Values and Beliefs

From the above studies, it seems evident that language learners' performance and achievements are inseparably intertwined with their attitudes, values and beliefs about language learning. Consequently, some scholars have found that learners' attitudes, shaped by their perceptions and beliefs about language learning, strongly impact overall learning behaviour (Como, 1986; Cotterall, 1995). They have also indicated that language learners who strongly believe in the self-efficacy of learning tend to attain successful academic achievement, and positive attitudes yield positive results, enthusiasm, and motivation. This has received considerable attention from educators from different countries with various cultures and backgrounds (Shams, 2008; Al-Mamun, Rahman and Hossain, 2012). It has been suggested to examine the relationship between language learners' attitudes and values, and then to explore how they guide or direct behaviour.

The words 'attitudes', 'values', and 'beliefs' are often used either loosely or interchangeably (Anderson and De Silva, 2009). Imagine a Chinese EFL learner says, 'I believe that learning English is as important as learning science, so I decided to take English extramural classes after school'. This statement involves a belief that learning English is important, a value that learning English is as important as learning science, and finally an attitude that shapes behaviour – i.e., willingness to take extra classes. From this statement, we can see that a learner's attitudes (which strongly effect their overall behaviour) are shaped by their values and beliefs. Similarly, other researchers have further explained this relationship. They have indicated that individuals' beliefs are the 'central constructs in every discipline which deals with human behaviour and learning' (Sakui and Gais 1999, p. 474); values derived from beliefs are the basis for people's attitudes; and attitudes expressed through words and behaviour are the ways in which people express or apply their beliefs and values (Anderson and De Silva, 2009). Educational research has defined this kind of relationship. For instance, Hayes's (2016) study reflects that Thai university students' values in learning English are influenced by their strong beliefs. Since the majority of Thai university students naturally prefer Thai over English, their values in learning English are for 'personal economic advancement' rather than to attain an indispensable language in and of itself (Hayes, 2016, p. 73). Figure 2 echoed from Clear IAS (2019) illustrates the relationship between people's beliefs, values and attitudes.

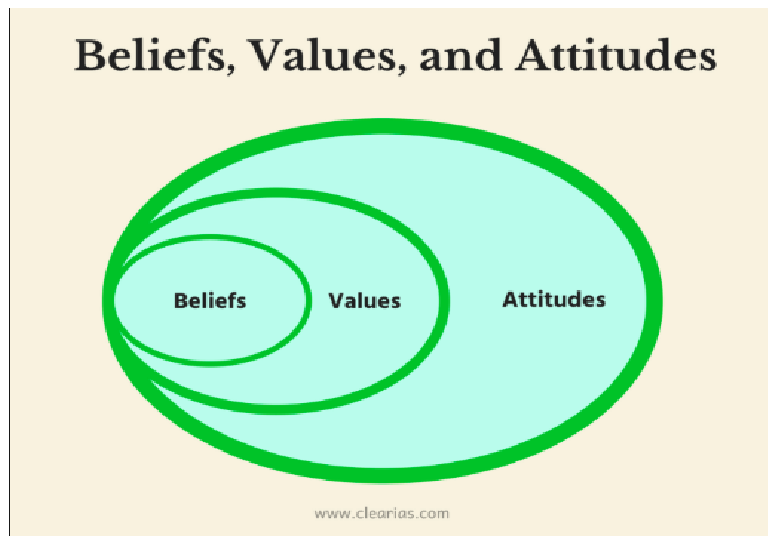


Figure 2: the Relationship between Personal Beliefs, Values and Attitudes
Source: Attitude – Concepts Made Simple; With examples – Clear IAS, 2019

Although this type of relationship has been widely accepted and applied in educational and psychological research, some researchers argue that this statement is somewhat asymmetrical. For instance, the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, 2011) states that beliefs (the cognitive component) affect emotions (the affective component), which then influence behavioural intentions (the conative component). As such, when beliefs become strongly entrenched or emotional, they serve as the 'guiding principals' of people's attitudes or behaviours (Puchta, 1999; Cabaroglu and Roberts, 2000). Similarly, personal values could be both the powerful explanation and effect on a variety of individual and collective behaviours, as shown in prior research (e.g., Henry, 1976; Vinson and Munson, 1976; Pitts and Woodside, 1983; Schopphoven, 1991; Beatty et al., 1991). Therefore, from this point of view, beliefs or values have the power to dominate a person's attitudes and behaviours, rather than being their key components. However, this notion is often debated by various cultures. Within Chinese Confucian culture, students' beliefs are formed by traditional Chinese culture, which in turn shape their values and attitudes. For instance, a famous Chinese proverb says, 'Day as a teacher, life for the father'. This means that, even if a teacher only teaches a student for one day, the student should respect the teacher as they would their father for their whole life. Chinese students believe that teachers are as important as parents, and they should respect their teachers in a similar fashion. This means that Chinese students seldom challenge their

teachers. This reveals that students' beliefs can develop into values when the person's commitments to beliefs grow, thereby forming their attitudes with beliefs and values.

From the above, it seems hard to identify a generally accepted statement of the relationship between a person's attitudes, values and beliefs due to the complex relationship being influenced and controlled by various factors (Puchta, 1999; Cabaroglu and Roberts, 2000, Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, 2011). However, in the meantime, it is evident that personal attitudes, values and beliefs are interrelated and mutually influential. Hence, these should be investigated as an entity rather than assessed separately. Moreover, these studies also expose the significance of students' beliefs, values and attitudes in language learning achievements, which has received considerable attention from international educators. Due to this increasing attention, one could ask, 'what factors influence students' attitudes, values and beliefs about language learning?' Scholars in various research fields have assumed and examined that people's experiences are related to their attitudes, values and beliefs. They have indicated that beliefs and attitudes are significant to determining learners' academic experiences and achievements (Sakui and Gaies, 1999), whereas different kinds of experiences may change certain beliefs (Richardson, 1996), and more strongly impact people's attitude and behaviour (Towles-Schwen and Fazio, 2001; Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002; Sutherland and Teacher, 2004). However, how language learners' experiences correlate to their attitudes, values and beliefs is underexplored within the Chinese EFL context. Accordingly, it seems vital to review the importance of Chinese undergraduates' experiences, and how they influence their beliefs, values and attitudes toward EFL learning.

2.4 Learning Experience

2.4.1 The Nature of Experience

Before defining the philosophy of experiential learning and education, it would be useful to consider the nature of experience in the field of education. Joseph Schwab and John Dewey have been generally internationally recognised as the most renowned and influential philosophers of education. Schwab (1958) is quite possibly the first educator to call for closer attention to the lived experience of students and teachers in classrooms, while Dewey (1953, 2007) is a leading exponent

of the use of experience for learning and education. Unlike many philosophers, Dewey's philosophy and educational theory are based on everyday experience and practical reality. Experience, in Dewey's educational theories, is defined as a 'a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the latter constitutes of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about is also a part of the situation; or the toys with which he is playing; the book he is reading; or the materials of an experiment he is performing' (Dewey, 1953, pp. 41–42). In other words, experience acts as a bridge connecting two independent dualities, such as thought and action, knowing and doing, and mind and body. The nature of experience-based learning can be seen as a form of attempt involving changes which are meaningless transactions unless they are consequently reflected in other changes (Dewey 1953, 2007). Hence, learning occurs when we act upon something which in turn acts upon us, or, alternatively, we can be infer that learning is an activity arising from the personal experience of grappling with a problem, taking action, performing an activity and so on.

However, Dewey (1953) states that the central problem of experience-based learning is not only to insist upon the activity and necessity of experience, but also the quality of the experiences themselves. Dewey (1953) explains that the quality of experience has two aspects: (dis)agreeableness and its influence upon later experiences. Each experience may be lively, vivid, and engaging, and yet its disconnectedness may artificially generate 'dispersive, disintegrated, and centrifugal' habits (Dewey, 2007, p. 104). Many painful or pleasurable occurrences cannot be connected to any prior experiences and are instead mere accidents. Compared to an experience, an accident has more likely happened without retrospect or meaning. Thus, there must be a certain quality to experience because only a qualified experience has the potential to transform the self. Regarding a qualified experience, the two principles of continuity and interaction provide 'the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience' (Dewey, 1953, p. 43).

Accordingly, there is justification for using these tools for this study. Continuity means that every experience should include something from what has gone before and do something to prepare for that which will come later with a more profound and expansive quality. Indeed, to learn from experience is to 'make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence' (Dewey, 2007, p. 104). Therefore, the past and

future should both be considered at every stage of the educational process. The second principle, interaction, refers to how the inner and outer worlds are linked and react to one another. The inner world is the inner self that includes ‘the sensorial, emotive, cognitive and psychoanalytic elements of our being’, while the outer world refers to the external environment that contains ‘the human (social/cultural), physical and more-than-human world’ (Beard and Wilson, 2018, p. 51). A commonly recognised concept of experience can be understood by noting that it includes an active and a passive element peculiarly combined, and also can be described as practical contact with, and observation of, contextual events. For instance, an infant’s physical development is illustrated by its having the ability to naturally make stepping movements when its feet touch the floor despite not being able to support its own weight. After thousands of stepping and walking experiences, the infant finally learns to walk. It appears that many of our internal physiological functions are already interrelated to other physical dimensions that develop and grow as a result of experiences. In sum, we can conclude that learning comes from experience, which is a transaction between an individual and other subjects or objects, and the foundation of experiential learning is the interaction between the inner self and external environment (further discussed in Section 2.4.3).

Dewey’s notions of continuity and interaction imply that it is more apt to say that an experience is taken collectively than to say it is temporal. Since an experience grows out of others and leads to further experiences, we can infer that they occur narratively. Narrative inquiry has been used, for example, in studying the lives and experiences of teachers by illustrating the teacher’s journey with scenes from the past, present, and possible futures in classrooms (Clandinin, 1985; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Carter, 1993). Narrative inquiry is in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling; a form of narrative experience; a way of understanding experience; a story of the experiences that constitute both social and individual life (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). However, the understanding of an individual’s experience cannot be fully realised without simultaneously considering other contexts, such as history, ideologies, and environments. Drawing on Dewey’s experiential learning theory, Clandinin and Connelly (1994, 2000) describe four directions of experience in narrative inquiry: backward and forward, inward and outward. They further explain that backward and forward refer to ‘temporarily – past, present and future’; inward means ‘toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions’; and outward as the existential conditions, environment, objects and other people

(Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 50). In summation, educators ought to focus upon two conclusions: (1) the value of an experience lies in the perceptions of continuity and interactions with other experiences, objects, and people; and (2) an experience is an active–passive affair that happens narratively. Therefore, this project, with the purpose of exploring Chinese university students' learning experiences, asks many questions, collects extensive field notes, derives interpretations, and addresses personal and social issues by examining events from the four directions of narrative inquiry.

2.4.2 Reflection on Experience

1. What is reflection on experience?

> *No experience having a meaning is possible without some element of thought.*
>
> *(Dewey, 2007, p. 107)*

In determining the place of experience, we should note a connection between doing something and reaching a consequent result. We do something, and if it fails, we do something else, and continue trying until the desired result is achieved. We consider an action successful if we connect it to an intended consequence, but we do not value the process of how such a connection is made. In other words, the links are missing. Hence, it is a stimulus to think or reflect, which is an intentional discernment for discovering the detailed connections between the action and result, so that these two facts become continuous. Beard and Wilson (2018) argue that experiential learning is an ever-changing process, and occurs when changes in feelings, judgements, knowledge and skills result for individuals through their living experiences, meaning that the central stage is to think or reflect upon how these changes occur. Similarly, the stage of reflective observation advocated in Kolb's (1984) cycle experiential learning theory (will be further explained sub-section 2.4.3) in acts as a bridge connecting students' practical experiences and theoretical conceptualisation (Kraft & Kielsmeier, 1995). These reflections of experiences are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts, which are then seen as possible consequences to draw.

On the other hand, reflection includes inquiry, analysis, and the drawing of conclusions, which is also to say that reflecting occurs when things are uncertain, doubtful, or incomplete. Take this study as an example, whether Chinese university students' learning experiences influence their attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning is doubtful. Hence, it is necessary to consider these previous experiences and explore what reflections are directly influenced by experiences that might contribute to changes in their attitudes, values and beliefs. These reflections that bring inevitable consequences serve to transform this uncertain and incomplete study into valid and original research. Reflecting, therefore, is not only ‘equivalent to an explicit rendering of the intelligent element in our experience’, but also to conducting original research (Dewey, 2007, p. 108).

2. The Model of Learning Combination Lock

Whilst offering a wealth of practical experiences with which to illustrate the value of reflections in experiences, Beard (2008) creates the Learning Combination Lock model (see Figure 3), which comprises a series of tumblers that can be varied so as to have a greater potential to enhance learning and help in the understanding of the complex processes involved in experiential learning. This model is inspired by a visual metaphor of a combination lock, and is primarily based on the notion that an individual interacts with the outer world through senses, reflections, or thoughts. It is presented with six facets that are divided into three categories, and demonstrates how the outer and inner worlds continuously interact in the creation of a constant flow of experience. The first two facets represent ‘where’ and ‘with whom’ the experience takes place, and ‘what’ the experience is. The model’s outer environment consists of people, places, spaces, and other objects that are in the more-than-human world. The third facet concerns the question of how learning occurs through sensing and reflecting upon experience. The last three facets focus on the changes in emotions and intelligence that respond to the stimuli from experience, and the possible transformation in a person’s becoming and being.

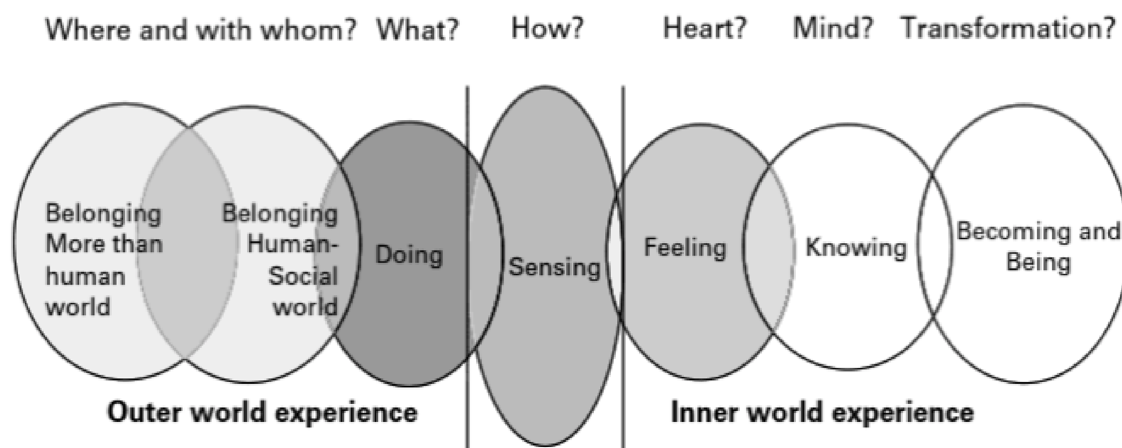


Figure 3: Model of Learning Combination Lock

Source: Experiential Learning (Beard and Wilson, 2018, p. 76)

The *Model of Learning Combination Lock* is suited not only for designing, delivering, and evaluating experiential learning (Beard and Wilson, 2018), but also helps us realise how our feelings, thoughts and self-being react to experiences, which also can be viewed as understanding how learning comes from experiences.

3. Emotional and Cognitive Engagement

Researchers have recognised that learning theoretically involves more than just cognition. For example, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning proposes that 'learning involves the integrated functioning of the total person-thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving' (Kolb and Kolb, 2005, p. 194). Kayes (2002) emphasises that an important part of individual knowledge is emotional in nature, while Simpson and Marshall (2010) more recently state that 'emotion and learning may be reconceptualized as two social processes that are interdependent constituents of all human experience' (Taylor and Statler, 2014, p. 593). At a practical level, there is a general agreement that emotion plays a large role in experiential learning. Although many people cannot fully capitalise upon experiential opportunities as experience in everyday life is virtually limitless, there tends to always be a degree of emotional engagement that makes people remember and learn from daily life. There are a few practical applications of this thinking. Beard (2005) finds that university

students experience a highly emotional learning journey, comprised of pleasantness or unpleasantness, acceptance or rejection, and relaxation or anxiety – all of which appear to contribute to the establishment and maintenance of students' whole beings and identities. Liu, Xu, and Wetz's (2011) also offer empirical evidence that emotion is positively interrelated to learning and, in particular, masking or hiding emotions is negatively related to learning. This is further supported by Beard and Wilson (2018), who argue that emotional competency underpins learning acts as a fundamental building block. However, a philosophical debate of a long-held belief asserts that learning is divorced from emotional reasoning and is purely a cognitive function. While teachers, trainers or educators may neglect emotional issues more than they possibly should (Beard and Wilson, 2018, p. 237), there seems to be a reasonable amount of agreement that emotion plays a central role to learning (e.g., Wolfe, 2006; Liu, Xu and Wetz, 2011; Taylor and Statler, 2014). The idea of emotion being at the core of learning has also confirmed by Zull (2006), a neuroscientist whose research summarises that 'emotion is the foundation of learning. The chemicals of emotion act by modifying the strength and contribution of each part of the learning cycle. Their impact is directly on the signalling systems in each affected neuron' (p. 7).

Additionally, experiential learning providers (e.g., Kolb, 1984, Beard and Wilson, 2006, 2018) have argued that experiences are mostly emotional in nature due to their occurring in the emotional hub (i.e., the mind). In other words, the instant emotional responses to incoming data are subject to long-established neural connections in the brain. One way of understanding this issue is to consider the human brain as having three parts. The old, or functioning, brain provides a base area where such automatic functions as the heartbeat and breathing are managed. The middle, or feeling, brain is higher up than the old, and is responsible for engaging fast emotional reactions to experiences. The new, or thinking, brain is more advanced and developed in humans, and is in charge of more complex and slower work, such as thinking, reflecting, and learning from experiences. The Nobel Prize-winner, Daniel Kahneman (2011) writes a book with a description of how little control people have over their feeling brains, but the subconscious or human biases stimulated from them affect people's thinking brain choices. Emotional responses, in other words, are hard to ignore since they have a close connection to thinking, reflecting, and learning. Research on emotional engagement in experiential learning has found negative emotions and feelings to more obviously affect a person's type of learning and outlook on life, and even inhibit their present

and future learning (e.g., Postle, 1993, Beard, 2005). Postle (1993) emphasised that previous negative learning experiences can easily drive people into 'the most bizarre' attitudes, values or beliefs of 'I have to' or 'I cannot'. He describes three main kinds of vast powerful painful learning experiences: 1) omitted learning, which occurs in a person unable to receive or give love in learning; 2) distorted learning, in which a person is told that they are hopeless or untalented; and 3) distressed learning, which means learning with distress because of the forced learning and compliance. Due to the urgent need to shift into a state of less worries and anxieties, it is valuable to analyse a person's previous learning experiences – especially the negative kind. From this point of view, in this study, I particularly analyse the participants' negative feelings driven from their learning experiences to explore whether and how these painful emotions affect their learning attitudes, values and beliefs.

On the other hand, experiences can be influenced by both the subconscious and conscious thoughts that continually contribute to the construction of the self (Beard, 2005; Beard and Wilson, 2018). Subconscious thoughts can be considered emotions or feelings, while conscious thoughts can be understood as cognitions or developed thoughts. Both cognitive and emotional engagement play a significant role in the learning process. Furthermore, we first observe things in the world, and then classify them into good or bad, right or wrong, simple or complex, beautiful or ugly and so on. Although there is no *real* separation, this notion of categorisation actually emerges from our senses, feelings, and thoughts. This separation can be seen as the practical implications of experiential learning. The aforementioned 'three brains' notion offers a simple way to understand the complexity of human feeling and cognition. The way of thinking with feeling is regarded as developing cognitive abilities mastered from experiential approaches to learning. However, cognitive abilities are more than a simple range of abilities, such as judging, reasoning or problem solving, but are also important for acknowledging the breadth and depth of thinking involved in deep, shallow, fast, slow, or feelings-based thought. From an educational viewpoint, such cognitive skills as assessing, analysing, problem-solving, and critical thinking have been strongly linked to the core of education. Based on the above emotional–rational debate, it seems highly pertinent to explore the worth of a person's emotional and cognitive engagement – particularly in experiential learning.

2.4.3 Experiential Education and Experiential Learning

1. Experiential Education

Education is considered as a transitive process between an educator/teacher and a student, and it must include a larger institution, such as the educational system. However, education surpasses the mere transmission of knowledge, skills and facts in that it is also central to individuals' preparation for participating in a community. In Dewey's (1916, 1938) early work, *Democracy and Education and Experience and Education*, he defines the educational process as a 'continual reorganization, reconstruction and transformation of experience' (1916, p. 50), and he emphasises that 'all genuine education comes through experience' (1938, p. 25). He viewes experiential education as a process involving teachers and learners engaged in a purposive experience. Moreover, in his later work on education and experience, he further illustrates that 'education, in order to accomplish its ends both for individual learner and for society, must be based upon experience – which is always the actual life-experience of some individual' (Dewey, 1953, p. 113). Simply put, he consideres experience as a means to develop a person's being through education. Capturing the essence of Dewey's view on experiential education, Itin (1999) defines it as 'a holistic philosophy, where carefully chosen experiences supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for the results, through actively posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, constructing meaning and integrating previously developed knowledge' (p. 93).

Learning, on the other hand, is derived from the experiences of wrestling with problems at hand, 'if he cannot devise his solution (not, of course, in isolation but correspondence with the teacher and other pupils) and find his own way out he will not learn' (Dewey, 1916, p. 160). Hence experiential learning is like a 'fluid' and 'ever-changing process' (Beard and Wilson, 2018, p. 7) which occurs when changes in feelings, judgements, knowledge and skills result arise through lived experiences. Moreover, Dewey (1916) uses experience as a lens through which to examine the interactions between people's thoughts and actions. At this point, Beard (2010) defines experiential learning as 'a sense-making process involving significant experiences that, to verifying degrees, act as the source of learning. These experiences actively immerse and reflectively engage the inner

world of the learner, as a whole being (including physical-bodily, intellectually, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually) with their intricate "outer world" of the learning environment (including belonging and acting (conative) in places, spaces, within the social, cultural and political milieu) to create memorable, rich and effective experiences for, and of, learning' (cited in Beard and Wilson, 2018, p. 25). Accordingly, learning occurs in traditional settings (schools, classrooms) or non-traditional settings (outside-of-school locations, outdoor environments), and includes traditional educational interactions (teachers and professors) or non-traditional interactions (games and interactive software applications). Consequently, it is most likely that the growing use of the term 'learning experiences' by educators and others is an attempt to update a new conception with how, when, and where learning occurs. Hence, learning experiences can 1) be gained through (as well as teachers and professors) games, videos, apps and other software applications; 2) be acquired at any time when learning takes place; and 3) occur both in and outside of class.

According to Itin (1999) and Beard's (2010) definitions of experiential education, the similarities between these two terms are evident while the boundary is blurred. Hence, educators, such as Dewey (1953), Itin (1999), and Jeffs (2017), have argued that experiential education and experiential learning are interchangeable because of the word 'experiential' being a category of learning. Itin (1999) explains that the deep historical roots of experiential education and learning have a common ancestor that lies within ancient Eastern and Western philosophies. In the Eastern world, an ancient Confucianist aphorism, 'I hear I forget; I see I remember, I do I understand' (Beard and Wilson, 2018, p. 26) suggests that a learner will most easily forget what they are told, may remember if they see, but will learn if they do. Similarly, in the West, it is said that Aristotle was the originator of the cycle of experiential learning, later developed by Kolb in the 1980s.

However, discussions have surrounded the confusions underpinning experiential education and experiential learning (e.g., Chickering, 1976; Stehno, 1986; Smith and Knapp, 2011; Roberts, 2012). Indeed, scholars have stated that experiential education and experiential learning are different constructs to education and learning. They have argued that experiential education is 'a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experience' (Association for Experiential Education, 1994, p. 1); whereas experiential learning should be considered as changes in an individual resulting from their reflections on direct experiences

(Chickering, 1976; Stehno, 1986; Association for Experiential Education, 1994). Other scholars, such as Smith and Knapp (2011), suggested that experiential learning is a subfield of experiential education. Roberts (2012) claimed that experiential education is a philosophy, while experiential learning is a mere method or technique.

2. *Experiential Learning*

In determining the significance of experience in education, Itin (1999), whose idea is similar to Dewey's (1916, 1953), states that 'it was insufficient to simply know without doing and impossible to fully understand without doing' (p. 92). In particular, SL acquisition theories play a dominant role in the process of learning. However, Dewey (2007) believes that 'an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance' (p. 107). Indeed, the conceptual idea of learning through experiences has been widely implemented in education, including language learning, nursery schooling, and pharmacy education (e.g., Habibullah, 2012; Refai, 2012; Mollaei and Rahnama, 2012; Abdullah and Chan, 2018). For example, Habibullah (2012) investigates Pakistani undergraduates' English language learning motivations by analysing their past English learning experiences. He finds that past failures translated into lacks of confidence and low motivation levels for English learning. Refai (2012) analyses the significance of the contribution of experiential learning approaches in the pharmacy education context in UK higher education institutions. Moreover, Mollaei and Rahnama (2012) find that Kolb's experiential learning theory accounts for adult's language learning because each adult has a unique set of formal and informal learning experiences in which they feel comfortable. Through these studies, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory provides a framework for conceptualising the transitive process between action, reflection, abstraction and application has been used to guide the educational process.

Kolb (1984) blends the original work of Dewey (1916), Lewin (1946), Piaget (1976) and other constructivist theorists on cognitive and behavioural psychology, and emphasises the central role that experiences play in the learning process (cited in Kolb and Kolb, 2005). He suggests that experiential learning theory provides a holistic, integrative perspective on learning combining experiences, perception, cognition, and behaviour. Moreover, he argues that learning from past

experience can help one influence behaviours which, in turn, influence experiences in an ongoing cycle. Hence, Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984) identifies experiential learning as a process whereby knowledge is created and transformed through experiences. It outlines how knowledge arises from both concrete and abstract conceptualisation as well as reflective observation and active experimentation. The latter stages provide the bridge between practical experience and theoretical conceptualisation. Accordingly, experiential learning connects learning with students' real-life situations. It is a learning approach aimed at integrating theoretical and practical elements of learning and emphasises the significance of experiences. According to Kolb's theory, learning is a process of creating new knowledge and understanding through the transformation of previous experience. The past experiences, in other words, are vital to the learning process. Experiential learning, or experience-based learning, has been frequently discussed. Figure 4 depicts Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning model.

Figure 4: Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984)

Source: Exploring Experiential Learning through Blogging (Ette and Stoker, 2015)

Although Kolb's theory has been widely accepted in the field of education, his work has been criticised regarding its worth and effectiveness (Mollaei and Rahnama, 2012; Roberts, 2018). Individual differences, which play an essential role in the ability to learn, are unaccounted for in Kolb's learning cycle. Due to this criticism, Kolb and Kolb (2009), based on the framework of the spiralling learning process created by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2004), upgrades the experiential learning cycle to a learning spiral. The learning spiral indicates that experience is enriched by reflecting, thinking, and transforming and developing into a new, richer, broader and deeper experience. Although Kolb's experiential learning cycle has been developed over time, a persistent criticism of it is that it disregards Dewey's emphasis on the place of informal learning experiences (Miettinen, 2000). As learning is defined as an activity arising from students' experiences of dealing with problems, the concept of learning experiences is far different from the dominant everyday school practice. Dewey (1916, 1953) even states that schools fail to provide valuable and genuine learning experiences, and the formal learning experiences that are spoon fed to students are easily forgotten (Education.stateuniversity.com, n.d.). Hence, only focusing on exploring students' learning experiences gained in classes is insufficient. Learning experiences, that is to say, should ideally be significant and memorable, and include both the informal experiences of daily life and the salient formal experiences of the classroom. Therefore, I will redefine, collect data on, and analyse formal and informal learning experiences in the following sub-section.

2.4.4 Defining Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning Experiences

As Mollaei and Rahnama (2012) state, adults can use their learning strengths in past experiences to construct new knowledge through both formal and informal experiential learning. Therefore, it would here be pertinent to explain and precisely identify what formal and informal learning (experiences) are. Students' formal learning experiences relate to direct classroom instruction. Regarding this type of experience, Dewey (2007) argues that students' senses are avenues of knowledge not because external facts are somehow 'conveyed' into their brains, but because they are used in learning, doing, and acquiring something with a purpose. However, some studies (discussed in greater detail below) have indicated that adults can increase their second language proficiency in informal environments, and even outperform second language learners (SLLs) who

spend large amounts time in a formal language learning environment. Informal learning refers to all learning situations which occur throughout people's lives based on their particular needs, interests, and personal characteristics (Bull et al., 2008). Indeed, informal learning experiences can be described as potential bridges between social and academic activities. There are three forms of informal learning: self-directed, incidental, and socialisation (Schugurensky, 2000). These include a wide variety of programmes, such as cooking courses, yoga classes, driving lessons, workshops and museum visits. These programmes offer opportunities to activate students' engagement with academic content free from curricula and time constraints. For example, China's National Science Foundation (NSF) describes the term 'informal learning' as a short and voluntary learning system that occurs within a social context or outside of formal school settings (NSF, 2006). The NFS establishes the Informal Science Education programme which is an activity outside formal school settings, and adapts new technologies to complete scientific learning objectives.

Based on the earlier work of Dewey (1916, 1938, 1953), Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993) conclude that 'learning builds on the flows from experience', and 'experience of learning has the potential for the transformation of the "self"' (cited in Beard and Wilson, 2018, p. 3). It can be inferred here that significant experiences can potentially change students. At this point, I will cease generating ways in which Chinese EFL learners' formal and informal learning experiences influence their attitudes, values and beliefs. Hence, before examining the relationship between these two facts, it would be necessary to re-identify formal and informal learning experiences, and decide which activities should be considered formal or informal. Defining students' learning experiences is far from straightforward and, within the literature, tends to involve exploring the definitions of learning (Elwick, 2013). Accordingly, I here consider the views of several researchers (e.g., Schugurensky, 2000; Malcolm, Hodkinson and Colley, 2003; Roger, 2013) to distinguish between formal, non-formal, and informal learning. I explore the possible relationships between these three learning types, and consider their definitions (particularly those provided by Chinese researchers). However, previous research in China has predominantly focused on formal and informal learning, leaving non-formal learning underexplored (Borau et al., 2009; Botha, 2014; Zhou, 2016). In their instances, non-formal or informal learning are understood as interchangeable (Zhou, 2016). However, some researchers do differentiate between non-formal learning and informal learning evidentially (which are distinguished from each other below). In response to this limitation, I

explore a wider arrange of formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Hence, I eventually decided upon following the European Commission's (2001) definitions (presented on page 26) to examine formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Moreover, I will further explain the features of formal, non-formal and informal learning by drawing a difference on intentional and incidental learning to reclarify them within the Chinese context.

Chinese students' formal learning experiences in this study refer to the full description of their lived experiences which occur in an organised manner, led by experts, teachers or trained professionals. These learning experiences are traditionally held indoors in such school setting as classrooms and laboratories, and contain related assignments with curriculum. As mentioned previously, English has been a compulsory course in China's national curriculum since the early 1980s. In China, students are enrolled in pre-school at the age of three and begin primary school at age six. Students then spend three years in junior school, another three in high school, and four years at university (Ministry of Education, 2020). This formal learning period is approved by China's MOE. Moreover, this traditional formal learning leads to certification or graduation. Accordingly, in this study, participants' narrative formal learning experiences predominantly concern nineteen years' experience with teachers, classmates, and learning materials in schools or at home from pre-school until university graduation.

Recent studies (post-2000) have displayed a burgeoning interest in considering the combination of formalised learning situations with informal learning forms (Folkestad, 2006). For example, many studies have highlighted the potential for applying Twitter – a multi-platform Social Networking Site (SNS) – as a tool for language learning (Borau, Ullrich, Feng and Shen, 2009; Harmandaoglu, 2012). At the Distant College of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Borau et al. (2009) analyse Chinese students' messages on Twitter to show how the site's use trained communicative and cultural competence under teacher's instruction. The authors find that most of the Chinese participants believe that Twitter can provide a chance to actively use English as a communicative tool and presents them with an opportunity to express themselves and interact in the target language. In this case, students' learning experiences would be informal; however, these experiences will be redefined as being a mixture of formal and informal learning experiences. Similarly, Kim, Park, and Baek (2011) reveal that using Twitter could stimulate students to produce more output in the

target language, and increase their social interactions with peers and native speakers alike. These authors have claimed that social media can thus serve as a medium for both formal and informal learning (Rosell-Aguilar et al., 2018). As such, this pattern of learning, which is considered less credible than formal learning but more organised than informal learning, is termed 'non-formal' (Eaton, 2010). It is assumed to be an addition to proper language education.

In addition, both formal and non-formal learning is intentional, which emphasises conscious learning (Ahmed, 2017). However, compared to formal learning, the non-formal variety is loosely organised and involves no certification. In this study, students' non-formal learning experiences mostly do not occur in formal settings, but would occasionally do so in classrooms. There is a wide variety of non-formal learning programmes, such as language training courses or workshops that are held in institutions outside of the school. Some language learning activities, such as language programmes, social events with English teachers, and overseas transfer programmes, are also ascribed to non-formal learning in that they are considered less credible than formal learning but more organised than informal learning. I thus redefine students' non-formal language learning as follows:

1. Learning may be formally, but less organised than formal learning.
2. Learning organisations may be included, but no certification is involved (overseas study or summer school programmes).
3. Private learning academies that are not authorised by government bodies to offer academic credit.
4. Learning through English-learning apps or websites.
5. Learning is likely led by someone with more experience – perhaps a more advanced student, a volunteer, or an adult educator. This person may or may not be formally trained.

Formal learning, particularly with SL acquisition, has been traditionally held in 'high regard, valued and considered credible' (Eaton, 2010, p. 15). However, it has been met with scepticism from some scholars who question the value of a learning experience that does not only involve grammar and textbooks in the classroom. This means that language educators are seeking other

learning types to improve the quality of English education. This could well explain the increasing interest in exploring another type of learning and informal learning's effect in Chinese EFL teaching (Borau et al., 2009; Botha, 2014; Zhou, 2016). The most evident feature of informal learning is incidental learning. As the opposite of intentional learning, the incidental kind refers to any unplanned or unintended learning (Ahmed, 2017). For example, Botha (2014) finds that both undergraduate students at Macau University of Science and Technology and Sun Yat-sen University learned English in their extra-curricular time. They not only acquired English in the classroom, but increasingly through music, game, films, and television. Similarly, in this study, students' informal learning also occurs outside schools in such outdoor locations as recreational playgrounds, battlefields, and other cities and countries. Their informal learning experiences are likely to be spontaneous and occurring outside formal settings, such as listening to English music, watching English films and drama, using social media, and travelling abroad.

However, we should also note that researchers define informal learning as 'learning outside the formal educational curricula' not 'outside the formal educational schools'. This means that informal learning may occur both within and outside of schools. Ahmed (2017) explains that incidental learning can occur in many modes inclusive of communications, problem-solving actions, and experiencing mistakes. Hence, students' narrative informal learning experiences also include their communications with friends, and problem-solving activities. In light of the above features of formal, non-formal, and informal learning, I have clarified Chinese students' experiences of learning. The relationships among these three kinds of learning experiences are depicted in the following Figure 5.

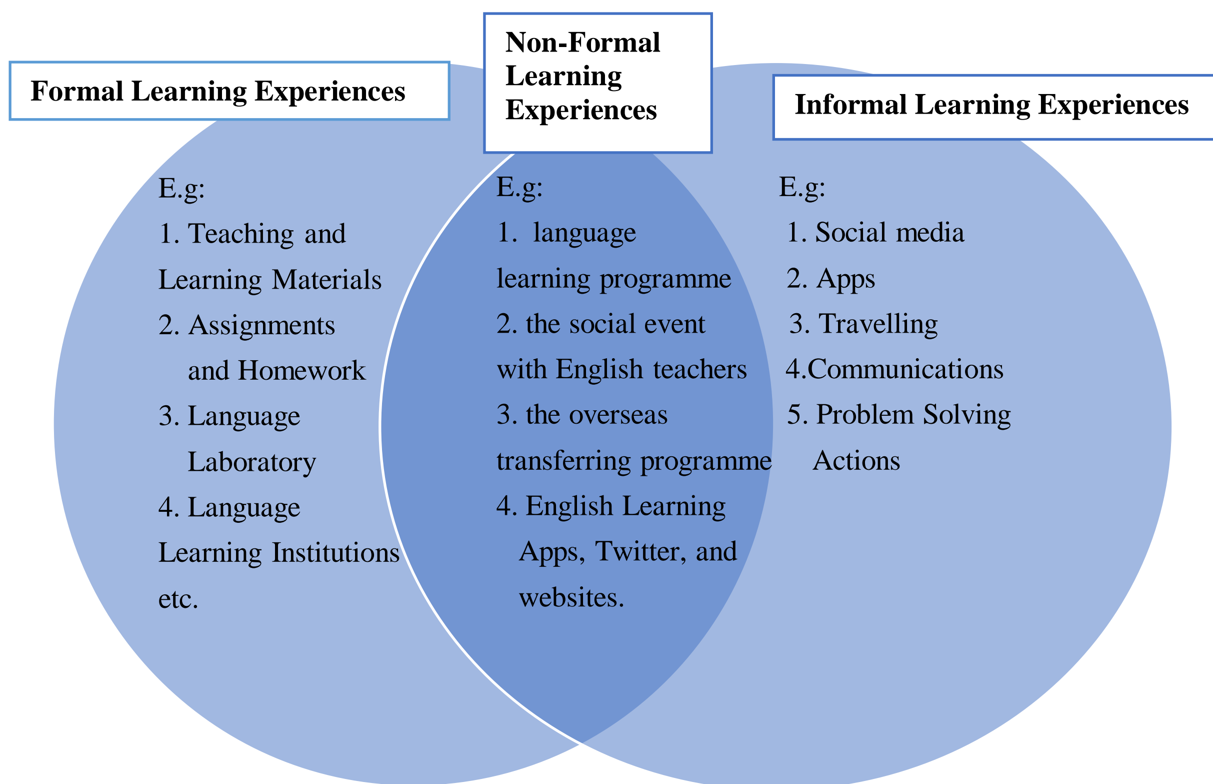


Figure 5: Formal, Non-formal, and Informal Learning Experiences

Source: Build upon the re-definitions in this study

2.5. Review of Selected Chinese Studies

The following eight studies conducted within the Chinese context seek to understand Chinese EFL learners' learning motivation and support their English study; develop English language teaching and learning criteria; and improve English teachers' expertise. I have developed my own understandings of EFL learning from these studies and other relevant research. Exploring this body of research in depth allowed me to see how similar studies have been conducted in the past, as well as to identify gaps in the literature which I could then attempt to address with my own work. Moreover, examining the strengths and weakness of these studies enable me to develop my project with the most appropriate research methods and analytical techniques. Hence, the following research play a significant role in justifying my study and setting my research questions.

2.5.1 Chen, Warden and Chang's (2005) Study

Outside mainland China, Chen, Warden, and Chang (2005) attempt to contextualise EFL learning motivation within Chinese culture and Chinese educational history. 567 EFL Taiwanese learners responded to a survey concerning whether integrative, instrumental, or required motivation could lead to success. Integrative English learning motivation indicates that the learners are motivated to use the target language intrinsically, while instrumental motivation referred to studying English in order to receive future gain (similar to external motivation) (Chen, Warden, and Chang, 2005). Compared to integrative and instrumental motivation, the authors find that the required motivation has a more important role to play in the Chinese EFL context. Required motivation implied that language learners appeared more motivated by requirements rather than either interest or external factors. The CHC in Chinese education reveals how heavily requirements are weighed on learning motivation. For example, Confucian meritocracy has been implemented through examinations. Chinese students feel obliged to work and study hard for their families as success in exams reflects positively not only on individuals, but also families. Generally speaking, these historical and cultural trends support the notion that requirements are the significant factor in motivating language learning effort in Chinese cultural settings. The attention to consider Chinese EFL learners' intrinsic and extrinsic English learning motivation is the rationale for this study.

2.5.2 Gao's (2008) Study

Compared to countries like the UK and US, Hong Kong has a relatively small broad study market, but is a favourite destination for mainland Chinese students. Most of these students come to Hong Kong because of its English-medium tertiary courses. Gao (2008) conducts a two-year longitudinal study of a group of mainland Chinese students in a Hong Kong English-medium university to explore the dynamic nature of these participants' English language learning motivation before and after their arrival. The dynamic picture of participants' English language learning motivation emerged from comparing their shifting learning motivational discourses in the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong contexts. The analyses reveal that all of the participants recognised the usefulness of English learning in both contexts, whereas the visible changes in their motivational discourses are associated with the differences in contextual mediation and increasingly self-determined

learning aspirations. One of the most important contextual differences between the two relates to the role of English. In China, English is an academic subject for compulsory high-stakes examinations, while English became the medium of instruction in university courses. After studying in Hong Kong, the participants realise that they should spend extra time learning English due to their having recognised its importance for their futures and personal development, rather than simply for academic achievement. Consequently, students attempt to improve their English by increasing their vocabulary, reading and watching English content, and socialising with local and exchange students. Meanwhile, the data also show that participants' English language learning motivation in Hong Kong is related to their increasing self-determination. Initially, the participants explain that they are learning English as there is little choice not to do so. One of the participants claims that she is more motivated by the desire to express herself in English rather than taking academic studies in the language. Moreover, other participants reply that they are more motivated to learn English when asserting themselves and pursuing desirable identities in the language. In short, it is evident that Chinese mainland students have been increasingly motived by their own visions and desires rather than other external requirements and forces. Hence, although the historical and cultural trends are relevant to Chinese EFL learners' motivation, Gao's study suggests that context-mediated and self-determined elements are closely interrelated to students' motivational process. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation factors that have been explored seem to be a rationale for understanding Chinese EFL learners' English learning needs and desires.

2.5.3 Pan, Zang and Wu's (2010) Study

In 2010, Pan, Zang, and Wu conduct a survey with non-English major students of two English level classes, Advanced and Ordinary English, at Qingdao Agriculture University. They seek to investigate how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations impact on students' English language achievement. The authors find that the participants' intrinsic motivation refers to personal interest and confidence, and they mean to learn, behave and achieve based on external outcomes, such as securing better jobs, receiving extra bonuses, and earning more money. Each class contains 25 students, and all of the participants provide statements based on their English language learning motivation. The Advanced English Class students are higher achievers than those in the Ordinary English Class. Although the findings show no apparent differences in English learning anxiety

between both classes, students in the Advanced English Class appear to be more motivated by their confidence, interest, and English learning achievements than their Ordinary English Class counterparts. In other words, lower English achievers tend to be less confident and interested in learning English. In sum, Chinese students, like other language learners in the West, are motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Further to this, Chinese EFL learners' intrinsic motivators, such as personal confidence and interest, are found to contribute to more positive English learning attitudes. For this study, it is more rational to present a discussion on the relationship between Chinese EFL learners' language learning motivators and their English learning attitudes.

2.5.4 Liu and Huang's (2011) Study

Pan, Zang, and Wu (2010) perceive intrinsic motivation to be highly correlated to EFL learning. Liu and Huang (2011) also examine the relationship between extrinsic motivators (which they are termed instrumental motivators), foreign language classroom anxiety, and students' English performance. 980 undergraduate students from 3 Chinese universities have participated in a survey, which consists of a 36-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety scale, a 40-item English Learning Motivation Scale, and a background questionnaire. As expected, more intrinsically motivated and interested students are more likely to perform more highly than instrumentally motivated students. This finding supports those of Pan, Zang, and Wu (2010). Meanwhile, the participants who report being more anxious and fearful of tests or negative evaluations seem to be less motivated to learn English. Although some participants reply that the stresses and anxiety of examinations are the positive predictors in English learning to a certain degree, the overall results show that educators and language teachers should be cautious in trying to cope with anxiety in classes. Moreover, the results also revealed that students with enhanced motivation would more actively use English in various situations, which would in turn serve to reduce their anxiety. Consequently, Chinese EFL students' intrinsic motivation and interest in the English language and cultures prove to be positive predictors for their learning performance, while foreign language anxiety seem significantly negatively correlates with English language learning motivation and achievement (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Horwitz, 2010). Hence, it would be beneficial to promote Chinese English teachers and educators' awareness of the

importance of releasing foreign language anxiety and examination pressure, as well as to foster learners' intrinsic motivation by encouraging them to watch films and books in English, and befriend with international (English as the native language) students. For this study, a discussion on the Chinese traditional English learning pressure would be rational for understanding the Chinese formal learning approach.

2.5.5 Li and Zhou's (2017) Study

In 2017, Li and Zhou use a questionnaire to investigate 367 EFL learners' demotivation in English study at a Chinese non-key local university. Contrary to Pan, Zang, and Wu (2010), Li and Zhou (2017) argue that external factors (i.e., teaching materials, processes, and content, and the relationship between teachers and students) are more influential than internal factors (i.e., lack of interest or confidence, and experience of failure) in students' English learning motivation. Li and Zhou describe learners' demotivation in English study in three aspects. First, the participants are chosen from a non-key local university as the majority of similar studies have focused on key universities (e.g., Hu and Cai, 2010; Zhou and Wang, 2012). However, students studying at non-key local universities have largely been neglected. The term 'key universities' can be translated as 'major', 'priority', or 'focal' universities. These universities are now normally referred to as '211' and '985' universities that are based on China's Project 211 and Project 985. In other words, non-key local universities are general universities except for the 211 and 985 universities. Second, Li and Zhou's study is further distinguished by advancing unclear study aims as key demotivating factors. Third, the results are implicative for teachers to cultivate students' beliefs and interest in English study, help them establish clear goals, maintain efforts in English learning, and take measures to improve English teaching. Therefore, Li and Zhou's study, which enriches the research of demotivation to learn English in China, is the rationale for this study.

2.5.6 Du and Jackson's (2018) Study

In recent years, Chinese universities (in Mainland China) are increasingly entering into transitional higher education partnerships with insititutions in Hong Kong or English-speaking countries. In 2018, Du and Jackson explore changes in the English learning motivation of eight Mainland

Chinese undergraduates after their academic exchange to a Hong Kong university. These eight participants have been surveyed and interviewed about their different English learning experiences in Mainland China and Hong Kong. Du and Jackson's (2018) study reveals that the most participants' English learning motivation is heightened and remained at a high level after their relocation at Hong Kong, although there are some fluctuations. From the findings of Du and Jackson's study, participants' motivational enhancement may be influenced by the continuous interaction between them and different English learning contexts at the Hong Kong University. Also, these eight students' perceptions about ideal and actual second language learners are found to be affected by their learning experiences in Hong Kong. However, the participants' English learning motivation returns to an original state when such an academic exchange academic comes to an end. In the end, from students' reflections of their different learning experiences, Du and Jackson (2018) suggest to offer them with a learning environment where English is used as the medium of instruction. Hence, Du and Jackson's (2018) research provide the rationale for this study which aims to explore Chinese EFL students' various learning experiences.

2.5.7 Qiu and Fang's (2019) Study

Qiu and Fang (2019) are interested in Chinese undergraduates' perceptions of their native English-speaking teachers and local (non-native) English-speaking teachers – regarding their English-Medium Instruction (EMI) teaching behaviour and practice. English-Medium Instruction is defined as teaching non-English academic subjects in English (Jiang, Zhang and May, 2019). The data of Qiu and Fang's (2019) study is collected through observations of teachers' actual practices. Also, 101 Chinese undergraduates' perceptions are collected via a questionnaire survey and interviews, which are mainly about students' learning experiences with EMI teachers. Students perceive those native English-speaking teachers would adopt more interactive teaching approaches with diverse activities and various modalities of communication, but lack in presenting intercultural competence and understanding their learning difficulties. In comparison, non-native English-speaking teachers, the local English teachers, could understand and communicate wuth students about their learning difficulties. These local teachers' instructions are more intelligible but rather teacher dominated. The findings of Qiu and Fang's research provide insights for implementing EMI curriculum in schools and developing EMI teachers' expertise. Moreover, the most of participants favour

interactive and efficient EMI curriculum and courses. From students' narratives, their perceptions about EMI teachers' instruction behaviours and practices are affected by their learning experiences. These findings, therefore, can be seen as the rationale for exploring and investigating the relationship between Chinese undergraduates' perceptions and their learning experiences.

2.5.8 Zhang's (2022) Study

The background to English in China today, which I have presented in Chapter 1, explains that improving Chinese students' English skills have been the focol point in Chinese education system. As Zhang (2022) states, many students have paid more attention to extracurricular English practice to develop their English listening, speaking, writing and reading, and many students would leave mainland China and receive English-teaching mode in transnational univerties. However, Zhang (2022) finds that although plenty of efforts have been spent into English learning, Chinese students' negative transferring experiences would influence their English language achievement, in particular of their English writing. Zhang gathers data from 32 college students from China. 16 of them are studying in maninland with Chinese as their teaching language, and the other 16 students are studying in other regions with English as their teaching language. Zhang compares their performance in English writing. In contrast to many researchers' belief that the experiences of studing abroad and the English-teaching environment can contribute to better EFL learners, the findings turn out that extra English learning experiences could limitedly help Chinese students in English writing. The role of learning experiences, in other words, has been the subject of intense scholarly debate recently. Hence, a presentation of Zhang's (2020) study tends to be a rationale for the present study.

2.5.9 Limitations of These Research Findings

The first five studies (2.5.1 to 2.5.5) have mainly tested the two primary language learning motivation orientations: intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. They have attempted to contextualise EFL learning within Chinese culture. Their findings generally demonstrate that a lack of interest or confidence, and unclear study aims, lead to low levels of motivation. Moreover, as Chen, Warden, and Chang (2005) noticed, traditional Chinese

culture and classical education have a powerful effect on language learning motivation. For example, the examination-oriented assessment as a key traditional Chinese education characteristic has been internationally discussed. Western educators have indicated that test anxiety or exam anticipation likely demotivates students by shifting their attention away from the positive aspects of learning (Hosseini and Pourmandnia, 2013, Fong and Soni, 2022). Conversely, some Chinese EFL learners believe that students' fear of being negatively evaluated and their test anxiety could become positive predictors of performance in English since learning anxiety is conducive to learning if students are pressurised into continuing their study (Liu and Huang, 2011).

On the contrary, the majority of Chinese educators and language teachers are agreed that they should reduce students' exam anxiety and suggested caution when attempting to cope with anxiety in class. Besides these motivating and demotivating factors, other language learning motivation elements' significance, such as their unique personal characteristics, attitudes, values and beliefs, have been approved in Western studies. However, it is necessary to reassess Chinese EFL learners' (de)motivating factors within the Chinese contexts due to the English education setting in China being so distinctive from that of the West. Methods concerning how to help Chinese EFL learners reduce their test pressure has not been investigated here. Berwick and Ross (1989) demonstrate the challenges of reducing this pressure among university students. This has been supported by a study conducted in Hong Kong in 2011. Hong Kong is traditionally an examination-oriented culture where the government has sought to establish formative assessments rather than examinations since the 1990s (Berry, 2011). However, formative assements have not been successfully implemented in university English courses. Chen (2011) investigates the incorporation of formative assessment as the Chinese MOE launched the College English Reform Program, and finds it to be limited within Beijing's key and ordinary universities. Reducing test anxiety and increasing motivation in CHE have yet to be successful as changing the deeply-rooted exam culture, which is highly challenging.

Additionally, in recent years, more studies (examples as 2.5.6 Du and Jackson's Study, 2.5.7 Qiu and Fang's Study and 2.5.8 Zhang's Study) aim to explore the interaction between Chinese students' various learning experiences and their achievement in language learning. These three studies have mainly investigated the interaction between Chinese undergraduates' various learning experiences

and their learning motivation (Du and Jackson, 2018), English-Medium Instruction teachers' behaviours and practice (Qiu and Fang, 2019), and English language learning achievement (Zhang, 2022). Although more and more studies tend to meet up the new English education criteria in China, which advocates shifting excesses from a traditional teacher-dominated, knowledge-based transmission mode, and examination-oriented education to a more learner-centred, experience-based, and quality-oriented education; learning from reflecting on experience has not been widely explored and accepted by the Chinese. Therefore, by seeking to emphasise the role of students' daily experiences in their language learning journey, I intend to fill these research gaps by using a narrative inquiry.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed (the three types of) learning, EFL education in China, the identification of language learners' attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as the characteristics of learning experiences. Generally speaking, I have uncovered two main implications from the literature. First, while the literature offers confirming evidence for the importance of English education in China, there is little research investigating the learners themselves. However, from the studies discussed above, the literature has attempted to study FL/SL learning approaches. The implication here is that language learning, especially EFL learning in China, emphasises the learning types and procedures rather than the learners (Zheng, 2015). Extending this line of argument, the literature on the role of language learning approaches and processes is significant to FL/SL learners' achievement (Vetter, 2014; Pitchard, 2017). Second, the literature heavily emphasises that all language learners' attitudes, values and beliefs play a vital role in learners' academic achievement (e.g., Othman, 2009; Anderson and De Silva, 2009; Hayes, 2016). Some Chinese scholars have explored the identifications of language learners' attitudes, values and beliefs, and increased consideration has been given to cultural aspects that might potentially influence these among Chinese students (e.g., Zhang and Hu, 2008; Zhu, 2011; Cui, 2014). From some Chinese scholars' previous studies, educational and cultural contexts can influence Chinese EFL learners' perceptions. However, other factors, such as prior learning experiences – which has been identified as a central factor in influencing students' attitudes, values and beliefs in other countries (e.g., Amuzie and Winke, 2009; Kolb, 2014; 2009; Yang and Kim, 2011) – are surprisingly less

important in the Chinese context. Hence, I seek to determine which other factors might influence Chinese students' attitudes, values and beliefs, with a particular attention paid to the role of Chinese students' prior learning experiences. Accordingly, it is necessary to review experiences, including the nature of learning experiences, reflections upon them, and re-identifications of different types. Since experience is not limited to occurring within a person, it can potentially influence the formation of attitudes and other behavioural tendencies (Beard and Wilson, 2018).

In summation, because of the increasing attention given to the significance of students' own contributions to their language learning through 'initiative-taking and active involvement' (Mollaei and Rahnama, 2012, p. 269), an increasing amount of interest is being paid to the language learners themselves (Cortazzi and Jin, 2013). A growing number of studies (e.g., Breen, 2001; Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Mollaei and Rahnama, 2012) have shifted their focus on developing students' 'basic reflective orientation' by working on their beliefs, values attitudes, and past experiences (Mollaei and Rahnama, 2012, p. 270). Thus, the majority have investigated language learners' experiences, attitudes, values and beliefs in study-abroad contexts (e.g., Zhang and Hu, 2008; Zhong, 2015; Chen and Chen, 2021) or with native English speakers (e.g., Yu, 2010; Chew, 2013). However, there are notably fewer empirical studies in the traditional Chinese context. I thus hope to fill these gaps by investigating how Chinese undergraduates' various learning experiences influence their attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning in the Chinese context. Therefore, it seems highly pertinent to design a study from the stance of exploring the interaction between Chinese EFL learners' learning experiences and their attitudes, beliefs, and values of English language learning, and mainly focus on how these are affected and shaped (Horwitz, 1987, 1988, 1999) by learners' various learning experiences.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the procedures and methods used to collect and analyse the data. The chapter begins with a statement of the ontology and epistemology (Section 3.2). This is followed by a section (section 3.3) discussing the methodological considerations of phenomenology, including an introduction of phenomenology and a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of phenomenology. Subsequently, section 3.4 presents the research methods, including introducing the narrative research method (sub-section 3.4.1); illustrating the data collection stages (sub-section 3.4.2); outlining the interview schedule (sub-section 3.4.3); and presenting the sampling of this project (sub-section 3.4.4). In order to provide the reader with a glance at the participants' journeys of English learning in China, another sub-section 3.4.5 will introduce the participants and three universities respectively. Followed by the ethical considerations in Section 3.5, Section 3.6 will illustrate my positionality in conducting this research. After Section 3.6, the chapter concludes with a summary (section 3.7). In order to go into depth about the process of analysis, the analysis of interview data will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Qualitative research is 'a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of approach' (Hammersley, 2013, p. 12). According to Merriam (2019), qualitative research involves an interpretive approach, such as learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, and prioritises the data's contribution to important research questions or existing information. Qualitative researchers not only study things in their natural settings in order to explain or understand phenomena in terms of their ascribed meaning (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), but they are also 'interested in knowing how people understand and experience their world at a particular point in time and in a particular context' (Merriam, 2019, p. 4). My interest lies in gathering Chinese students' salient learning experiences, and their attitudes, values

and beliefs about EFL learning, and attaining a deeper understanding of how they interpret the roles and contributions of their prior learning experiences in their English language development. Moreover, I also aimed to explore how students explain the influence of their previous learning experiences on their English learning attitudes, values and beliefs. Consequently, in order to answer the main research question, I adopted a qualitative research approach, which provides ‘an in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, non-observable as well as observable phenomena, attitudes, intensions and behaviours’ (Gonzales *et. al.,* 2008, p. 3). When exploring the core issues of qualitative studies, qualitative researchers tend to agree on both the research approach selected and its underlying philosophical assumptions (Creswell and Poth, 2016). These assumptions concern the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of reality and the social world (Ataro, 2020). The basic philosophical assumptions in this study are ontology, epistemology and methodology.

Based on the work of Burrell and Morgan (1979), ontological assumptions ‘concern the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated’, and epistemological assumptions ‘concern the very base of knowledge – its nature and forms, how it can be acquired and how communicated to other human beings’ (cited in Cohen et al., 2018, p. 5). Put simply, an ontological assumption is geared towards answering such questions as ‘what is there that we can know?’ and ‘what is the nature of reality?’; whereas epistemological assumptions hope to answer such questions as ‘what is the nature of knowledge?’, ‘how can we look at it?’, and ‘how can it be acquired and communicated?’. As many scholars have explained, ontological and epistemological assumptions have direct implications for the methodological concerns of a qualitative researcher (e.g., Creswell and Poth, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018; Ataro, 2020). That is, constructing one’s ontology and epistemology will, in turn, frame the methodology. Methodology includes the what, how and why of a specific research method. Accordingly, methodology is the strategy, the action plan or the process or design behind the choice of the research methods to reach the desired outcomes (Ataro, 2020).

There are two sets of ontological and epistemological traditions towards reality and knowledge: objectivism/positivism and interpretivism/constructivism (Ataro, 2020). The former relies on observation or measurement as a means of understanding reality and knowledge (Cohen et al., 2018). This means that the researcher should distance themself from the study so as to merely

observe and explore without directly impacting the findings. Alternatively, the interpretivist/constructivist perspective involves viewing reality and knowledge as subjective, unique, and flexible, wherein the researcher is actively engaged with the research (Ataro, 2020). That is to say that interpretivism/constructivism requires researchers to place a greater focus on the processes that lead to the construction and character given the reality and knowledge. Methodology refers to 'the philosophic framework, the fundamental assumptions, and the view of knowledge' (Van Manen, 2016, p. 34). As my research is of a phenomenological qualitative nature, I choose the interpretivist/constructivist tradition to shape the methodological approach.

This study focuses on Chinese students' narrated learning experiences – and particularly on how these influence their attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning. It should be noted that this study is neither a scientific nor social anthropology work, but rather one which explores experiences from a second order (i.e., the researcher's) perspective, revealing the students' qualitative differences from other students' standpoint rather than my own. For example, the same phenomenon, such as having extra English language training classes, can be understood differently. These extra classes may be considered useful for a student well-suited to classroom learning, but could also be viewed as considerably time and money consuming for another learner who rarely acquires any knowledge from their past experiences. As stated by Marton and Booth (1997), individuals would experience the same phenomenon differently because they conceptualised it 'through their different biographies' (p. 34).

Marton (1981) raises first or second order perspectives in a phenomenographic context. The phenomenography is defined as 'the empirical study of the qualitatively different ways in which a phenomenon can be experience, perceived, apprehended, understood, conceptualised' (Marton, 1994, p.4425). The initial purpose of this approach is to identify and describe the ways in which people experience specific learning tasks in different areas (Sandbergh, 1997). Marton and Svensson (1979) argue that phenomenography is a qualitative method to more completely understand individuals' experiences in response to the limitations of the quantitative methods in education. They frequently adopt the learners' perspectives of experiencing as the point of departure, and typically present it in the form of description. More specifically, learners' experiences of the world act as a relation between them and their world. Instead of two independent

descriptions (i.e., of the learner and of their world), the basic idea of the phenomenographic approach is to identify the assumed relationship between the learners and their world faithfully within one description. Hence, the phenomenographic researcher's perspective could be regarded as the second order perspective that seeks to describe individuals' first order perspectives of an aspect of reality. Although phenomenography is first developed by an educational research group in 1977, a limited number of studies about the field have been conducted. According to Sandbergh (1997), up until the 1990s, approximately 50 doctoral studies and fewer than 1,000 research reports have been published using a phenomenographic approach. After the 1990s, there is no clear evidence to show that abundant phenomenographic studies have been conducted. This causes one to question whether the approach is reliable. Indeed, phenomenography is produced a long time ago, so why has its reliability for researching individuals' experience of the world not been fully investigated and developed?

Nevertheless, similar to a phenomenological approach, the origin of a phenomenographic approach is to explore the learners' understandings of certain phenomena or texts (Marton, 1981); and its aim is to explore the participants' world and their reflections on a particular phenomenon through their own eyes (Richardson, 1999). Therefore, some statements, arguments, and theories related to the phenomenographic approach fit with a phenomenological study (e.g., Marton, 1981; Richardson, 1999; Pherali, 2011). For instance, the statement of first and second order perspectives can be applied in this phenomenological study. Marton (1981) clarifies that the world's first order perspectives refer to 'a statement about reality'; whereas the second perspectives refer to 'a statement about people's conception of reality' (p. 178). For example, any answers to the question, 'Why do Chinese girls succeed more in English learning than boys?' could be considered as from the first order perspective; while answers to, 'What do people think about why Chinese girls succeed more in English learning than boys?' would be from the second order perspective. In other words, from the first order perspective, 'we orient ourselves towards the world and make statements about it'; whereas 'we orient ourselves towards people's ideas about the world (or their experience of it) and we make statements about people's ideas about the world (or their experience of it)' from the second order perspective (Marton, 1981, p. 178). Aspers (2009) argues that 'empirical phenomenology proceeds from the assumption that a scientific explanation must be grounded in the meaning structure of those studied' (p. 1). This means that the actors or participants'

perspectives are central in the analysis. The participants' (first order) perspectives, in other words, are important to data collection and analysis, while the role of the researcher is more important because this study is conducted from the second order perspective. Accordingly, in this phenomenological study, I aim to explore Chinese undergraduates' learning experiences, and investigate how these learning experiences influence students' attitudes, values and beliefs about English study. I, therefore, encourage the participants to answer the main research questions and other supplementary ones, whereas I attempted to 'assume as little as possible, to adopt a second-order perspective, and to describe the world as experienced by the individual' (Richardson, 1999, p. 57).

From what I have stated above, ontological and epistemological assumptions frame the methological concerns which influence the research design and methods. This statement has been widely agreed on by scholars (e.g., Creswell and Poth, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018; Ataro, 2020). The relationship between ontology, epistemology, methodology and research methods for this study is shown in Figure 6.

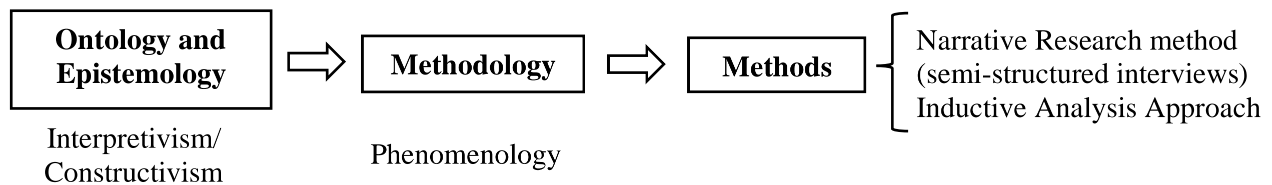


Figure 6: Relationship between Ontology, Epistemology, Methodology and Research Methods
Source: Adapted from Crotty (1998)

3.3 Methodological Considerations of Phenomenology

3.3.1 Introduction of Phenomenology

Phenomenology has been identified as an approach with which to experience, perceive, apprehend, understand and conceptualise the appeared phenomena. Moreover, phenomenological research is based on the view that knowledge is rooted in human experience, which researchers must then understand, construct, and interpret (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 20). This definition raises three questions: What are the phenomena? What are the phenomena in this study? Why is

this a phenomenological study? The common view is that phenomena are things as they appear. The phenomena here, in this study, involves the description of learners' narrative learning experiences, their views about these learning experiences, their perceptions of and behaviours in English language learning, and the changes to their attitudes, values beliefs, and behaviours of English study.

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who is largely regarded as the founder of phenomenology, asserts 'back to the things!', by which he means that we ought to determine how things directly appear to humans. Not only Husserl, but also Heidegger (1988) and Aspers (2009) argue that the general trait of the phenomenological approach is not to 'start with a set of assumptions, but to gradually establish a foothold' (Aspers, 2009, p. 2). Establishing a foothold refers to making it easier for readers to grasp how the phenomenological approach is intended to work in practice. Various research fields employ a phenomenological study design. For example, Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) examine students' experiences of transitioning into secondary school to produce clear and accurate descriptions of a particular aspect of human experience. Moreover, Pisarik, Rowell and Thompson (2017) explore the phenomenon of career anxiety through a qualitative investigation of seven college students' experiences, and Gunawan, Aungsuroch, Marzilli, Fisher, and Sukarna (2021) investigate the lived experiences of nurses combating COVID-19 in Indonesia. The phenomenology researchers here look beyond the details of everyday life or lived experiences in order to reveal the essences underlying them. Within the key aim of this study, phenomenology can contribute to deeper understandings of Chinese EFL learners' lived experiences and create meanings through embodied perception (Starks and Brown, 2007; Sokolowski, 2000; Stewart and Mickunas, 1974). This is one consideration for adopting a phenomenological approach.

Additionally, a phenomenological approach emphasises collecting and analysing data inductively and creating new meanings (Gray, 2013). In other words, phenomenological research emphasises gathering various data from social reality. Crucially, these data must be new, not part of previous studies. This phenomenological project is designed to analyse the data collected from participants' daily lives, which could likely be both innovative and different between each other, and contributes to new findings and implications. Therefore, this phenomenological approach is not only fitting for my research purpose, but also guarantees an original contribution to the field of education in China.

Table 1, adapted from Gray (2013), summarises the major characteristics of a phenomenological study. It is an accepted model or pattern followed in this study. Moreover, the table contributes to shaping the appropriate research methods for this phenomenological study.

Phenomenological Paradigm	
Basic beliefs	• Exploring the 'lifeworld' human experience. • The world is socially constructed and subjective. • Science is driven by human interests.
The researcher should	• Focus on meanings. • Try to understand what is happening. • Construct theories and models from the data (inductive approach).
Methods include	• Qualitative methods. • Small samples researched in-depth (between 5–15 participants). • Unstructured interviews.
Reliability	• Confirmation by participants.

Table 1: Summary of Phenomenological Paradigm
Source: Adapted from Gray (2013, p. 25)

3.3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of Phenomenology

As Giorgi (1975, 1985, 1992b) states in his research, a phenomenological approach can provide thick and direct descriptions of certain phenomena; access the participants' lived experiences through the use of loosely structured interviews; help participants purposively select on the basis of experience of the phenomenon that is under investigation; and capture a holistic sense of the participants' lived world, extract themes from them, and provide integrated descriptions. Furthermore, a phenomenological approach is an attempt to centre on the participants' lived world, and aims to explore and understand the meaning behind the world. Take this study as an example, a phenomenological approach has helped me to investigate Chinese EFL learners' understandings of their learning experiences, attitudes, values and beliefs. It has also revealed their concerns or interests about English learning, and how these are influenced. Such a study plays an essential role

in the field of education, as it has valuable potential for educational improvement by developing a deeper respect for learners' perspectives.

On the other hand, phenomenology has been criticised as lacking 'scientific tenets' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 301), objectivity and generalisability (Denscombe, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). For instance, phenomenology is suited to small-scale research, descriptive details of lived experiences, and usually relies on interviews as the main research method. Denscombe (2014) argues that, in its pursuit of rich and individualised descriptions, phenomenological research may 'neglect bigger issues' (p. 103), be ungeneralisable, lack 'objectivity, analysis and measurement' (p. 103), and may not move beyond an individual's description. These potential weaknesses have also been commonly criticised as methodological weaknesses. However, this concern is of little importance in this context as I do not seek to provide generalisations relevant to all areas. The associated risks of researcher bias and subjective interpretation is discussed in *Section 3.6 Positionality*.

3.4 Research Method

3.4.1 Narrative Research Method

A narrative research method is more likely to be linked to a phenomenological study. To understand how a narrative inquiry fits with, enlarges, or shifts the social and theoretical conversations around the phenomenon of interest, we must be prepared to provide an account of what is special about the phenomenon, something that could not be known through other theories or methods. Basit (2000) described a narrative as a story created and constructed from an individual perspective, such as one's lived experiences. When the researcher tells a story, in is organised in time and space, and makes sense of the ambiguity and complexity of human lives (Basit, 2010; Bamberg, 2012). In brief, a narrative inquiry attempts to normalise or explain what has been released orally. Narratives are, in essence, an account of events which either have or have not occurred, or may or may not yet happen (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

In this case, a narrative is defined as a way of recounting participants' past events that have occurred, and it carries more of a sense of 'continual reformulation' of these events (Clandinin and

Connelly, 2000, p. 124). Narratives thus transmit reality from a practical to a theoretical level. As per the literature review, experience acts as a bridge with which to connect a person's thought and action, knowing and doing, mind and body. On the other hand, at a theoretical level, Dewey's theory of experience and education highlights that 'all genuine education comes through experience' (cited in Dewey, 2007, p. 104), and he further explains that:

> *'Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it. When an activity is continued into the undergoing of consequences, when the change by action is reflected back into a change made in us, the mere flux is loaded with significance. We learn something.'*

This means that an experience grows out of others and leads to further experiences. We can here infer that an experience is an active–passive affair that happens narratively. With Dewey's notions of continuity and interaction, experiencing something in a certain way means that people gain knowledge about the world which involves qualitative differences or changes that are understood, experienced, and apprehended as phenomena, situations, or even learning itself. Based on Dewey's educational theory, the research questions of this study primarily focus on exploring Chinese participants' salient formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences, their views on how these have impacted their English language development, and their perspectives of how experiences have influenced their attitudes, values and beliefs about learning English. Narrative inquiry has created a place for itself in the field of education, particularly in studying the lives and experiences of teachers (e.g., Clandinin, 1985; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Carter, 1993). In these studies, the narrative research method sketches out the journey with scenes from the past, present and possible futures. In line with these, I seek not only to examine present events or experiences, but also those of the past.

In China, much research has been conducted into language learning anxiety, individual differences, and teaching strategies as factors influencing students' achievement in English learning. However, language learners' previous learning experiences in social contexts have not been explored, and limited studies have focused on the relationship between Chinese EFL learners' previous learning

experiences and their attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning. As Clandin and Connelly (2000) illustrate, a narrative inquiry enables one to 'articulate a relationship between personal interests and sense of significance, and larger social concerns expressed in the works and lives of others' (p. 122). As a narrative researcher, I have drawn on some key studies in this field (e.g., Riessman, 1993; Goodson, Loveless & Stephens, 2013; Eichsteller, 2018; Cortazzi and Jin, 2020). Engaging a narrative inquiry in this study allows me to compose how personal learning experiences influence attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. Through hearing the stories of the learners, themselves, I am able to explore and understand the relationship between their learning experiences and their perceptions about English study.

Furthermore, interviews are central to much narrative research (Goodson, Loveless & Stephens, 2013). Over the past two decades, the link between in-depth interviewing and narratives has been a major part of proliferative discussions about the various interview approaches and narrative analysis methods. In Mishler's (1986) book *Research Interviewing,* he states that 'interviewing and the analysis of interviews require close attentiveness to what interviewers and respondents say to each other, and how they say it' (p.76). Interviewing, in other words, is viewed as a participatory site in which meaning is co-produced by both interviewers and participants. Although narratives can emerge in every kind of conversation (Elliott, 2005), certain open-ended questions are more suitable to receive narrative responses rather than yes/no questions. As Elliott (2005) discusses, there are situations when researchers fail to get narratives from respondents. This is usually caused by problems with the effectiveness of interview questions. Sometimes the simple and straightforward questions or the very open-ended questions may not help to produce narratives, events or stories may be summarised and given little significance (Elliott, 2005). As scholars (e.g., Esin, 2011, Goodson, Loveless & Stephens, 2013) suggest, further questions that aim to encourage the participants to unpack the layers of their stories should be asked in interviews. Hence, developing and preparing open-ended interview questions is one of the first steps in collecting narratives. The semi-structured interview, which is the interviewing approach in this project, uses open-ended, non-leading questions. The reasons why and the ways how semi-structured interviews are applied in this study will be further explained in sub-section 3.4.3. The semi-structured interviews give priority to the elicitation of participants' stories and narratives with minimum intervention from the interviewer. The open-ended questions designed in this study are following

some narrative researchers' suggestions (e.g., Esin, 2011, Goodson, Loveless & Stephens, 2013; Cortazzi and Jin, 2020). They suggest that the interviews can begin with an open invitation:' Tell me what happened… and then what happened.' Also, interviews can involve more topic-orientated questions, such as 'How did you go decide to go for English training classes after-schools?' or 'Tell me about your relationship with your teachers.' Sometimes, these motivating questions were effective, but not on all occasions. I would frequently comment, 'That's quite interesting. Would you please talk more about that?' or 'I am quite interested in ... Could you explain more?'.

However, not all interviews go fluidly as expected. The interviews with female students are more fluid than those with males. In this study, gender differences seem to create a barrier between the interviewer and interviewees. As Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) note, three main challenges regarding gender relations arise in female–male interviews: 'intense control negotiations during the interviews; the interviewees' sense of being misunderstood due to differences in gendered experience; and sexual objectification of the interview by the interviewee' (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, cited in Prior and Peled, 2021, pp.1–2). In a female interviewing a male, 'gender and personal involvement may not be enough for full "knowing"' (Riessman, 1987, p.189), as I face in conversations with male participants. The majority of male participants prefer to answer questions I ask rather than actively narrate their learning stories. Mishler (1986) and Esin (2011) explain that re-structuring the interviewer-interviewee relationship is an important part of the interview design, to encourage respondents to find and speak in their own voices. The narrative researchers highly advocate that the interviewees are likely to tell stories when the balance of power is shifted between the interviewer and the interviewee (Mishler, 1986; Esin, 2011). Therefore, in conversations with female students, I notice something regarding my insider position as a fellow EFL female student. I introduce myself, speak of my learning experiences, move each discussion forward, and draw more heavily on my insider status than when I interact with male students. When speaking to male participants, I seek to compensate for my outsider status as a researcher collecting data. My positionality served to create spaces in which male students have a voice. I would explain the research purpose, mainly introducing myself as a researcher sincerely interested in their learning experiences. More details about my positionality in this study will be discussed in section 3.6.

There are four steps in analysing narratives: situating the epistemological approach, selecting the analytical model(s) to be used, selecting narratives to be analysed, and analysing narratives. The first step, situating the methodological approach, would influence the choice of analytical model(s) as well as the analytical position of the researcher (Esin, 2011). This step is one of the most important steps in the analysis of narratives. As discussed in the section *3.2 Ontology and Epistemology*, this study places a greater focus on the processes that lead to the construction and character given by participants' narratives. Hence, the analysis is going to be situated within a constructivist approach to narratives. The next step is to decide which analytical model(s) would be used in analysing narrative data. Narrative analysis considers the structure, content and context of narratives (Esin, 2011). Different narrative analytical models are interested in different features of the narratives and offered different focuses to analysts.

Esin (2011) clarifies three narrative analysis models: Structural Model (Labov, 1972), Thematic Model (Riessman, 2008) and Interactional/Performative Model (Riessman, 1993; Mishler, 1995). Structural Model, developed by Labov (1972), closely examines how the narrative is formed and how stories were told. This model, in other words, focused on the structure of narratives. Thematic Model, proposed by Riessman (2008), focuses on the content of stories and the themes around which stories were told. The Interactional/Performative Model mainly explores the contextual features that shape the construction of narratives. This model also investigates how the meaning is collaboratively created through interactions between storytellers and listeners. As Frost (2009) notes that there are no strict guidelines that dictate how to apply these analytical models to narrative researchers. Depending on this study's research questions and the interpretations of the narrative analytical models, Thematic Model (Riessman, 2008), which mainly analyse the content of narratives, is applied in this project. As Esin (2011) explains, it is possible to analyse only one aspect of narratives, because the application of narrative analysis model often integrates the three aspects (structure, content and context) of narratives as whole. Taking this study as an example, I choose to analyse the content of narratives, I describe the structure and context as well, because the ways, time and context in which stories are told shape the content (Esin, 2011).

As Riessman (2008) states, the Thematic Model focuses on 'what' is said more than 'how' it is said, the 'told' rather than the aspects of 'telling' (p.54). The content of the narratives is the centre

of this analytical approach. Same to the thematic analysis approach, the Thematic Model also starts to analyse data by the open coding of data, aims to build a set of themes by looking for patterns and meanings constructed in the data, and grouping the themes in connection with the research content. This model is closely connected with the thematic analysis approach, and it is useful for finding common or different thematic elements between participants' narratives. The procedures of applying the thematic model in this study are integrated with the stages in the thematic analysis. A full description and discussion of thematic analysis stages will be further illustrated in Chapter 4.

3.4.2 Data Collection Method: Semi-Structured Interview

Interviewing is a popular way of gathering qualitative research data. However, Aspers (2009) argues that there are two predominant means of such data collection, namely participant observations or interviews. For Aspers (2009), both of these methods can facilitate readers' understanding of how the phenomenological approach is intended to work in practice. In this case, I schedule two semi-structured interviews with each participant. Two questions raised here:

1. *Why is interviewing more appropriate than observation for collecting data in this study?*
2. *Why does a semi-structured interview fit for this study?*

Phenomenological research supports the use of interviews as the data obtained is 'more dialogic in nature', and both the researcher and participants 'come to a new understanding of the experience under study via a conscious process of explicit thematization' (Felix, 2009, p.174). The experiences are jointly constituted by the researcher and the participants, and are thematised through a 'conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest' (Kvale, 1996, p.125). In *Real World Research*, Robson and McCartan (2016) suggest that individual interviews offer researchers invaluable opportunities to listen to other people's life experiences and understand how they perceive the world around them. Therefore, an individual interview is a prime and productive research tool for exploring lived experiences. That is to say, an individual interview allows the researcher to investigate the phenomenon through the participants' eyes, and thus make statements

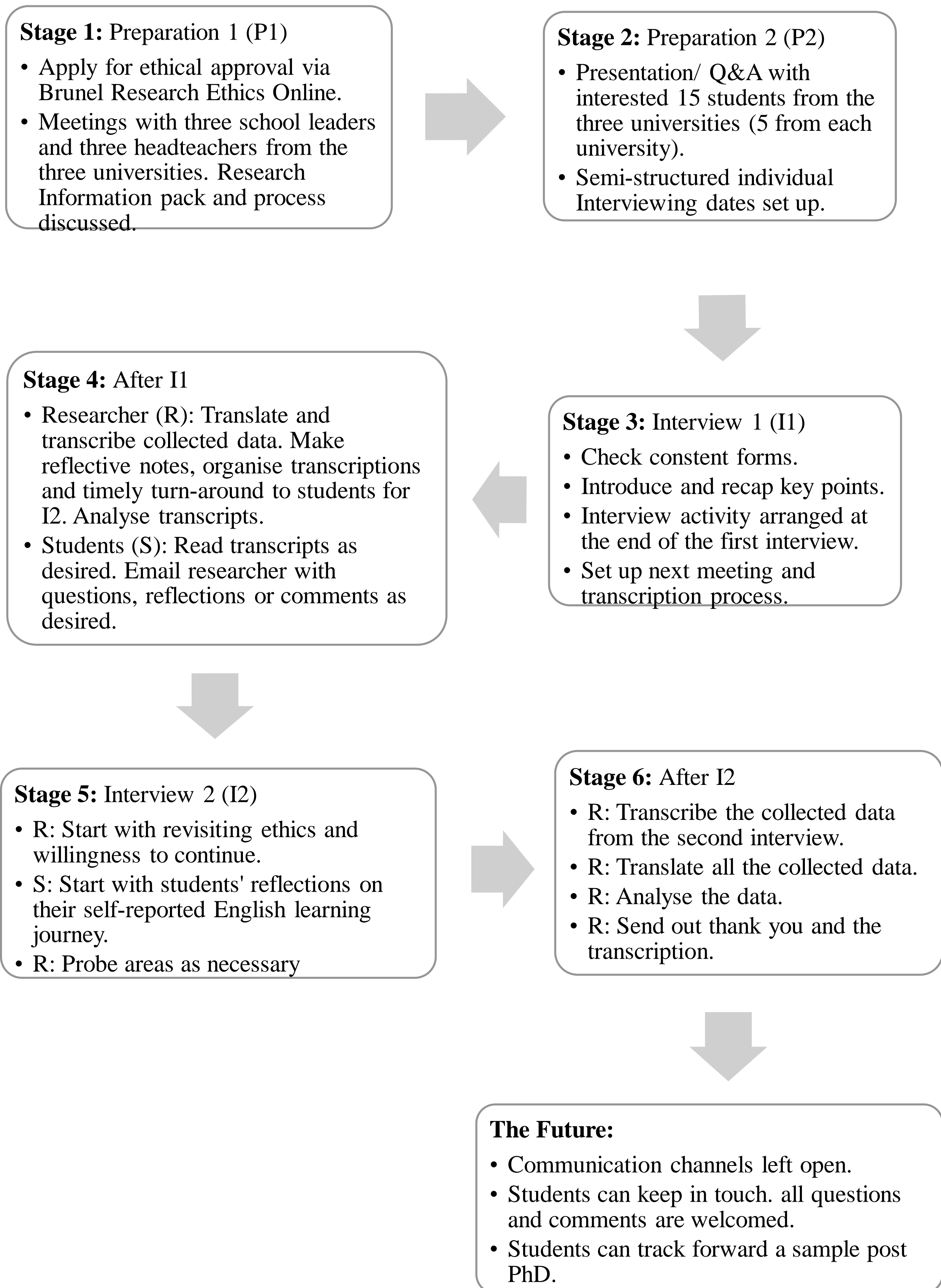
about their experiences from a second order perspective. However, some researchers (e.g., Alshenqeeti, 2014; Starks and Brown, 2007) have stated that qualitative research frequently relies on interviewing as the primary data collection strategy. Observations and interviews are highly different data collection methods. While the former can provide a rich source of data, it is often impractical in a study which requires participants to speak in their own voices, and express their own thoughts and feelings. For instance, using observations would allow the researcher to investigate participants' external behaviours, but, somewhat crucially, not their internal beliefs. As such, observations can supplement individual face-to-face interviews, which could then be used to collect participants' inner attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as their external behaviours.

To answer the second question ('why does a semi-structured interview fit for this study?'), we must first discuss the main characteristics of semi-structured interviews, i.e., their uniqueness and flexibility. Basit (2010) explains that semi-structured interviews formulate not only specific research questions but also a scope of open-ended questions that might be linked to the interviewees' responses to earlier or pre-formulated questions. Put simply, semi-structured interviews are essentially 'a list of questions but there is scope for the participants to raise issues that the researcher has not anticipated' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 78). As the aim of a phenomenological study is to 'explore at greater and greater depth of thinking without leading' (Trigwell, 2000, p. 68), there is also scope for the interviewer to use prompts, follow new lines issues that the participant has introduced. In light of this, a number of prompts and open-ended questions (further to the specific research questions) are both important and useful. As Van Teijingen (2014), and Toson and McCartan (2016) have indicated, the prepared open-ended questions could help comprehensively elicit interviewees' lived stories, their experiences, and their inner beliefs to achieve in-depth responses. This is to say that unprepared questions could help the researcher detect unexpected but meaningful data. Hence, semi-structured interviews allow asking unscheduled questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In Teijingen (2014), and Toson and McCartan's (2016) research, semi-structured interviews are well suited for exploring attitudes, values, beliefs and motives. Having considered the strengths of semi-structured interviews (both in theory and using examples from prior research), I also deem semi-structured interviews appropriate for collecting data in the current study.

While interviews have been criticised as being ‘time-consuming with regard to both data collection and analysis’ (Robson, 2002, p. 94), as they need to be transcribed, translated, and coded, in this study, the expected vastness of the data concerning lived experiences that the participants would reveal counterbalanced this temporal limitation. Furthermore, Flinders (1997) presents the following limitations: ‘people interviewed may not be able to say what they think’, or ‘may not be able to state their opinion in a clear way’ (cited in Griffee, 2005, p. 36). This potential weakness could be neglected in this study. As the participants prefer to use Chinese (Standard Mandarin/Putonghua) for the interviews, they are able to share their ideas, opinions and feelings clearly. While some are perhaps unable to state their opinions clearly at first, the list of open-ended questions are prepared to help them recall their experiences and provide more detail. Despite these limitations, an interview – especially a semi-structured one – is a powerful way to gain insights into participants’ perceptions, and acquire in-depth information about interviewees’ attitudes, values and beliefs (Robson and McCartan, 2016; Van Teijingen, 2014).

I schedule two waves of semi-structured interviews with each participant, with a four-week gap between the first and second. The first interview with each student is the main interview, while the second acts as a ‘check on data’ interview (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p. 180). The details of these two stages of interviews will be further presented in the next section (3.4.3). Table 2 listed below provides a summary of data collection stages:

Table 2: Summary Diagram of Data Collection Stages


Stage 1: Preparation 1 (P1)
• Apply for ethical approval via Brunel Research Ethics Online.
• Meetings with three school leaders and three headteachers from the three universities. Research Information pack and process discussed.
Stage 2: Preparation 2 (P2)
• Presentation/ Q&A with interested 15 students from the three universities (5 from each university).
• Semi-structured individual Interviewing dates set up.
Stage 3: Interview 1 (I1)
• Check constent forms.
• Introduce and recap key points.
• Interview activity arranged at the end of the first interview.
• Set up next meeting and transcription process.
Stage 4: After I1
• Researcher (R): Translate and transcribe collected data. Make reflective notes, organise transcriptions and timely turn-around to students for I2. Analyse transcripts.
• Students (S): Read transcripts as desired. Email researcher with questions, reflections or comments as desired.
Stage 5: Interview 2 (I2)
• R: Start with revisiting ethics and willingness to continue.
• S: Start with students' reflections on their self-reported English learning journey.
• R: Probe areas as necessary
Stage 6: After I2
• R: Transcribe the collected data from the second interview.
• R: Translate all the collected data.
• R: Analyse the data.
• R: Send out thank you and the transcription.
The Future:
• Communication channels left open.
• Students can keep in touch. all questions and comments are welcomed.
• Students can track forward a sample post PhD.

3.4.3 Interview Schedule

This was a 10-month longitudinal study with an 8-week interval during which the participants were on their winter vacation, and 4 weeks during which I was on maternity leave. The first period was from 19th August, 2019 to 25th October, 2019, and the second period was from 8th January, 2020 to 1st February, 2020. All of the 15 participants participated during these two periods, in which each was interviewed twice. In order to provide the reader with a degree of background knowledge regarding the participants and universities, I shall provide a profile of them before illustrating the interview findings. Hence, I draw the reader forward to the 'Table 4: the Profile of Participants' and the mini-introductions of the three Chinese universities in sub-section 3.4.5, as it presents biographical information of the fifteen participants. I designed two interviews for each participant so as to ensure the trustworthiness and genuineness of the collected data. The main interview (the first) lasted for approximately 45–60 minutes with each participant (Appendix 7 & 8)), and the second lasted roughly 30 minutes (Appendix 9 & 10). Since the interview was semi-structured, there was scope for both the participants and me to raise unanticipated issues and questions. With the aim of 'exploring at greater and greater depth of thinking without leading' (Trigwell, 2000, p. 68), I designed prompts and some questions in the first interviews, which were to be 'as open-ended as possible in order to let the subject choose the dimensions of the questions they want to answer' (Marton, 1986, p.42).

In addition to exploring how participants' learning experiences influenced their attitudes, beliefs and values of EFL learning, I encouraged the participant to talk about their stories and experiences within a timeline structure (Appendix 11: extracts of a participant's narratives to illustrate the transcript style). A timeline method was sometimes referenced as a lifeline method (de Vries et al., 2017). According to de Vries et al., (2017), lifeline methods were the 'graphic illustrations of the pathways of lived experience travelled by individuals from birth to anticipated death' (p. 55). More research suggested that the consequences of individuals' life events might be strongly influenced by their timing (e.g., de Vries, Blando, Southard & Bubeck, 2001; Adriansen, 2012; Merrill, Fan, Wray, and Miranda, 2020). Hence, timeline methods (lifeline methods) had been widely used in the study of lived experiences. Further to this, narrative researchers, such as Cortazzi and Jin (2020) highly adovated that applying a repertoire of visual means (e.g., drawings) could support narrative

eliciations. In line with these scholars' ideas, I constructed a graph with a timeline: a line anchored at one end by 'Pre-School' and at the other by 'University' in this present study. At the end of the first interview, all of the participants were asked to draw a linear graph about their English journey with the timeline structure (see Figure 10: Example of 2D Line Graph on page 123). On the students' self-made line graphs, I could indicate, label and probe for critical issues and moments in their journeys. Furthermore, I encouraged the participants to undertake such an activity by telling them the second interviews would be designed according to their graphs.

The second interview was a video conferencing interview to discuss about the participants' learning journey graphs in depth. As Berg (2007, p. 210) suggested that it was important for interviewers to maintain their 'interviewee's motivation by keeping boredom at bay', I hoped that drawing a picture or graph would keep them sufficiently motivated to take part in the second interview. During the four-week gap between the first and second interviews, I transcribed the audio data (from the first interviews) to text, and reviewed the collected data. Then, based on the primary coding and analysis, I arranged a new appointment with each participant for the second interview. After the second interviews, I transcribed all of the collected data, translated these data from Chinese to English, coded, re-coded, and thematised the data step-by-step (the details of which will be explained in the following chapter). Table 3 in the following outlines the two stages of interviews:

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Data Collection Method</th><th>Targets of Investigation</th><th>Purpose</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="7">Semi-structured Interviews</td><td rowspan="3">1st Interview</td><td rowspan="3">Face-to-face interview</td><td>5 final-year undergraduates with different majors (University A)</td><td rowspan="3">To investigate students’ attitudes, values and beliefs of EFL learning.

To investigate students’ experiences of learning in and after class.

To draw a picture about their English learning journey.</td></tr>
<tr><td>5 final-year undergraduates with different majors (University B)</td></tr>
<tr><td>5 final-year undergraduates with different majors (University C)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Four-Week Gap</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">2nd Interview</td><td rowspan="3">WeChat, Tencent Meeting, or Skype</td><td>Same participants from the University A</td><td rowspan="3">To clarify and confirm the accuracy of data collected from first interview.

To explore participant’s feedback of other related opinions.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Same participants from the University B</td></tr>
<tr><td>Same participants from the University C</td></tr>
</table>

Table 3: Schedule of Semi-Structured Interviews

As shown in the table above, the first interview was held face-to-face, while the second was conducted through the help of technology-mediated video-conferencing. Both the face-to-face and video-conferencing interviews were popular in qualitative research due to the advantages they could afford both interviewers and interviewees (Potosky, 2008; Basch, Melchers, Kurz, Krieger and Miller, 2021). Some scholars had argued that face-to-face interviews are generally preferred

in qualitative research due to their frequent depiction as more attractive alternatives to other interviewing methods (e.g., Greenfield, Midanik and Roders, 2000; Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Compared to facetime or telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews provide more abundant data, including that came from contextual, visual, verbal and non-verbal cues (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Accordingly, I scheduled the first interview to be held face-to-face.

Moreover, I also use video-conferencing interviews to collect data. Technological advances have developed video-conferencing interviews to be the most obvious alternative to face-to-face interviews (Brenner, Ortner and Fay, 2016; Basch, Melchers, Kurz, Krieger and Miller, 2021). Nowadays, in China, most students are highly familiar with such video-conferencing technologies as WeChat, Tencent Meeting, or Skype (Zhou, Wen, Tang and Disalvo, 2017). I used video-conferencing for three reasons. Firstly, since the target participants were Chinese students still studying at an university in China, I had to fly to China to conduct the first interview. Due to issues of cost, time, and convenience, I decided to hold the second interviews via video. Secondly, further to my own convenience, video-conference interviews allow the participants to 'remain on their own turf, permit more anonymity and privacy' (Novick, 2008, p. 393), 'put a little pressure on the respondent to respond', and it also could 'improve the quality of responses' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 536). Finally, while I was not in the same room as the participants, the cameras on the screen allowed us to view each other, thereby coming relatively close to face-to-face interviews (Basch, Melchers, Kurz, Krieger and Miller, 2021).

I conducted both sets of interviews in Chinese (Standard Mandarin/Putonghua), so that both conversation partners could express their thoughts effectively in their native language. Having obtained permission from the participants, I audio-recorded all of the interviews, and later transcribed and translated them in the data analysis process. During the interviews, I, as the interviewer, asked questions, listened to the interviewees, observed their non-verbal behaviour, and recorded the information with simple notes, logging ideas and abstract thoughts. Moreover, these observations included the participants' facial expressions, eye contacts, hand movements and body language. During the interviews, the participants used non-verbal communications to express their thoughts, and make their answers more appealing and interesting. As Phutela (2015) stated, non-verbal communications could support or even replace verbal communications in many situations.

In particular, non-verbal messages could be used to interpret the meanings of a participant who was either unfamiliar or unwilling to share their thoughts. I followed Phutela (2015), who found that individuals tended to rely on non-verbal clues whose interpretation could reveal their true meaning.

3.4.4 Sampling

Cohen et al. (2018) suggested that the researcher should make judgements on six key sampling factors. These are: 'the sample size'; 'statistical power'; 'the representativeness and paraments of the sample'; 'access to the sample'; 'the sampling strategy to be used'; and 'the kind of research that is being undertaken (e.g., quantitative/qualitative/mixed methods)' (p. 202). Sample sizes were more likely to be small in qualitative studies (Stakes, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Goard, 2003; Cohen et al., 2018). Creswell (1998) suggested a size of between 20–30, and Gorard (2003) believed that 10 participants would be erring on the side of caution. However, other researchers, such as Thomson (2004), proposed a range of between 1–350 (or over), and Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007, p. 242) argued that the sample size should be large enough to generate 'thick descriptions' and rich data in qualitative studies. Although different researchers hold various perspectives, the sample size should depend on the factors involving 'research purpose, questions and design'; 'the confidence level and confidence interval required'; 'the nature of the research' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 203). As this research is a phenomenological study which aims to gather participants' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning and explore their various learning experiences at a collective level, one participant is obviously insufficient. Even though 'there is no clear–cut or simple answer' for the correct sample size (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 203), some researchers, such as Bowden (1995, 1996) suggested that approximately 15 participants who were researched in-depth would be appropriate for a phenomenological study. Gray (2013) also suggested between 5 and 15 participants as being able to create a reasonable chance to conduct a phenomenological study. From the above considerations, I chose a sample size of 15.

In calculating the sample size, I considered its potential representativeness, which was defined as 'the extent to which it is important that the sample in fact represents the whole population in question if it was to be a trustworthy sample, to be clear what is being represented' (Cohen et al.,

2018, p. 212). However, as I did not intend to make claims outside of the specific study context, this was a less pressing consideration. The implication of this study was intended to expand educators, scholars, teachers, and parents' thinking on how to optimally develop Chinese students' English learning methods by exploring their previous learning experiences and their attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. Due to the specific purpose of the study, I did not consider representativeness to be a key consideration.

I did, however, consider access to the sample a key issue. The reason for selecting final-year university students was that they were the easiest to approach. First-year students tended to be more inexperienced regarding learning at university level, so it may have been difficult to motivate them to engage with the project. Most students in their second and third years would be too busy preparing for the CET-4 (required to graduate) to participate. Fourth year students would have already completed their credits and passed the CET-4, meaning that they would have both the time and learning experiences to participate. However, internships and job hunts may have taken them away from campus, meaning that the first individual interview needed to be arranged in advance. The students in the last year, therefore, were the most suitable participants for this research. All of the selected participants to participate were asked on a voluntary basis.

I selected purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, for this study. Purposive sampling enables the researcher 'to focus on specific, unique issues or cases', and it provides 'greater depth' to the study (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 218). The three universities (codenamed A, B, and C) were selected in three levels according to the 2021 University Ranking (Ministry of Education, 2021). More details about these three universities will be further introduced in the following section. Moreover, I used three criteria for selecting the participants. First, all of the students had to be Chinese (Mandarin) speakers who had started learning English between the ages of 8–9. Second, they had to have passed the CET-4 in China. Third, no participants reported a residence history in English-speaking countries (travel was permitted). This purposive selection ensured that the most appropriate participants were chosen. According to the research purpose, 15 final-year undergraduate students from 3 different universities in China took part in this project – all of whom had volunteered (Appendix 5: the advertisement of interview in English version and

Appendix 6: adverstisement of interviews in Chinese version). The profiles of these 15 students will also be presented in the next section.

3.4.5 Profile of Fifteen Participants and Three Universities

a. *Table 4: the Profile of Participants:* including participants' pseudonyms, gender, age (in 2020), their universities, majors and the length of their English studies.

Participant	Gender	Age (In 2020)	Institution	Major in University	Years of English learning
ChengYi	Male	24	University A	International Trade Programme	16
ChongYang	Male	24	University C	Medicine	14
Dan	Female	23	University A	Risk Management	16
HuiFan	Female	24	University B	Journalism and Communication	14
JiaJia	Male	24	University C	Accounting	12
MeiQi	Female	23	University B	Human Resource Management	14
MengLin	Female	23	University C	Education	12
MuHan	Male	23	University A	Political Science	20
SiHan	Female	24	University C	Japanese	16
SiJia	Female	24	University A	Accounting	16
XiaoFu	Female	23	University B	English	20
XiaoJing	Female	23	University C	Marketing	17
Ying	Female	24	University A	Law	16
Yu	Male	24	University B	Computer Programme	14
YuNong	Male	24	University B	Actuarial Studies	16

b.the Mini-Introductions of the Three Universities:

University A:

University A is located in Beijing. It is a key university directly under the governorship of China's MOE. It is a famous university with a focus on teacher education, education science, and social studies. After over one hundred years of development, it formed a new education concept of 'learning and self-cultivating and helping the world'. University A has a wide range of international co-operation and exchange programmes, including universities in the US, UK, Singapore, and so on. It has signed co-operation agreements with nearly 500 universities and research institutions in over 30 countries, such as the US, Canada, the UK, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland, and Spain. In 2021, the University A ranked in the top 15 of a total of 2,595 universities (including general universities not in Mainland China) (Ministry of Education, 2021). Hence, University A is one of China's top higher education institutions.

University B:

University B is located in Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, Mainland China. It was founded in 1956. It is a teaching and research university with a focus on electronic information. Obviously, the University B's advantages in economic management disciplines, and penetration of engineering, science, economics, management, and other disciplines. This university has a particularly high-quality of teaching and a strong scientific research team led by experts with outstanding contributions. Similar to University A, University B has extensive and diversified foreign cooperation and exchanges with well-known universities in over 20. For example, the US, Canada, the UK, Germany, Russia, France, and Japan, have engaged in substantive cooperation in doctoral, master's, and undergraduate projects. University B was ranked in the top 150 of a total of 2,595 universities (including general universities not in Mainland China) in 2021 (Ministry of Education, 2021), giving it a middle academic level.

University C:

University C is also located in Hangzhou City. It is founded in 1984. This University is administered by the Zhejiang Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. In the past 37 years, this university has seen steady improvement. The university initially provided eight university disciplines, including medicine, literature, economics, management, science, law, engineering, and art. University C is also an international university. Friendly and cooperative relations have been established with over 70 colleges and universities in such countries as the UK, France, the US, Canada, Belarus, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. In 2021, this university is ranked in the top 550 of a total of 2,595 universities (Ministry of Education, 2021). Compared to University A and University B, University C is at a lower academic level.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial for protecting the researcher, participants, and research data (Orb et al., 2001; Chen, 2020). Researchers (e.g., Orb et al., 2001; Litchman, 2013; Chen, 2020) indicated that a qualitative study was highly dependent on the participants' willingness to participate. Hence, it was vital to first gain permission. Since this study was conducted with Chinese undergraduates in three universities, permissions were required to access gatekeepers or key teachers from these institutions in advance. Since two key teachers from Universities A and C, and a gatekeeper from University B, had the access to students, I first sought their permission. All three replied that they were willing to introduce this study to their final-year students (See Appendix 14, Appendix 15 and Appendix 16). Those interested provided me with their contact details via these three teachers. Additionally, I submitted a detailed research design with a written consent form of a full procedure, methodology, and nature of this study to the Research Ethics Committee of Brunel University. To gain an ethical approval letter (see Appendix 13), I had to ensure that 'the researcher had clearly understood and considered the ethical issues in the research process and could protect the rights of any individual participants' (Chen, 2020, p. 85). Accordingly, the main principle of ethical conduct should fully consider participants' privacy, rights, dignity, autonomy and data ownership (Litchman, 2013; Chen, 2020).

This study followed the standards identified by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC)[9] (2015) research ethics framework and the BERA (British Educational Research Association, 2018)[10] ethics guidelines. Six principles, including 'protecting participants', 'minimising risks', 'respecting', 'ensuring accuracy', and 'providing equalities and justice,' were set to protect the participants' rights, cultural and religious freedom, and well-being (ESRC, 2015). To further protect their rights, I gave every potential participant an informed consent form (see Appendix 1, English version on page 276 and Appendix 2 Chinese version on page 277) and participant information sheet (see Appendix 3 English version on page 278 and Appendix 4 Chinese version on page 282) to read and sign. The participants would be informed about the background, purpose, data collection methods, and main features of the study design by the participant information sheet. I made sure they knew to contact me with any questions or concerns they had, and that they were free to refuse to participate. Although there were limited risks, such as disruption or intrusion that participants might feel worried and distressed, they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any explanation – which I emphasised to them throughout the fieldwork. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the participants were notified that neither individuals nor universities would be identified within the written work and no comments would be traceable to an individual. Both written materials and audio-recordings were fully confidential, and I used pseudonyms in the written thesis. All of these issues were explained fully to the participants. Indeed, I took great care to ensure that participants understood that their participation was entirely voluntary and would not have any effect on their studies or universities.

According to Aspers (2009), phenomenology researchers focused on exploring, investigating, and describing people's life experiences in their natural environments. Therefore, establishing researcher–participant rapport was crucial for obtaining high-quality data. Litchman (2013) argued that qualitative researchers should be considered as much a part of the research process as the participants, although they must be sensitive to the power they held over participants. To avoid this concern, I followed Litchman's (2013) suggestions for establishing rapport and fostering an appropriate and trustworthy research environment. First of all, I allowed the participants as much access as I had to the collected data. This means that the original data was traceable, and the analysis process was transparent to the participants. All of the findings and results were reported anonymously. The participants would have full access to the final thesis and any EFL learning

suggestions could be provided for their further development as they wish. It was my fervent hope that this study's report, feedback, and suggestions could benefit the participants in their future language learning. Second, I arranged a comfortable interviewing environment for each participant during the interview. As many authors argued that the major goal of an indepth explorative interview was to gain as much reliable information as possible (Shepherd & Griffiths, 2013; Vrij et al., 2017; Hoogesteyn, 2020). Hence, these scholars suggested to create a comfortable interviewing environment for both the investigator and interviewee, in which could contribute to elicited information (Hoogesteyn, 2020). The first individual interview was scheduled in the school's café or in a convenient classroom the participants requested. The second video-conferencing interview was scheduled at their convenience. If the participants felt upset, they were offered an opportunity to withdraw at any time.

Furthermore, I guaranteed the privacy of all participants and keep data confidential. The participants were informed how their personal information and data would be used and published, and how long these would be kept (Cohen et al., 2018). Regarding the legal requirements, the storage and use of personal data complied with the Data Protection Act (2018)[11] and Brunel's data protection policy. Considering the ethics of interviews, I coded the names of the participants and the three universities. The recording contributions, including recording pen and written forms taken from the interviews, were used according to the participants' wishes. Moreover, all consent forms, interviewing notes, and transcribed documents were kept locked in a drawer with only one key kept by myself. Further to these the paper documents, all the audio recordings were saved on my laptop with password protection. I made a copy of these digital data and saved them to my personal hard disk, again with password protection. In accordance with Brunel's data protection policy: all codes, equivalent code lists, and collected data were only held by me and would be deleted at the end of the project.

3.6 Positionality

Research is a shared space, shaped by both the researcher and the participants (England, 1994). Therefore, the positionality of the researcher, the identities of the participants, and the interaction between them, have the potential to impact the research process and findings. I have included this

section in an effort to present my reflections on this qualitative research, which has led me to consider the positionality that I have encountered during the completion of this project, as well as my own interactions with the voluntary participants. Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Ntseane, and Muhamad (2001) indicate that positionality is 'determined by where one stands in relation to the other' (P. 411). Who am I in the processes of data collection, analysis, and dissertation? Regarding my positionality and access, I have made assumptions that relate to the concept of insider and outsider.

Throughout my research preparations – from the formulation of the initial research questions to the project design – my positionality as an EFL learner studying issues of Chinese EFL students remained at the forefront of my mind. Further to this, as I prepared to conduct interviews with EFL undergraduate students in which I would seek to engage them in frank discussions, I expected that my positionality would aid my ability to connect with these students. As some research (e.g., Fries-Britt and Turner, 2001; Bourke, 2014) has suggested that people 'tend to gravitate toward those with whom they share some level of commonality' (Bourke, 2014), my position as an EFL learner seemed reasonable. The process of researching in a critically interpretive style, sharpened the way in which I interviewed with the participants and engaged with their narratives. In conversations with the participants, what I found was somewhat unexpected. Female students were much more open to discuss their issues, experiences, ideas and feelings with me, whereas male students were markedly more 'quiet'. The interviews with female students, in other words, were more fluid than those with males. The female participants showed greater understandings of this project, and they were willing to share their learning stories with me. As Finch (1984) claimed that women shared a subordinate structural position in society so were enthusiastic about talking to a female researcher. Feminists in sociology suggested that due to women's general experience of gender subordination, a 'non-hierarchical' relationship contributed to a fluid conversation when women interviewed women (e.g., Finch 1984; Riessman, 1987; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Ribbens, 1989; Tang, 2002). Therefore, in conversations with female students, I noticed something regarding my insider position as a fellow EFL student. I introduced myself, spoke of my learning experiences, moved each discussion forward, and drew more heavily on my insider status than when I interacted with male students.

However, in interviewing with male participants, they refusal to speak of past learning experiences may have two potential explanations. First, it could be that the male learners were less interested in their English learning. Second, they may have perceived me as a female EFL learner who would not understand their feelings, difficulties, and experiences during the English learning period. As Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) noted, three main challenges regarding gender relations arise in female–male interviews: 'intense control negotiations during the interviews; the interviewees' sense of being misunderstood due to differences in gendered experience; and sexual objectification of the interview by the interviewee' (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, cited in Prior and Peled, 2021, pp.1–2). In China, multiple studies had shown that, in schools, girls' internal motivation in English learning was stronger than that of boys, and girls achieved more highly in language acquisition than their male peers (Gangyi, 1997; Li and Zhang, 2001; Xiong, 2010). To mitigate bias when I was interviewing with male participants, I realised that I need to step back from the insider position of an EFL learner. I sought to compensate for my outsider status as a researcher collecting data. My positionality served to create spaces in which male students had a voice. I explained the research purpose, and mainly introduced myself as a researcher sincerely interested in their learning experiences.

To mitigate bias during the data analysis stages, I drew more on my outsider status as a researcher. For example, after I transcribed the collected data from audio to text, I sent the transcripts back to each participant. Inviting the participants to check the transcripts to make sure their narratives and meanings were understood correctly. Also, in the stage of translating the collected data, I followed Brislin's (1970, 1980) model, which suggested that two bilingual people should translate the qualitative research texts. Hence, I used another professional translator, and we both followed careful translation procedures. First, I translated the transcripts into English. Second, they were blindly back-translated by the second bilingual expert. Thirdly, I compared the second bilingual expert's transcripts with mine to find differences. Finally, the second bilingual expert and I would discuss and make corrections to ensure the accuracy of translated texts. More details about data transcribing, translating and analysing stages would be presented in the next chapter. Furthermore, in the results presentation stage, my role was of a researcher providing detailed descriptions of participants' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning and their previous learning experiences; investigating the participants' world of learning English; and interpreting the realities

from a second order perspective. In other words, I was the primary tool for analysing the data and presenting the findings. I drew on my outsider status more heavily than I did when interviewing the participants.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has introduced the ontology, epistemology, and methodology underpinning the present study. In addition, this chapter has outlined the research design, including data collection methods, the sampling procedure, and the profile of fifteen participants and three universities. Furthermore, ethical issues and the researcher's positionality have been taken into consideration. This chapter has carefully presented why and how I conducted this project, now it is the time to review, organise and analyse the data before getting into the findings. To highlight the significance and creativity of applying multiple analysis methods in this study, there should be a separate chapter to elaborate on the analysis stages in depth. Therefore, the following chapter will introduce and explain the process of analysis and analysis methods in depth.

Chapter 4 Analysis of Interview Data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will further present the analysis of 15 participants' narratives, and the findings will be discussed with reference to the literature in the next chapter. In order to interpret the main findings more fluidly in the next chapter, I must first introduce the thematic analysis, thematic network, and three charts in this one. The thematic analysis is the main analysis method in this study. The stages of how I analysed the collected data thematically will be demonstrated in Section 4.2. Also, the thematic model I used in analysing narratives is intergrated and presented in the same section, stages of thematic analysis approach. After that, the thematic network, which allows me to examine eight emerging key themes from data, will be illustrated in Section 4.3. Following by the thematic network, I present one 2D line graph and two charts in the following sections (Section 4.4). The thematic network and the three charts need to be discussed and presented because they are supplementary tools in the analysis stage and serve as connecting threads in this whole project. Finally, this chapter ends up with a summary section (Section 4.5).

4.2 Stages of the Thematic Analysis Approach

Qualitative data analysis is a comprehensive process of systematically examining, describing, summarising, analysing, or reconstructing data so as to answer research questions (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Qualitative case studies tend to be more closely linked to the inductive approach, in which, researchers read, re-read, analyse, reflect on, infers from and interprets the raw data (Thomas 2006; Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, data was collected from two sets of interviews. Based on the data-driven inductive analysis approach, I adopted a combination of three data analysis approaches and steps: thematic, narrative, and visual analyses. Thematic analysis is used to generate interpretations from data inductively (Roulston, 2010). It involved six steps: '*familiarisation, generating codes, constructing themes, revising themes, defining themes and producing the report'* (Braun et al., 2018, pp.10-14). Following Braun *et al*., (2018), the thematic analysis approach in this study was developed and involved the following steps:

Stage 1: Familiarisation

Stage 2: Generating codes

'a. First Cycle Coding: Initial Coding';

'b. Second Cycle Coding: Data Driven Coding';

Stage 3: Constructing and Identifying Themes

Stage 4: Reviewing Themes

In addition, besides the above six steps of thematic analysis, I combined and applied the visual data analysis approach in this study. The six procedures of thematic analysis and the process of visual data analysis will be fully explained in the following sections.

4.2.1 Stage 1: Familiarisation

To analyse data, familiarisation was considered a 'loose route into engaging with the data' (Braun et al., 2018, p. 11). This stage is where I would transcribe and translate the verbal data, read and re-read textual data, make casual notes, and reflect upon its features. Transcribing spoken words into text and translating Chinese words into English transcends mere writing in that it is 'a process or technique for the fixing on paper of fleeting events' (Regmi, Naidoo and Pilkington, 2010, p. 18). As noted by Cortazzi, Pilcher and Jin (2011), the choice of language for interviews can heavily influence the data obtained. In this study, I considered interview data important in terms of presenting a fuller picture of the EFL students' learning experiences during the study period. I conducted the interviews in Chinese (Mandarin) due to the participants' clear preference for using their mother tongue. During and after the data collection, I transcribed the audio recordings to written texts, and later translated them into English.

As presented in the research design, I scheduled two semi-structured interviews for each participant. As soon as the first interview finished, I transcribed the collected data. I did so as the second interview questions were based on the answers of the first. More importantly, I designed the second interview for ensuring the accuracy of the data collected from the first. Then, in the second phase, I transcribed the data collected from the second interviews upon completing the conversations. After transcribing all of the collected data, the following step was to translate the written words

from Chinese to English. In the first and second phase, I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews into Chinese (Mandarin) texts. Since such shortcuts as omitting words, using abbreviations, or excluding (perceived) unimportant information could distort the meaning and hinder later data analysis, I opted to transcribe everything as recorded. I listened to each audio-recorded document three times. After transcribing all of the data, I checked the transcripts against the original documents, notes, and recordings for accuracy. Although transcribing audio-recorded interviews is considerably time consuming, this crucial procedure would allow me to begin to grasp the salient patterns and recurring themes between different individuals. Then, I read the Mandarin transcripts several times in order to familiarise myself with the data collected from the first interview. During my readings, I also inserted my observation memos of the participants. The observational memos, which were about participants' nonverbal behaviours, such as smiling face, looking at ceiling, nodding the head, were noted separately in my notebook. As Jones and LeBaron (2002) interviewees' nonverbal behaviours could be closely linked to their verbal messages. I inserted these memos because they linked to the research questions and related to emergent unconscious meanings, which might impact on the findings. I intergrated participants' nonverbal messages to verbal transcrpts because the nonverbal messages could contribute to catch the essence of meanings and identify meaningful themes or patterns (Jones and LeBaron, 2002; Cohen et al., 2018).

The next phase involved translating the transcripts into English. As many researchers had noted (e.g., Emmel, 1998; Birbili, 2000; Jones, Lee, Phillips, Zhang and Jaceldo, 2001; Jootun, McGhee and Marland, 2009), maintaining accuracy in the translation process was challenging due to there not being precise translations for certain ideas, concepts, and feelings. Therefore, Emmel (1998) used different researchers to check transcripts, and Jootun, McGhee, and Marland (2009) suggested that researchers should engage with meanings and discourses. Accordingly, I began to translate the transcripts followed by Brislin's (1970, 1980) model of translation. This model has been considered the most effective for cross-cultural research (Jones, Lee, Phillips, Zhang and Jaceldo, 2001). Especially for translating the qualitative research texts, field notes, or interview transcripts from the source language (non-English) into the target language (English) (Regmi, Naidoo and Pilkington, 2010). As Brislin's (1970, 1980) model suggested that two bilingual people should translate the qualitative research texts, I used another professional translator, and we both followed careful translation procedures. First, I translated the transcripts into English. Second, they were

blindly back translated by the second bilingual expert. Finally, to check the accuracy of the translated texts, I compared the second bilingual expert's transcripts with mine to find differences. We were thus able to negotiate and re-translate any discrepancies. For example, all of the participants mentioned two Chinese words '*中考(Zhong Kao)*' and '*高考(Gao Kao)*'. *Zhong Kao* was the High School Entrance Examination (similar to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)[12] test in the UK). *Gao Kao* was the University and College Entrance Examination. These exams were two of the most important in China. However, if translating word by word, the meaning would be lost. Since the expert was not familiar with the Chinese education system (see details in Appendix 18), she translated these as '*Middle (Zhong) Examination (Kao)*' and '*High (Gao) Examination (Kao)*'. Therefore, the second bilingual expert and I discussed and re-translated these terms appropriately.

After finishing transcribing and translating all the verbal data, I quickly browsed through the transcripts as a whole. I simultaneously reviewed the field notes I had taken in a separate notebook. I did so in order to begin making preliminary ideas for codes and themes that can describe the interview's contents. While repeatedly reading the transcripts, I added the comments, memos, and notes about the participants' facial expressions and body movements. As I explained earlier, I was doing this because the nonverbal messages could contribute to catch the essence of participants' meanings, then identify meaningful themes or patterns for a later ease of analysis (Jones and LeBaron, 2002; Cohen et al., 2018). Further to this, I highlighted these notes with blue markers. Since the semi-structured interviews were verbal, the participants were most likely to use common verbal pronouns, such as 'it', 'they', 'we', and 'you' in Chinese. As a Chinese researcher, this was unproblematic for me. However, English speakers would find it difficult to read and understand the meanings. These pronouns can confuse meanings. Although I realised this problem when interviewing my participants, it would have been inappropriate to disrupt them while they were sharing their ideas, and it would have been difficult to ask them to explain what each pronoun meant. Hence, I translated these pronouns directly, with comments next to them and highlighted the comments in green (see example).

[Example]

MuHan: Hmm… (looking at the ceiling) the teachers. It (stress) mainly comes from teachers.

4.2.2 Stage 2: Generating Codes

If the familiarisation was considered a 'loose route into engaging with the data' (Braun et al., 2018, p. 11), the code generating stage involved making sense of data deeply and rigorously. A code is 'a name or label that the researcher gives to a piece of text which contains an idea or a piece of information' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 668; Miles and Huberman, 1994). In analysing interview data, creating and developing meaningful codes is the initial step (Miles and Huberman, 1994; DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch, 2011). Codes created and developed from existing theories or concepts are known as theory- or concept-driven codes. Those which grow from research goals and questions are named structural-driven codes. Other codes that emerge from the raw data are known as data-driven codes. Theory- and structural-driven coding requires the constant reviewing and revising of theories, concepts, research aims, and questions; whereas data-driven coding requires repeated examination of the raw data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003; DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch, 2011). The most frequent codes in qualitative research are theory- or data-driven (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch, 2011). To develop meaningful codes, I conducted two coding cycles using a mix of concept-, structural-, and data-driven coding, and a picture coding method. I assigned the first coding cycle (hereafter, 'initial coding') to create potential codes. Then, data-driven coding (i.e., the main method) assigned tags or labels to raw data. Both King (1998) and Ritchie et al. (2013) use a similar approach in their qualitative research. They advocated building a list of potential codes first, then placing them to one side, and then examining the raw data to note detailed codes. Constructing potential and detailed codes to the descriptive data played an essential role in the later theme construction phase (King, 1998; Ritchie et al., 2013).

Additionally, with the aim of exploring students' learning experiences, I also chose the narrative analysis method due to its power to imbue experiences with meaning (Esin, 2011). Depending on this study's research questions and the interpretations of the narrative analytical models, Thematic Model (Riessman, 2008), which mainly analysed the content of narratives, was applied in this

project. In the first two stages of thematic analysis, familiarisation and coding, all the relevant sections of the transcripts that related to the research questions would be marked and selected to create a new file. This stage was called selection of the subtexts, which was also the first stage in the thematic model narrative analysis (Esin, 2011). For example, the research question involved formal learning experiences, all the subtexts about participants' different formal learning experiences would be marked for analysis. This stage of narrative analysis resulted in blocks of text from each student that related to the research questions. Also, I described the structure and context as well, because the ways, time and context in which stories were told shape the content (Esin, 2011). Narrative coding, that was to say, was also added to the two cycles coding. As I explained earlier, the participants were encouraged to narrate their learning experiences, and the ensuing narratives would be analysed. Experiences or events do not present themselves as narratives. It was through the experiences of the events that they become stories. This means that a narrative was a story with a clear, sequential order, which responds to the question, 'Then what happened?' Hence, while I was coding students' narrative experiences, I carefully went through the participant's experiences and made specific codes narratively (represented by different colours). I did so in order to develop a deep understanding of the main 'story line'. Codes were listed as 'Time', 'Place', 'Character (People)', 'Actions (Interactions)', and 'Consequences'.

a. First Cycle Coding: Initial Coding

The first step in developing initial coding was to create potential codes. These potential codes could be taken from the literature or interview topics (Gibbs, 2007). In light of this, I first constructed a collection of codes in a separate notebook without using them to code the collected data (see Figure 7). In determining the potential codes, I had a close reading of the research gap, aim, and questions that guided this study. Moreover, I had an overall reading of all 15 participants' transcripts and field notes that I had noted. Then, I generated potential codes from my literature review, research questions, and interview topics. These codes captured by concept- and structural-driven coding were the major codes to be focused on in the data analysis.

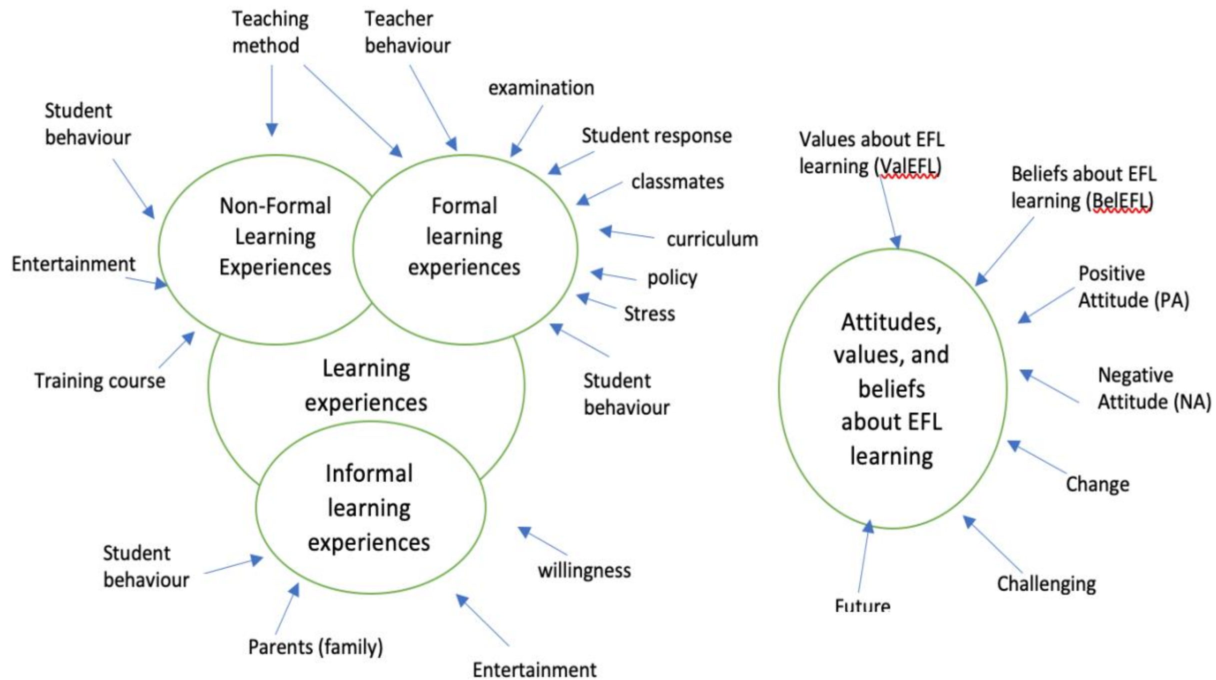


Figure 7: Codes created from the Initial Coding Process

In order to create 'conceptually meaningful, clear and concise' code labels (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch, 2011; p. 143), one must also develop initial codes to review and refine the transcript codes. Doing so required reviewing and revising the appropriateness of codes applied to the data. For example, I created a code 'perspective in EFL learning', which was based on the literature review and one of the specific research questions. I intended this code to describe and reflect participants' beliefs or thoughts about EFL learning. However, once I attempted to assign this code to the actual interview transcripts, I found that it needed rearranging into a more analytic code. For example, one participant, Yu, used to believe that English learning was independent of their ways of knowing and acting, but later grew to reject this idea. He realized that English learning was a process of transforming one's ways of knowing and acting, and learning was constrained and afforded by what a student sees, understands, and experiences. I realized that the reality behind the Yu's 'changed' thoughts was a core aspect to be analysed. Thus, it was necessary to examine the participant's different examples of conception-based ideas and practical thoughts about EFL learning. Accordingly, I refined the code to two sub-codes: 'conception-based perspective in EFL learning' and 'practical perspective in EFL learning'.

The last step in developing initial coding involved determining the utility and reliability. After finishing several interviews, I discovered that line and sentence level coding was not consistently meaningful. Indeed, a regular occurrence was that one code could not stand for one (or a few) sentences. On the other hand, it was occasionally impossible to label with only one code on the paragraph level, because a variety of meanings and concepts easily featured from the paragraph. Based on this, I thus decided to follow MacQueen et al. (2008)'s idea of coding on the level of meaning. They suggested that a code could be 'made up of a sentence or a paragraph as long as the essence was the same' (cited in DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch, 2011; p. 145). Although, the potential codes emerged before I could assign them to the data, I labelled a separate code when a sentence or paragraph could 'stand on its own' and convey meanings. This rule would also be applied to the implementation of data-driven codes.

b. Second Cycle Coding: Data-Driven Coding

First, while repeatedly reading the transcribed data, I highlighted the interesting paragraphs, and sentences. I occasionally placed initial comments and memos, which proved highly useful for developing a further coding, categorising, and analysing stage. In this step, I 'broke data apart and delineated concepts to stand for blocks of raw data' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; p. 195). For example, I first asked the participants to introduce themselves, which resulted in the first paragraph of the interview data being typically named 'participant's background'. During the interview, I encouraged the participants to chronologically recall their memories of learning English. I asked them all to share their learning experiences in nursery and primary school, followed by junior and high school, and lastly university. Accordingly, each interview transcript was in parts, each labelled as 'nursery', 'primary', 'junior', 'senior', and 'university'. Similar to the rule code on the level of meaning, applied in initial coding, separate codes were warranted when the unit of analysis could convey other meanings.

The next step involved developing open coding and analytical coding (i.e., data-driven). In the open coding step, I prioritised each transcript in order to glean more sophisticated and detailed data. I highlighted different codes with different colours. For example, students' narratives about their

positive attitudes, values and beliefs was coded separately as Positive Attitudes (PA), Positive Values (PV), Positive Beliefs (PB), respectively, and highlighted in pink. Students' negative attitudes, values and beliefs were coded as Negative Attitudes (NA), Negative Values (NV), Negative Beliefs (NB), respectively, and highlighted in blue. Moreover, students' formal experiences were coded as FE, non-formal experiences as NFE, and informal experiences as IE. All of these experiences were highlighted in yellow. Other codes, such as impacts, changes, and behaviours, were coded and highlighted in different colours. See an example listed below:

[Example]

Student S: Both English and Chinese are languages. I am confused. And a little bit sad.

Belief in langue learning | NA | NA

I don't know why we learn another language like we learn mathematics. I didn't learn

Effective Experience

Chinese like that (mathematics). But I have no choice, I had to learn.

Impact of Formal learning experience

Dörnyei (2007) stated that new insights can emerge through this open coding process. Indeed, during this process, I noticed the way in which a student described the traditional English language learning method in primary school. Regarding this method, students' negative feelings, such as 'boring', 'tired', and 'stressful' were labelled as 'NA (negative attitudes)', and I fit their descriptions under the code 'Traditional English Language Learning Method' (TELLM). These codes were important to capture because of their close relation to the initial codes recorded in the first coding cycle. After the open coding process was completed, I gradually refined the codes, and compared or merged them into analytical codes. For instance, the code 'NA – TELLM' was refined into 'Negative Impact of Traditional English Language Learning Method' (NITELLM). Moreover, after I finished open and analytical coding, abundant codes emerged from the data. The next step required reviewing and refining the codes. I joined similar codes and created a new one, and discarded the irrelevant codes. For example, there were two codes: Impact of Body Language (IBL) and Impact of Facial Expression (IFE). While cross reviewing, I found that IBL was more prevalent than IFE, and that these two were very close to each other. Therefore, I joined these two and created

a new code called Impact of Human Gesture (IHG). Whenever I finished reading and re-reading the written transcripts with reshaped codes, I drew and updated tables which helped to delineate pre-conceived themes and new emerging ideas (see the following Table 5: example of codes and themes). More extracts can be seen in the Appendix 12 From Codes to Themes (1st Round: Codes to Themes).

Clarified issues	Themes	Codes
Why learners are into English learning?	Drives/Needs (D/N)	1. to gain knowledge in western culture 2. to seek knowledge 3. to upgrade oneself 4. to improve English skills 5. to improve communication skills 6. self-satisfaction 7. to be competitive
Factors leading learners to learn English		8. compulsory requirements 9. personal interests 10. career enhancement 11. better for future 12. personal development 13. parents' pressure 14. other personal reasons
All the good Learning experiences with teachers	Positives Formal Learning Experiences (PF) a. teachers	15. glad to learn from foreign teachers 16. glad to speak with teachers in English 17. glad to do learning activities in classroom 18. provide good feedback 19. provide clear explanation 20. supportive and helpful
All the good experiences with fellow learners	b. fellow learners	21. supportive and helpful 22. active in discussion 23. active participation 24. supportive and helpful 25. Prompt responses 26. Useful and helpful
All the good Learning experiences with other		

Table 5: Example of Codes and Themes

4.2.3 Stage 3: Constructing and Identifying Themes

According to Braun et al. (2018), a theme does 'not emerge fully-formed from the data' (p. 12) but rather expresses important meanings regarding the coded data. The last step involved coding the data relating to my research aim and questions. This step, constructing and identifying themes, constructs a level of coded data. In order to move from text to interpretation, it was necessary to construct and identify clear, comprehensive, and concise themes. More importantly, a theme which

is to be determined should be consistent. The particular theme should be consistent to related codes, sub-themes, and research questions. As such, finding more instances of a theme did not necessarily mean that it would eventually come to be important for the analysis. Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2006) cautioned that, in qualitative research, there is no 'hard-and-fast answer' to the question of what ratio of data is needed to justify considering a theme. I used an example to decide if a theme was important or not, thus evidencing the importance of the researcher's judgement.

Once all the data in each transcript had been codified thematically, I collected the data identified by the same or similar codes together. Due to the nature of doctoral research, I aimed for deeper levels of critical and reflective analysis combined with rigour and transparency of the entire research process. Hence, I used manual analysis methods, such as devoting time to printing out transcripts on different coloured paper, cutting the thematic scripts out of the transcript paper, and displaying them in lines of groups. This manual way of arranging codes with similar ideas or deviant factors likely created several jigsaw puzzles, and enabled me to fully immerse myself in the data, and visualise a large quantity of it simultaneously. I was thus able to identify a group of pertinent concepts or themes. The themes emerged in the first-round coding, and others constructed in the second-round were further analysed within and across categorises. Through the identifying process, the themes merged into others or created new ones. Table 6 showed examples of how I grouped codes into key themes. More extracts can be seen in the Appendix 12 From Codes to Themes (2nd Round: Codes to Themes).

Major Codes	Minor Codes	Sub-Themes identified	Key Themes
• positive attitudes • freedom • with friends	• No pressure	Advantages	**Informal Activities**
• Difficulties in participating • Expensive • Limited time • Useless		Disadvantages	
• Impact of media (IM) • Impact of Travelling (IT) • Making friends • Positive attitudes	• Impact of making friends with foreigners	Impact of Informal activities	

Table 6: Example of Codification and Categorisation

When the second cycle coding of each transcript was completed, some sections of the narratives relating to the themes that relating to formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences were appreant. If the first stage of narrative analysis was to result in the excerpts or blocks of text that related to the research questions, the second stage involved deeper immersion in these excerpts or blocks (Esin, 2011). Excerpts were suggested to shorten where necessary to exclude unnecessary discussion, repetition, disgressions and examples shared by participants (Bamberg, 2012). However, the sequencing of events or experiences by the participants was preserved. These were all done on the new file in which all the relevant excerpts of the transcripts that related to the research questions were marked and selected. The page number for each excerpt was included to show where within each story an excerpt was located. As Esin (2011) suggested, adding page number to each excerpt was as further verification when a participant returned in his/her narrative to pick up an earlier point on a theme. After that, followed the Thematic Model, I was to group codes into sub-themes, define sub-themes and group these sub-themes into key themes. It meant that sub-themes or perspectives were identified and assigned to relevant key themes across the selected texts. This was as same as how I construct and identify themes within the thematic network. In sum, the narrative content analysed in each thematic model could be used to describe and present the meanings of the narratives.

4.2.4 Stage 4: Reviewing Themes

After building and ascribing meaning to sub- and key themes, reviewing and defining the latter was particularly important due to their not working well consistently. Thus, I conducted a cross-theme analysis so as to 'build a general explanation' that fit each of individual interview despite their differences (Yin, 2003; p. 121). As Schofield (1990; cited in Duff, 2008, p. 177) asserted, 'a finding emerging from the study of several very heterogeneous sites would be more robust and thus more likely to be useful in understanding various other sites than one emerging from the study of several very similar sites.' In this study, each participant had contextual variables and a diverse English learning background. Therefore, a cross-theme analysis was particularly valuable for exploring the particular differences or similarities between the participants. For example, while cross reviewing, I found that the theme 'learners' formal learning experiences', emerged after the first-round coding cycle, overlapped with 'learning experiences in class', which was itself constructed after the second-round. Thus, I again returned to the relevant codes and categorised them into different groups, such as learning experiences with teachers, learning experiences with parents, and learning experiences with classmates. This review process enabled me to develop an in-depth understanding of the data. These themes – and even the pre-conceived answers – addressed the research questions. As Braun et al. (2018) stated, the purpose of revising themes was to develop an in-depth understanding of the 'central organizing concept', 'boundaries of each theme', and 'the overall theme story' (p. 14). In sum, the general stages of the thematic data analysis analysis involved implying initial codes, reshaped codes, and sub-themes from the collected data. These codes and sub-themes derived from the constant modifications and comparisons were interpreted and generated to a final set of key themes. More details about grouping codes to sub- and key themes will be further illustrated in the following section.

In addition, as I explained in the first stage of narrative analysis, all the relevant excerpts of the transcripts that related to the research questions would be marked and selected to create a new file. Each excerpt which was relevant to a same theme would be listed together. Creating this new file made it easier for me to look for commonalities and differences between each participant in relation to each theme. Looking for commonalities and differences was the third stage of narrative analysis. This stage allowed me to review and classify each theme according to the way each participant

represented the theme in their stories. The three stages of narrative analysis and the Thematic Model applied in this study lead me to see, construct, explore, and investigate multiple layers of meanings within stories and experiences. Narrative analysis, therefore, perceived narratives as a means of exploring and describing linear realities or series of events. Bruner (2004) stated that 'a narrative analysis reports personal experiences or observations and brings fresh insights to often familiar situations' (Bruner, 2004, p. 702). He indicated that a narrative analysis was interpretive, but functions as more than a method for the researcher to explore how people remembered, structured, and storied their experiences. Many other researchers had also emphasised that a narrative analysis could provide the researcher with useful tools for understanding the complexity of people's lives and stories (Smeyers and Verhesschen, 2001; Esin, 2011; Bamberg, 2012).

4.3 Constructing a Thematic Network

Thematic analyses were highly flexible as they permit the researcher to determine themes in a number of ways (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To construct themes for this study, I tried to identify links between the central nature of a potential theme and one (or more) of the research questions. Hence, I constructed a specific thematic network for this study. A thematic network was the analytic tool used in the analysis process, not the analysis itself (Attride-Stiring, 2001), and supported me in remaining consistent when determining the themes. The thematic network for this study was built in the form of a web-like structure which was principally organised to present the procedures of going from texts to interpretations. I followed Attride-Stiring's (2001) ideas of constructing a thematic network:

a. *Identify Major and Minor Codes in the Text:*

Major and minor codes were simple phrases or lowest-order statements related to the research questions. While they can be found in the data, they cannot represent the whole text (or even a part of) the text on their own. The major codes in this study were those closely linked to one or more of the research questions, or those which frequently appeared within the data. The minor codes were those present in relatively little of the data set, but were also highly important for the later analysis phase. In order for codes to be intelligible beyond their immediate meanings, they must

be read within the context of other codes. Together, these relative codes could represent a sub-theme.

b. Group Codes Together into Sub-Themes:

When the main ideas proposed by major and minor codes had been grouped, these can constitute a basic code. A sub-theme was a cluster of significations that summarise the assumptions of a group of codes. These sub-themes then represented larger shared ideas or meanings. The group of sub-themes then constituted a key theme.

c. Group Sub-Themes into Key Themes:

Grouping sub-themes into key themes in a concise form represent the concluding ideas which revealed an interpretation of the text. A key theme (abstracted from data) was to summarise and make sense of clusters of sub-themes and codes. Thus, a key theme was like a conclusion that helps readers understand the data and texts within a given analysis. I found 11 emerged key themes:

1. Motivation;
2. The Traditional Learning Method;
3. Key Relationship;
4. Formal Learning Locations
5. Formal Activities;
6. Other personal Relationships (Contact other than formal teachers)
7. Non-Formal Learning Locations;
8. Non-formal Activities;
9. Technology;
10. Informal Learning Environment;
11. Social Media;

Figure 8 illustrated in the following the thematic network which shows the relationship between codes, sub-themes, and key themes. Although this network is neither the analysis itself nor the

findings, it served as an illustrative tool in interpreting collected data, and was intended to aid the readers' understanding. This web-like map represented the structure of the thematic network, which was developed by starting from the codes, flowing towards sub-themes, and finally to key themes. I would use these key themes to demonstrate the findings in the next two findings chapters.

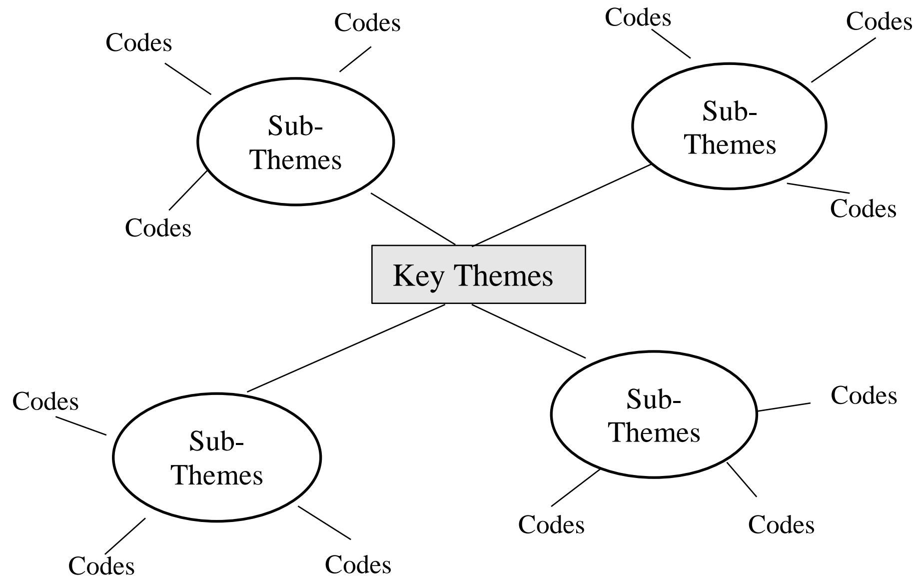


Figure 8: Structure of Thematic Network
Source: Adapted from Attride-Stiring (2001, p. 388)

Taking the key theme 'Motivation' as an example, it constitutes one thematic network (see Figure 9) comprising two sub-themes:

1. Intrinsic Motivation;
2. Extrinsic Motivation.

These two sub-themes are comprised of eight major codes and four minor codes. The following major codes are intrinsic motivation codes (1–5), and extrinsic motivation codes (6–8):

1. Gain Knowledge (GK);
2. Personal Development (PD);
3. Career Enhancement (CE);

4. Personal Interests (PI);
5. Improve English (IE);
6. Parents Requirements (PR);
7. Course Requirements (CourseR);
8. Career Requirements (CR).

The minor codes include intrinsic motivation codes (1–2), and extrinsic motivation codes (3–4):

1. Self-satisfaction (Ss);
2. Interested in Western Culture (IWC);
3. Teachers' Pressure (TP);
4. Classmates' Pressure (CP).

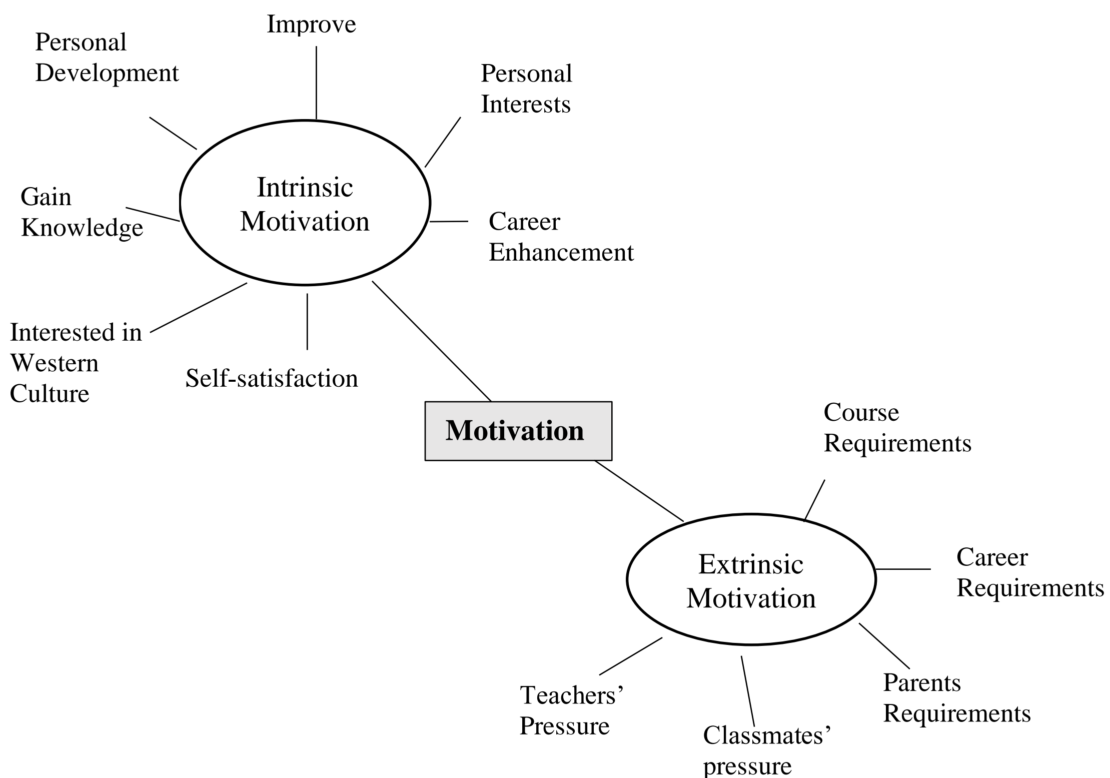


Figure 9: Example of the Thematic Network (Key Theme 'Motivation')

Source: Adapted from Attride-Stiring (2001, p. 388)

The above example had been explored in detail. This network enabled interpretations to emerge from transcripts, and clearly showed a considerable analytic leap – one in which the process of interpretating shifted to a higher level from texts to abstraction.

4.4 Explore within the Visual Texts

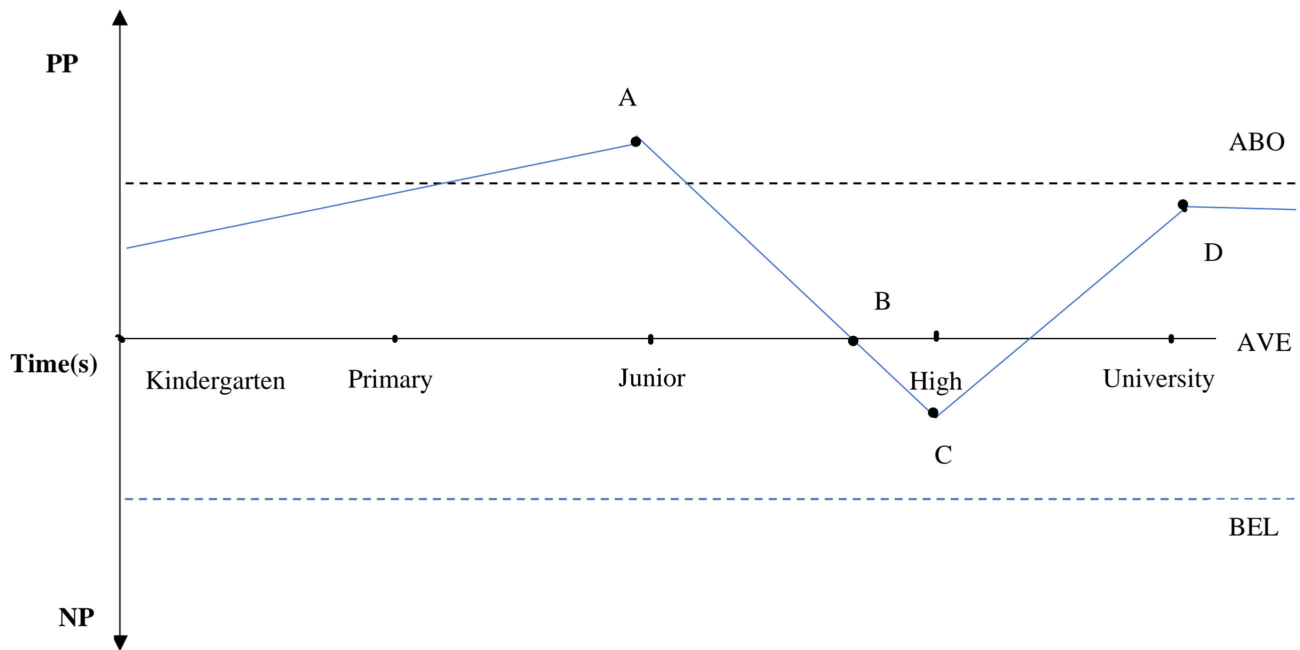
As I explained in the Introduction Chapter, my own previous learning experience led me to conduct this research. While planning this research project, an intellectual problem formulated. This study required participants to narrate their prior learning experiences in nursery, primary, junior, and high school, and then at university. Hence, how to optimally support participants in recalling their memories and sharing their most valuable learning stories was one of the main difficulties. Visual images or named as non-verbal texts, like print- or screen-based art work, drawings, or graphs are becoming increasingly multimodal paths to answer research questions, especially in qualitative research (Machin, 2007; Mannay, 2016; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2017). I, thus, used both non-verbal and verbal texts to collect and analyse data.

Goodman (1996) and Van Leeuwen & Jewitt (2001) already found it difficult to find a single study using solely verbal English. To this direction, a 2D-line graph (see Figure 10: Example of 2D Line Graph on page 123) drawing activity, offered a usable description of participants' critical issues and moments in their learning journeys. After transcribing and translating the data, I created two charts: the weighting chart (see Table 8 on page 124) and the colourful tree map (Figure 12 on page 127). These two charts showed students' different experiences weighted from their own perceptions. I moved back and forth between the interview contents and these visual data to interpret and represent the findings. With these created line graphs and charts, simply looking was insufficient. Banks (2001) argued that, with created graphs, researchers cannot simply view them, but must instead bring the knowledge to bear upon the images. Simply put, visual texts were suggested to closely linked to knowledge or research contents. Hence, the visual texts in this study, were closely related to the first interview contents, and were also the topics discussed in the second interview.

4.4.1 Explore within The Line Graph:

I arranged the drawing activity at the end of first interview. The participants and I discussed the drawings in detail in the second interview. I designed the graph to probe for more details about learners' perceptions of English learning through their narrative experiences, especially through the special points and crucial issues the participants made in their lines. I considered each line graph an object. The participant's drawing was named as a 'Self-Reported Perceptions Trajectory'. These line graphs were intended to summarise the relation between participants' attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning, and their affective learning experiences.

According to Sultana's (2003, 2008, 2009) Longitudinal Qualitative Data Summary Matrix (LQDSM), the learners' narratives to their self-reported perceptions were adapted and organised into the matrix. The Y Axis referred to participants' perceptions about EFL learning, while the X axis refers to the time spent learning English (i.e., from nursery school to university). I simultaneously employed magnitude coding to categorise their self-reported perceptions into three zones: the above average zone (ABO), the average zone (AVE), and the below average zone (BEL). By referring to the magnitude coding, each figure had three horizontal lines. I labelled the dashed line from the top ABO (high positive attitude), the middle solid line AVE (expectational attitudes), and the bottom dashed line as BEL (negative attitudes). Five dots were evenly distributed on AVE solid line, which referred to different timescales. I encouraged the students to make their own polygonal lines in the same figure on a notebook. According to their drawings, the self-reported perceptions trajectories over time could be created with colourised polygonal lines. These lines travelled between the ABO, AVE, and BEL lines (see Figure 10). Accordingly, the students' self-reported perceptions were distributed to the relevant locations. In findings chapters, I will discuss the special changing points in participants' drawings with their narratives.



Y Axis: Positive Perceptions (PP)/Negative Perceptions (NP)

X Axis: Time (s)

ABO: Above Average

AVE: Average

BEL: Below Average

Figure 10: Example of 2D Line Graph

4.4.2 Creating a Weighting Chart

Before I directed the reader to the collected learning experiences, it would be worth my clarifying a few words and phrases here. In this section, I would draw upon such words and phrases as 'Heavy (H)', 'Moderate (M)', 'Light (L)', and 'configurations of …'. I used the terms H, M, and L as a principle to describe the weight of learning experiences on students' attitudes, values and beliefs. I followed Ludhra (2015) in using the concept of 'weighting', as it can provide narratives with a 'weighted continuum' for explaining weighting of education in participants' lives (p. 110). I created Figure 11 (below) in order to illustrate the concept of weighting through an imaginary continuum. It provided the flexibility to discuss the students' narratives more fluidly:

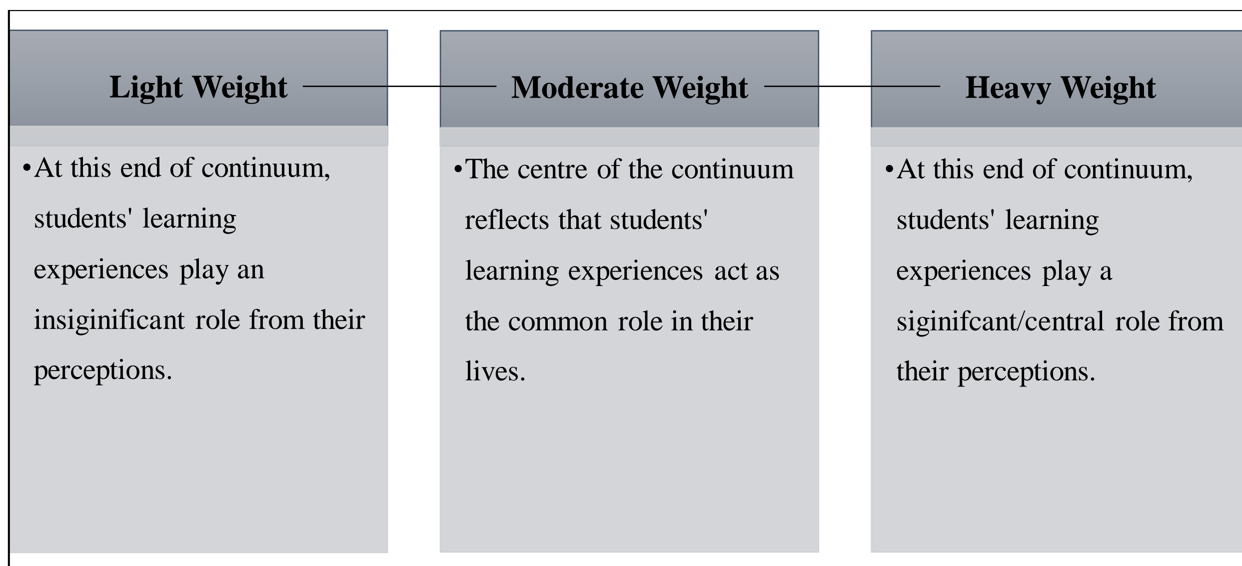


Figure 11: A Weighted Continuum

The connecting thread across all 15 students was the weighting of their previous learning experiences in their English learning journeys. Examining the weight of prior learning experiences involved investigating students' perceptions of these experiences' roles. Rather than talking in terms of the role of students' learning experiences, it would be both more accurate and (in terms of professional development) meaningful to talk of the roles of learning experiences. I drew upon (and developed on) Kaye's (2002) phrase 'scholars and practitioners see experience as central' to learning (p. 137). I aligned the central role of learning experience with the heavy weight of learning experience in students' lives. Following this line of thinking, the different perceptions of the roles of experiences can also be configured between light to heavy (L–H). Hence, I aligned 'central' role with 'heavily-weighted (H)', 'common role' with 'moderately-weighted (M)', and 'insignificant role' with 'lightly-weighted (L)'. In so doing, I thus presented students' learning experiences on their attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. By way of an example, Muhan's narrative learning experience in junior school revealed that his poor relationship with his English teacher was a key hinderance to his learning. He reported feeling 'frustrated' during (and by) English classes. From his responses, and based on my knowledge of the participant Muhan and the analysis of his narratives, I assigned him as 'H' in relation to the impacts of the teacher–student relationship in his attitudes towards English learning.

The phrase ‘configurations of …’ was mostly used in ‘configurations of English learning attitudes, values and beliefs’. The phrase helped me more fluidly present students’ multidimensional and relational nature of their attitudes, values and beliefs. I created a table titled ‘Configurations of Attitudes, Values and Beliefs (see below) to present a profile of each participant’s configuration of their changed attitudes, values and beliefs in relation to their learning experiences. I followed this table using the aforementioned L–H principle. This enabled me to present the weight of learning experiences in students’ lives through their own perspectives. This table was also followed by participants’ narrative learning experiences with the eight key emergent themes. I constructed an initial draw of the table following the first round of interviews (see Table 7), and made amendments after the second. For example, ChongYang had not mentioned any experiences with formal learning locations. Hence, I marked a ‘/’ sign next to the key theme ‘Formal Learning Locations’. For my purposes, whether ChongYang had not experienced any relations with formal learning locations or he had forgotten to narrate this in the first interview was insufficiently clear. To ensure the accuracy of the collected data from the first interview, I prepared more related semi-structured questions for the second. After the second interview, I changed the sign to ‘L’ because ChongYang directly spoke of his ideas about his experiences in different formal learning locations. If the participants made no mention of experiences related to the specific topics in both interviews, I would retain the ‘/’ sign. Hence, I had to update the table after the second round of interviews (see Table 8, changes in yellow) which was the table mostly used in the analysis.

	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
Formal Learning	The Traditional Learning Method	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
	Key relationships	M	M	M	M	L	M	L	H	H	M	M	H	L	H	M
	Formal Learning Locations	L	/	M	M	/	M	/	M	M	/	M	L	M	M	M
	Formal Activities	H	M	L	/	/	M	L	L	H	M	L	M	L	M	M
Non-Formal Learning	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
	Other Personal Relationship (Teachers in institutions/tutors/ families/friends)	L	L	M	L	L	L	L	/	M	M	L	H	/	M	M
	Non-Formal Learning Locations	/	/	L	/	/	/	/	M	H	M	/	H	H	/	/
	Non-Formal Activities	M	/	H	/	/	/	M	H	H	M	/	H	/	H	H
	Technology	H	M	H	M	M	H	M	L	M	L	M	M	M	L	L
Informal Learning	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
	Informal Learning Environment	L	/	/	L	/	/	/	H	/	M	/	/	H	M	M
	Social Media	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	H	H	M	L	M	M	M	M

Table 7: Weighting Chart (created after the first phase of interviews)

	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
Formal Learning	The Traditional Learning Method	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
	Key Relationships	M	M	M	M	L	M	L	H	H	M	M	H	L	H	M
	Formal Learning Locations	L	L	M	M	L	M	L	M	M	L	M	L	M	M	M
	Formal Activities	H	M	L	/	/	M	L	L	H	M	L	M	L	M	M
Non-Formal Learning	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
	Other Personal Relationship (Teachers in institutions/tutors/ families/friends)	L	L	M	L	L	L	L	/	M	M	L	H	/	M	M
	Non-Formal Learning Locations	/	/	L	/	/	/	/	M	H	M	/	H	H	/	/
	Non-Formal Activities	M	/	H	/	L	L	M	H	H	M	L	H	L	H	H
	Technology	H	M	H	M	M	H	M	L	M	L	M	M	M	L	L
Informal Learning	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
	Informal Learning Environment	L	L	L	L	/	/	/	H	/	M	L	L	H	M	M
	Social Media	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	H	H	M	L	M	M	M	M

Table 8: Weighting Chart (created after the second phase of interviews)

Key Words (in both tables):

Attitudes, Values and Beliefs about English Learning (AVBE)

Heavy Weight (H)

Moderate Weight (M)

Light Weight (L)

Not Mentioned (/)

4.4.3 Creating A Colourful Tree-Map

Besides the weighting chart, I used a colourful tree map to show the different weight of various learning experiences in students' lives. Figure 12 listed in the following provided Dan's tree map as an example.

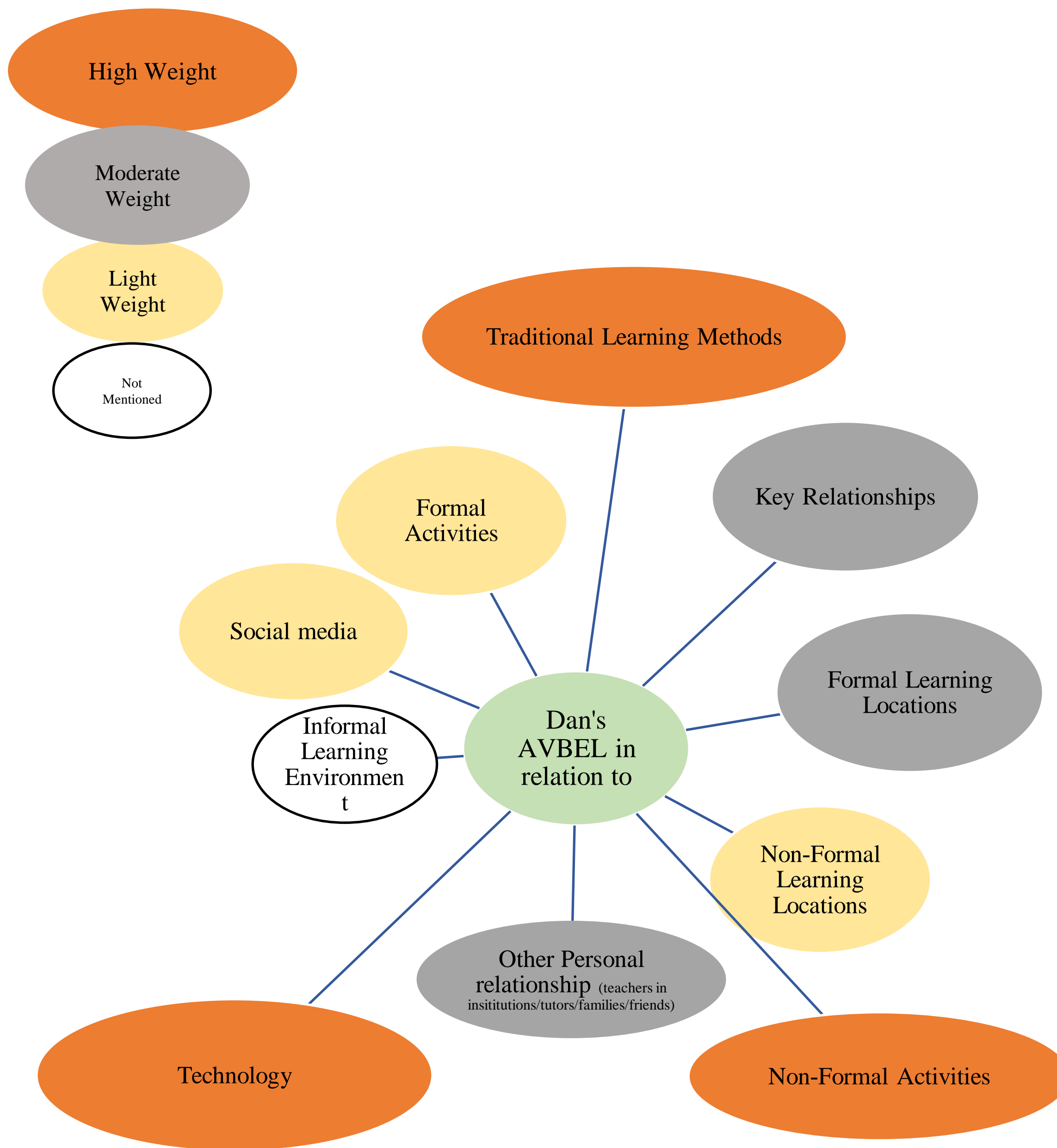


Figure 12: Example of Tree Map (The Weight of Dan's Different Learning Experiences)

The weighting chart was intended to measure similar experiences different weights in students' perceptions. However, the tree map sought to present different weights of different experiences in each student's life. The map placed more emphasis on comparing and contrasting different experiences within different situations. The orange circle represented high weight, the grey circle

showed moderate weight, the yellow circle meant light weight, and the white circle was 'Not Mentioned'.

4.5 Summary

Regarding the data analysis procedures and methods, I explained the thematic analysis process and how I constructed and explored within the thematic network. In addition, I explained why and how the visual data would be analysed. The visual texts in this study mainly referred to the participant's self-made line graph, and two charts, which were constructed based on participants' narratives. I designed the line graph to show 'when' students' attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning changed, 'what' made these changes, and 'why' they occurred. One chart was named 'the weighting chart' and showed where students place their different language development experiences from their own viewpoints. The other chart was 'the tree-map', which is similar to the weighting chart. The difference between these two was that the weighting chart illustrated the different roles of similar experiences in different student's lives, whereas the colourful tree-map presented the different weights of different experiences in each student's life. All the visual data would be further discussed and presented in the Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. These two chapters would present the findings and the discussion in terms of the impacts of the students prior learning experiences, the interactional relationships between students' previous learning experiences and their attitudes, values and beliefs, and the key factors which determined the interactional relationships.

Chapter 5 Analysis, Discussion and Findings: Formal Learning

5.1 Introduction

To investigate how Chinese students' learning experiences influence their attitudes, values and beliefs in English learning, a qualitative approach was used and this decision had been explained in Chapter 3. The evidence from data collected from each students' two phases of interviews provided rich and nuanced insight into students' learning stories and emphasised their voices. In this chapter, the findings are given and discussed according to each specific research question. The data related to research questions are analysed in multiple ways, including the thematic analysis approach and visual data analysis method. The thematic analysis approach is used as the main analysis method—to examine the data from students' interviews (specifically, the impacts of students' learning experiences on their attitudes, values and beliefs), and additionally the visual data analysis method (line graph and tree-map analysis) is used to further analyse the data collected from students' self-made graphs. Through their self-made line graphs and tree-maps, the role and contributions of learning experiences in students' lives from their perceptions are presented. In this chapter, I will present the findings from students' formal learning narratives, because formal learning is the main learning type in China. Other findings relating to students' non-formal and informal learning experiences will be illustrated in Chapter 6 respectively. The findings in this chapter answer the research questions in relation to the formal learning, while the findings in next chapters answer the research questions in relation to non-formal and informal learning.

This chapter will discuss my interpretation of students' narratives and contextualise these with the formal learning literature. First, the key findings - the impacts of students' formal learning experiences on their attitudes, values and beliefs - are discussed and presented through four key themes: The Traditional Learning Method (section 5.2); Key Relationships (section 5.3); Formal Learning Locations (section 5.4); Formal Activities (section 5.5). Describing and discussing the four key themes aims to answer the first three specific research questions (SRQs):

SRQ 1: What are Chinese undergraduates' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning (formally)?

SRQ 2: What are students' salient experiences of learning English (formally)?

SRQ 3: How do students see the respective roles and contributions of (formal) learning experiences in their English language development?

In answering these three specific research questions, students began to articulate their formal learning experiences and language learning attitudes, values and beliefs. Their reflections enabled to bring their attentions on the relationships between students' previous experiences and their attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. Then, section 5.6 explores how students' attitudes, values and beliefs shifted through their reflections. This section also relates to the fourth research question:

SRQ 4: How do students explain any influences of (formal) learning experiences on their attitudes, values and beliefs about learning English?

Finally, this chapter ends with a conclusion of findings interpreted in this chapter.

5.2 The Traditional Learning Method

During the first interview, all the participants spent the most time sharing with me their formal learning experiences in relation to teachers, classmates, and families. The thematic network (Figure 13) of the key theme *'The Traditional Learning Method'* shows an abundance of related codes and sub-themes emerging from participants' narratives. It could be inferred that students had various learning experiences with the traditional learning method. The diagram below (see Figure 13) is to summarise the network for Key Theme *'The Traditional Learning Method'*. This thematic network illustrates concisely the key theme on which the traditional learning method was anchored on four sub-themes: rote learning, lack of practicing speaking English, examination-oriented, and impacts of Confucian culture. Rote learning, lack of practicing speaking English and examination-oriented are the three characteristics of the traditional learning method. The theme: impacts of Confucian culture generates all the codes that students mentioned about the influences from the Chinese

Confucian culture. The network in the following figure gives a clear picture of the key themes that emerge in the description of the network as the four sub-themes and various codes work inward and outward. From the illustration, one will be able to see how the four sub-themes had an impact on students' English language learning development. This table has been illustrated as an example. The rest of the chapter will not list other thematic networks which follow the same pattern of discussion as has been adopted for the *'the traditional learning method'* theme.

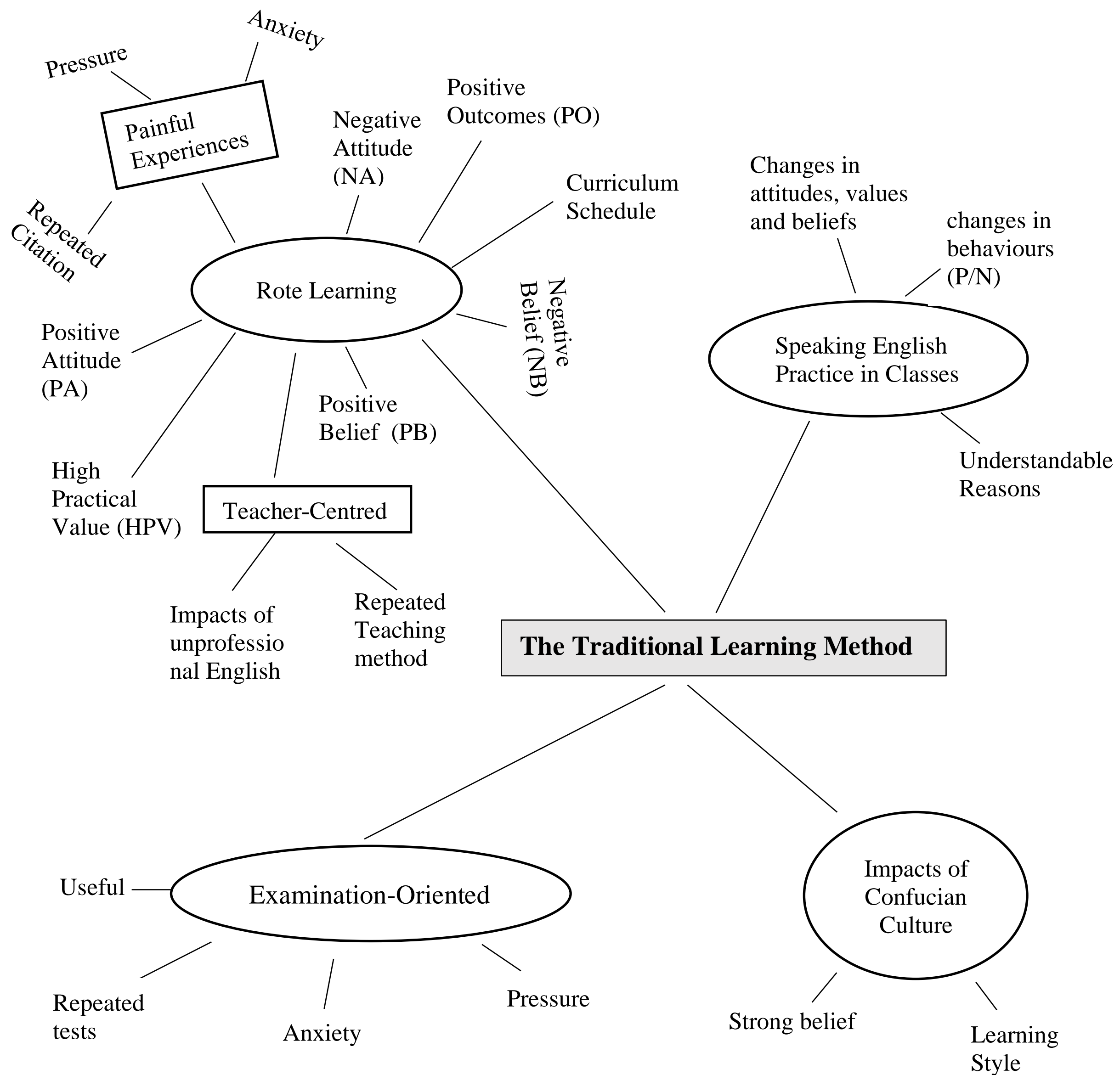


Figure 13: Thematic Network of 'the Traditional Learning Method'

Source: Adapted from Attride-Stiring 2001, p. 388

As a reminder, it is important to return to the definition of the traditional learning method within the Chinese context. As I discussed in the literature review, the traditional learning method refers to a traditional teacher-dominated, knowledge-based transmission mode and examination-oriented education learning approach in China (Zheng, 2015). It is the traditional formal learning method, which is also known as 'rote learning'. The Chinese traditional formal learning method is influenced by Confucian heritage culture. Students' experiences discussed in this section mainly occurred within formal learning settings (Schugurensky, 2000). These experiences mainly happened in formal learning spaces, and related to learning materials and implemented academic curriculum. These various narratives, students' specific experiences with teachers, parents, siblings and classmates, will be introduced and discussed separately in the following section. The weighting chart and tree-maps (presented below) were used to analyse and present students' attitudes, values and beliefs in relation to their different learning experiences.

To present the different roles of various learning experiences on their attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning, a concept of 'weighting', developed from Ludhra's (2015) weighting model, applied in this project. In Ludhra's (2015) study, she used the concept of weighting to present the heavy weighting of education in her participants lives. I drew on and developed Ludhra's (2015) phrases: 'wear, invest in or consume lightly', 'a mid-way point', and 'wear, invest in, or consume heavily' (p. 110). I aligned 'central' role with 'heavily weighted (H)', 'common role' with 'moderately weighted (M)', and 'insignificant role' with 'lightly weighted (L)' to present the different 'weights' of students' various learning experiences. Following this line of thinking, the roles of students' learning experiences in their attitudes, values and beliefs could also be configured in light to heavy or insignificant to central ways. The chart below (Table 9: Weighting of *'the Traditional Learning Method'*) related to all kinds of learning, encapsulating the formal, non-formal and informal learning. The part I highlighted was related to formal learning which was relevant to this section. The yellow part clearly showed that the traditional learning method was weighted heavily in all of the students' lives.

	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
Formal Learning	The Traditional Learning Method	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
	Key Relationships	M	M	M	M	L	M	L	H	H	M	M	H	L	H	M
	Formal Learning Locations	L	L	M	M	L	M	L	M	M	L	M	L	M	M	M
	Formal Activities	H	M	L	/	/	M	L	L	H	M	L	M	L	M	M
Non-Formal Learning	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
	Other Personal Relationship (Teachers in institutions/tutors/ families/friends)	L	L	M	L	L	L	L	/	M	M	L	H	/	M	M
	Non-Formal Learning Locations	/	/	L	/	/	/	/	M	H	M	/	H	H	/	/
	Non-Formal Activities	M	/	H	/	L	L	M	H	H	M	L	H	L	H	H
	Technology	H	M	H	M	M	H	M	L	M	L	M	M	M	L	L
Informal Learning	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
	Informal Learning Environment	L	L	L	L	/	/	/	H	/	M	L	L	H	M	M
	Social Media	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	H	H	M	L	M	M	M	M

Key Words:
Attitudes, Values and Beliefs about English Learning (AVBE)
Heavy Weight (H)
Moderate Weight (M)
Light Weight (L)
Not Mentioned (/)

Table 9: Weighting of *the Traditional Learning Method'*

Within the weighting chart, I assigned a colourful tree-map to each student to represent the different weights of learning experiences individually. I have included a tree-map, which is related to formal learning, as examples below (see figure 14). The font of the theme *"traditional learning method"* is bold and italic to show that this student's traditional learning experiences were perceived as the most effective learning experiences compared to other formal learning experiences in this student's life.

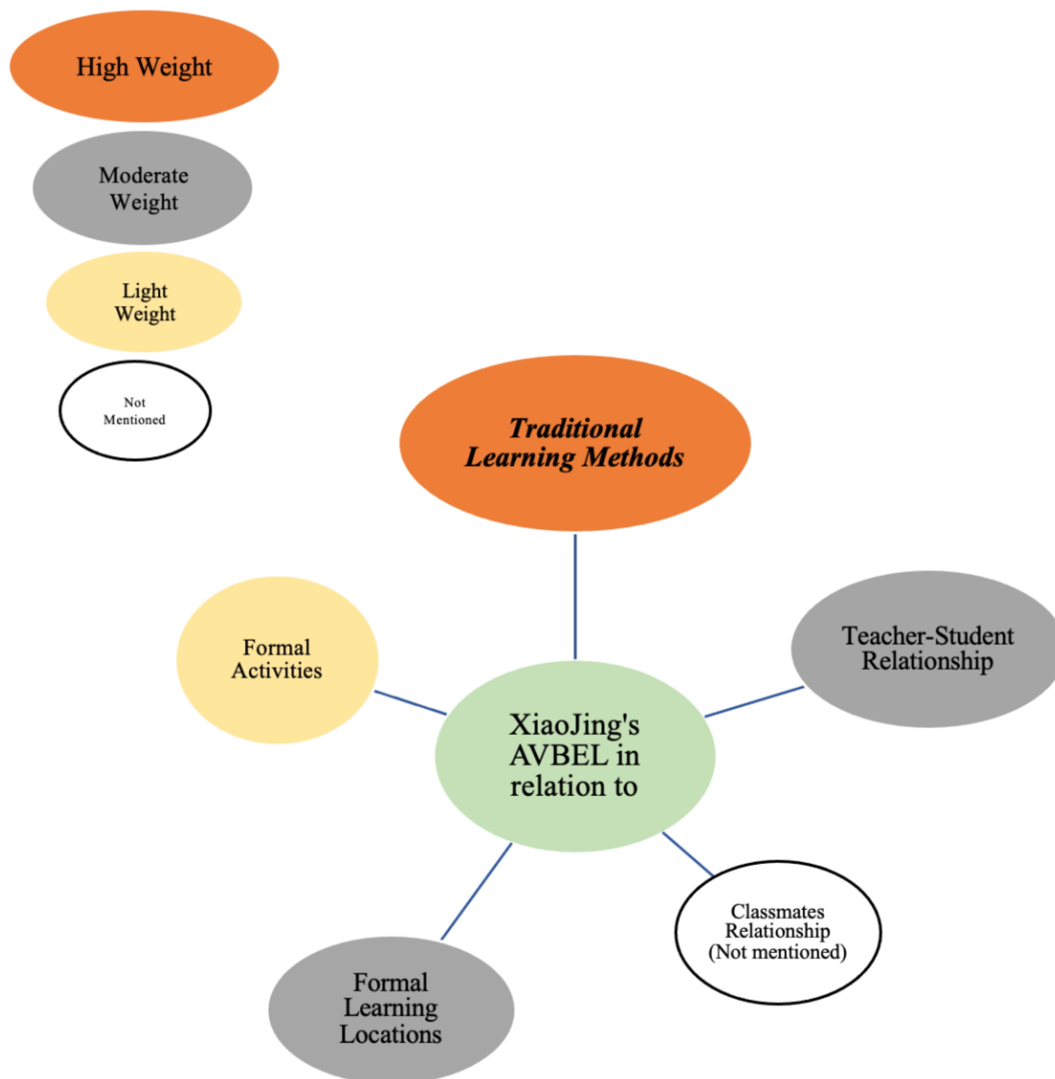


Figure 14: XiaoJing's Tree-Map: The Weight of Different Learning Experiences

Fourteen students showed negative attitudes towards traditional English learning, whereas only SiJia showed a positive attitude. From students' narratives, there was no doubt that all of the students understood the importance of learning English, particularly from having formal English courses in school. Although, the significant place of formal English learning in the Chinese education system is highlighted by scholars (Qi, 2016; Wen, 2018), some participants showed a strong sense of pressure—often couched in the traditional English learning method. Here, XiaoJing, a final year Chinese undergraduate student, said:

> *'There is no doubt that English is very important. English is like a second language. It is necessary to take English course in schools. But, to acquire a language is to practice this language, right? So sad that I don't have chances to practice. My parents tell me that I only need to finish homework. I don't understand why we learn English like learning a science subject there (in schools). There is too much pressure from parents and teachers, too much pressure from homework, and too much pressure from examinations. Too tired of that! The English teaching and learning method should be changed.' (XiaoJing)*

Jing's narrative provided a valuable backdrop to the figure showed above (Figure 14), as it raises the importance of learning English and having formal English classes. More importantly, this narrative extract captured an interesting reality: XiaoJing held a positive attitude towards the importance of English study; however, she showed her concerns about English learning in Chinese schools. Put it simply, although XiaoJing understood the importance of learning English, she was frustrated and disappointed about how she learned English in schools. Not only XiaoJing, there were varied pressures directly discussed by other participants, such as the ineffective rote learning approach, lack of practising speaking English and having frequent examinations. Based on students' concerns, careful consideration was given to three kinds of pressures exerted by the traditional learning method.

Before looking into the three issues, it is important to briefly explain the Chinese educational system here as a reminder (see Appendix 18: The Years of Schooling in China), because the Chinese educational system is different to education system in western countries. According to the

Article 17 of the Education Law of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese traditional education system includes four stages: preschool education, primary education, secondary education and higher education (Ministry of Education, 2020). Preschool education, also known as early childhood education refers to nurseries (one to three years old), and kindergarten (three to six years old). Usually the last year (five to six years old) in kindergarten, children would have preschool classes attached to primary schools. It means that children enter primary schools when they are six or seven years old. Students spend six years studying in primary schools. After the six years' primary education, students need to spend another six years in secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2020). There are two stages in the secondary education: junior high school, which is usually called junior school, and senior high school, which is known as high school. Students spend three years in junior schools (year 12/13 to year 14/15), and another three years in high schools (year 15/16 to year 17/18). Students graduated from high schools could decide to have higher education. Usually, students spend four years in higher education (year 18/19 to year 22/23) in China (Ministry of Education, 2020). Sometimes, the length of study may differ. More specific explanations are presented in the introduction chapter.

5.2.1. Ineffective Rote Learning Approach

From students' narratives, it was found that except for SiJia, fourteen students questioned the effectiveness of the rote learning approach. In many countries, there has been an emphasis on exploring the effectiveness of educational systems and the academic curriculums (Watkins, Carnell, & Lodge, 2007). However, the phrase 'effective learning approach' discussed in this section is to gauge the effectiveness of how to learn. As Watkins, Carnell, and Lodge's (2007) defined, effective learning is 'the monitoring and review of the effectiveness of approaches and strategies for the goals and context (p. 19). This section is mainly a discussion about the effectiveness of Chinese traditional learning approach: rote learning. The rote learning approach referred to a Chinese traditional teacher-dominated, knowledge-based transmission mode, quantity-oriented education method. Students' narratives, which will be cited directly in the rest of the thesis, are not going to show the coding I made in the analysing stage. A more detailed coded transcript will be given in Appendix 11, which presents a sample of coded transcripts. In describing how to learn English, students said:

'…to recite English words, sentences, and grammar rules just like reciting the mathematics multiplication table'. (Ying)

'I am tired of the way we learn English there (in junior school).' (MuHan)

'The way how we learn English is ineffective.' (MeiQi)

'Follow the teacher, remember the words and grammar rules, and do a lot of homework does not work for me.' (YuNong)

One common issue raised by students was why they learned English like learning a mathematics course. MuHan, who was '*tired of*' the traditional English learning approach showed negative attitudes towards the traditional learning method. Other students, who felt *'ineffective' (MeiQi) and 'not work for me' (YuNong),* revealed the low practical values of the traditional English learning method in their minds. Additionally, compared to the way of learning mathematics, these four students directly pointed out that the teacher-centred and knowledge-based learning method did not fit in an EFL class during interviews. Even MeiQi and YuNong showed a strong belief that learning English should not be as same as learning mathematics. That was to say students' beliefs closely connected to their learning experiences whereas these learning experiences had impacts on their attitudes and values in English learning. Similar to them, Sihan, held a belief that learning English should be like learning Chinese.

'Both English and Chinese are languages. I am confused. And a little bit sad. I don't know why we learn another language like we learn mathematics. I didn't learn Chinese like that (mathematics). But I have no choice, I had to learn.' (SiHan)

SiHan believed that the way of learning English should be as same as how she developed her native language, Chinese. In other words, she thought of English as a language like Chinese, not a subject like mathematics. However, SiHan found that the way of learning English traditionally which was different to the way of learning Chinese was more like learning mathematics. In SiHan's mind,

English study was to master this language rather than acquiring knowledge. It was different to what Schugurensky (2000) found about EFL learning in China. As Schugurensky (2000) stated, English study in China was through instruction that focused on acquiring knowledge rather than mastering a language. Her formal English learning experiences which differed to her belief in a language study caused her negative feelings. Unfortunately, these formal English learning experiences subjected her to unnecessary pressure. She reported that she '*had to'* learn English, like taking other compulsory courses. Specifically, SiHan's learning experiences did work as a bridge, closely connecting her '*confused'* and '*a little bit sad'* feelings and her passive learning actions (Dewey, 1953, 2007). MuHan, MeiQi, YuNong and SiHan, all reported their rote learning experiences in junior and High schools. They did not narrate their learning experiences in kindergarten and primary schools as painful learning experiences. One of the reasons was that they could not retell what and how they thought so many years ago. The other reason was the teaching and learning styles changed in junior and high schools which were different to styles in primary school. Students, like MuHan, behaved totally differently in his English studies in primary school than in junior school. In primary school, MuHan said:

> *'I could not remember very clearly. But I know we learned while we were playing. It was full of fun. Especially in the first three years.'*

In junior school, he narrated:

> *'I could remember that I had to wake up early in the morning, because we had a reading session around 7:30. It meant that I had to be there before 7:15. Otherwise, I would get a report saying that I was bad at attendance. You know the reading session, right? Do you think it worked for us? [Muhan didn't wait for me to answer. He continued to talk] We read a Chinese book one day and read an English book on the next day. Could reading a passage, a book be good for our language development? I didn't know when I was that little, but I knew I was not happy. Getting up so early and starting a day with reading was not fun at all. So I read Chinese or English passages with a bad mood. I even didn't pay much attention on what I was reading. Sometimes*

the teacher would ask us try to recite the English passages during the reading session. That was quite stressful.'

MuHan provided a formal learning experience, which was clear and in a sequential order. "7:15" and "7:30" were coded as time; classroom was coded as place; '*read a Chinese book one day and read an English book'* and *'wake up early in the morning'* were coded as actions; and *'unhappy', 'stressful'* and *'read Chinese or English passages with a bad mood. I even didn't pay much attention on what I was* reading' were coded as consequences. MuHan's narrated reading story in junior school demonstrated the way how his attitude towards English learning was influenced by his experience of having reading session in junior school. Compared to MuHan's *'full of fun'* learning experiences in primary school, he was *'not happy'* with what he experienced in junior school. Also, MuHan questioned the practical value of the reading session: *'Do you think it work for us?'* in the junior school. From his narratives, it was inferred that his different feelings in primary school and junior school were because English learning styles were changed. Although, MuHan had not talked much about how he studied English in primary school, because it was a long time ago, so he could not remember very clearly; the phrase *'full of fun'* showed that MuHan happily learned through playing.

Regarding to young language learners, the main question argued by scholars was whether the students' 'ability to learn language is compromised by having to master multiple languages at the same time' (Wesierska, 2018, p. 68). Omari (2001) noted that there were studies had been conducted on the language learning abilities of young children. He concluded that young children (aged two to seven) were in the preoperational stage of development (Omari, 2001). In other words, children in kindergarten and early years in primary school would rely on the 'concrete stimuli and the items the child can see and touch in language learning' (Yu, 2012, p.4). Some researchers, therefore, emphasised setting up an appropriate learning path of another/foreign language development (Genesee & Nicoladis, 2007). Accordingly, one of traditional language teaching and learning approaches used in Chinese EFL classroom for young language learners was the Total Physical Response (TPR) method (Kaduhr and Fujisawa, 2009, Yu, 2012). TPR was a method developed by James J. Asher (1969), a psychological professor, with the purpose to learn a second language. In Total Physical Response, teachers or instructors gave commands to students in a target

language with body movements, and students can reply with a physical action (Asher, 1969; Yu, 2012). MuHan provided examples of his happy learning experiences in kindergarten and early years in primary school with the TPR method. For example, he would sing songs with teachers in kindergarten and act out stories followed by his primary teacher's instruction. In addition, MuHan's primary teacher would show coloured objects to him and his classmates so that all students could see, touch, feel or use.

However, the teaching and learning style changed in junior and high schools. In MuHan's mind, the way of learning English should be the same as how he learned in kindergarten. Unfortunately, MuHan's formal learning experiences in junior school subjected him to unnecessary pressure when learning English. *'Not fun at all' and 'not happy'* were MuHan's English learning feelings in junior school. The word *'stressful'* presented MuHan's English learning anxiety in the class. English learning anxiety, as a very important affective factor, had been considered very important, and many studies had been undertaken to explore it in Asian countries (Cui 2011; Jiang and Feng, 2020). Regarding Chinese students' language learning anxiety, some scholars believed that students, particular the students in junior schools, who were still at 'a comparatively low level of English proficiency' more easily experienced a feeling of anxiety (Rachman, 1998, echoed by Zhao, 2007, p. 23).

Nonetheless, in this study, it was hard to infer whether students' learning anxiety was varied by their ages/grades or not. From Muhan's narratives, it could confirm that his reading experiences in junior school was the cause of English learning anxiety. MuHan mainly narrated his learning experience of having reading sessions in the morning in junior school. The repeated reading experiences caused MuHan's *'tired'* feeling, then impacted on his behaviour, *'didn't pay much attention*' to what he was reading. Consistent with what Dewey had found in 1953, students' traditional learning experiences acted as a hook connecting their feelings and behaviour. Moreover, Dewey (1953) pointed out that the nature of experiences could be due to changes in their learning environment. Because of the changed learning environment, students' learning experience acted as a transaction taking place between an individual and what he or she was performing (Dewey, 1953). As Bandura's (1977) social learning theory indicated, social factors, including the learning environment, is seen as one of the major keys to our understanding of how students learn (Bandura

and Hall, 2018). Hence, the analysis and interpretations of learning environment would be presented in section 5.4. In MuHan's case, as a result of the changed learning environment in junior school, MuHan experienced challenges in studying in junior school. These challenges had an impact on his attitude and behaviour. The changed learning environment mainly referred to a changed teaching and learning style in junior school than in early schooling years.

In a junior school, English learning style tended to be more teacher-centred, examinations-oriented, and knowledge based (Zhao 2007). Students' narratives in this study revealed that the lack of student-centeredness, unfortunately, remained a problem throughout their schooling from secondary school years into their university years. In China, the way of taking a course, like mathematics and science, was a more focused, teacher-centred teaching and learning style (Luk & Lin, 2007). This learning style had been highly criticised in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991; Carson, 1992; Biggs, 1996; Bond, 1996; Rao, 1996; Chang, 2001; Luk & Lin, 2007). Over time scholars (Oxford, 1990; Chen, 2020) argued the focus for language learning strategies is the learner. A key scholar (Oxford, 1990) in the language learning strategies field offered a statement that language learning strategies should 'differ from the more mechanistic approach', which had been applied in mathematics or science learning (echoed by Chen, 2020, p. 45). Further to this, language learning strategies were described as more complex and fuzzier by many scholars (e.g., Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Cohen & Weaver, 2005; Griffiths and Oxford, 2014). Even so, there is a language learning approach highlighted by Oxford (1990) would offer learners' 'autonomy in relation to the behavioural and mental approaches' (echoed by Chen, 2020, p. 45). This learning strategy emphasised the place of students' "selves". In attempt for clarity of this concept, researchers (Dörnyei, 2005; Gao, 2007; Gao & Zhang, 2011) combined Oxford's (1990) concept within their research, and adopted a psychological construct, then introduced the self-regulated learning approach to second language acquisition. In China, the Chinese MOE had realised the importance of applying a more effective language learning approach, and they advocated focusing more on student-centred EFL learning.

Hence, from 1990, the MOE carried out the reform of English language education on a national scale, and this aimed to shift the excesses from a traditional style to a more learner-centred, experience-based and quality-oriented education (Zheng, 2015). However, from students'

narratives in this study, the modern, so-called ‘Quality-oriented Education’ in Chinese schools was the same as knowledge-based, examination-oriented and teacher-oriented education. As Chen (2007) explained, student-centeredness was more of an ideology than a specific class setting in the EFL classroom in China. Furthermore, examination-oriented learning style, as well, remained as another major concern for students. The pressure of examination-oriented learning style will be discussed in sub-section 5.2.3 section: *Frequent English Examination*. Because the traditional learning style had never been changed in students’ perceptions, their repeated rote learning experiences in junior and high schools caused their negative attitudes towards English learning formally and low practical values of formal English learning approach.

5.2.2: Lack of Practising Speaking English

The second issue discussed was in relation to the traditional English learning approach. An insufficient amount of time practising speaking English was another important consideration stated by the thirteen participants. They argued that they had limited time to practise speaking English under their teachers’ instructions. For example, YuNong and MeiQi presented their situations in an EFL classroom in China now: limited instructional time to practice speaking English in schools, shortage of professional English teachers and large class sizes. Students who experienced learning English in such situations showed negative attitudes towards English learning. However, JiaJia and SiJia, who showed positive attitudes towards traditional English learning, explained the difficulties of having all students practice speaking in schools:

> ‘*...Are there any better learning methods? I knew practicing speaking was really important. But it’s difficult to have all of the students, like 40-50, practice speaking in an English class, the class only had 45 minutes. It’s impossible. So we could only learn English in a traditional way. It fits the best’. (SiJia)*.

From SiJia’s narrative, it could be found that there were almost ‘*40–50’ (coded as reason: crowded classroom)* students in one classroom, and each English class only lasted for ‘*45 minutes’* (coded as reason: limited learning). In such a crowded classroom and with limited learning time, it was hard for all the students to practice in classes. Hence, SiJia believed that traditional learning

approach was the best formal learning approach within the Chinese context, and she showed positive attitude toward such learning style: ‘*we could only learn English in a traditional way. It fits the best’ (coded as consequence).* Not only in classes but also after classes, students were limited in getting enough professional support to practice speaking English. These situations were similar to what had been found in previous studies (Wu, 2001; Hu, 2002; Zheng and Davison, 2008; Kilinc, 2014; Zheng, 2015). The findings in their studies highlighted various problems in schools found many years ago—such as large class sizes, limited instruction time and a shortage of materials—continued in Chinese EFL classrooms at the present time.

In this study, thirteen participants experienced challenges with the stress of being in a large class but having limited time to speak English. Only SiJia and JiaJia enjoyed the traditional English learning approach. Both of them had not shown any concerns about inadequate English-speaking practice. From SiJia’s narratives: *“it fits the best”,* she held a positive belief in traditional language learning method. Also, SiJia’s belief of the appropriateness of traditional English language learning method in the Chinese context reflected her cultural value of this learning method. Both SiJia’s beliefs and values were as a result of her experiences in an EFL class in her junior school. With experiencing the realities in a crowded classroom, SiJia understood and believed that *‘it’s difficult’* to offer each student with a suitable learning environment to practice speaking English. There were a number of empirical studies that investigated concerns and difficulties that EFL/ESL students face in an oral class (e.g., Gan, 2013; Xie, 2018). One of the findings of Gan’s (2013) study indicated that Chinese EFL/ESL learners perceived difficulties were analysed in relation to academic speaking conventions, as well as affordance of opportunities to use English. SiJia’s experiences in an oral class gave expression to Gan’s (2013) finding. SiJia believed that learning a foreign language should follow from teachers’ instructions, finishing homework on time and listening, reading and performing written exercises more often. Her belief had not been changed for all schooling years. In other words, SiJia’s experiences of practicing English in junior school enhanced her belief in English learning. In a going cycle, her such strong belief in the traditional learning method leads the same English learning in high school and university as in junior school. The Figure 15 made below (taking SiJia as an example was to explain this influential relationship via a visual graph).

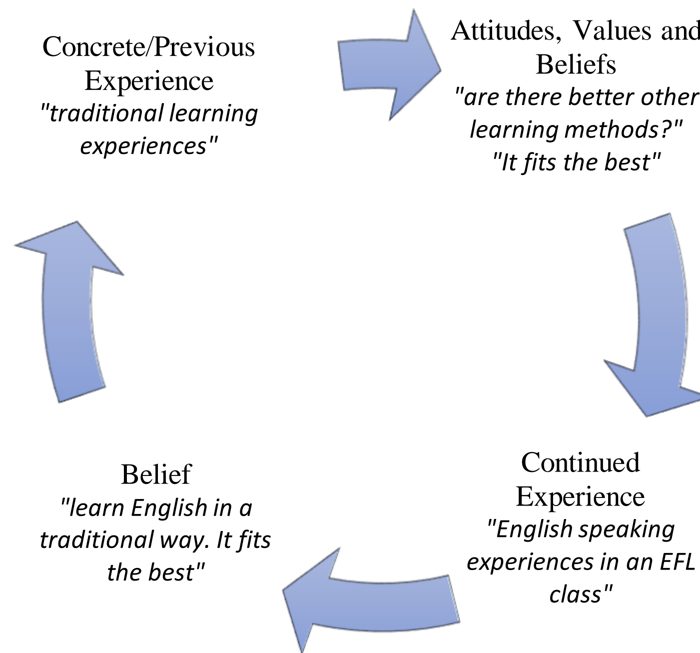


Figure 15: SiJia's example of Cyclical Influencing Process
Source: adapted from Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984)

I named this framework a cyclical influencing process. It was adapted and developed from Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory and was created on my participants' narratives. As Ette and Stoker (2015) stated, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory combined learners' experiences, perceptions, cognitions and behaviours. Kolb (1984) believed that learners could learn from past experiences then influenced behaviours, in turn, influenced experiences in an ongoing cycle. The experiential learning process highlighted that the stage of reflective observation and active experimentation bridged practical experience and theoretical conceptualisation (Ette and Stoker, 2015). Differing from Kolb's (1984) experiential learning process, my framework of the cyclical influencing process showed that students' attitudes, values and beliefs were intensified by their previous learning experiences. Influenced by these intensified attitudes, values and beliefs, students continued experiences/behaviours were the same as their previous experiences. This cyclical influencing process was not only found from SiJia's narratives, but also emerged from MuHan's narratives:

'I thought my English was good, because I spoke a lot, when I was free... I kept speaking as much as I could' (MuHan).

The word *'good'* represented Muhan's positive emotion about English language in junior school. His positive emotion was influenced by his previous speaking experience. This learning experience in junior school seemed to be named as affective experience, rather than experiential learning experience. In some studies, EFL/ESL researchers described the emotional dimensions as the major element of affective experiences (Imai, 2010; MacIntyre and Gregersen, 2012; Baker, Andriessen, and Järvelä, 2013). They considered positive emotions as tools to appraise experiences, to behave properly, to facilitate decision making, and to promote learning. MuHan's oral practice experience, which stimulated his positive emotion and belief in English learning could be seen as the affective experience. In turn, his belief influenced his behaviour of continuing to practice oral English. The Figure 16, made on the basis of Muhan's narratives, visually illustrated the relationship between his belief and learning experiences.

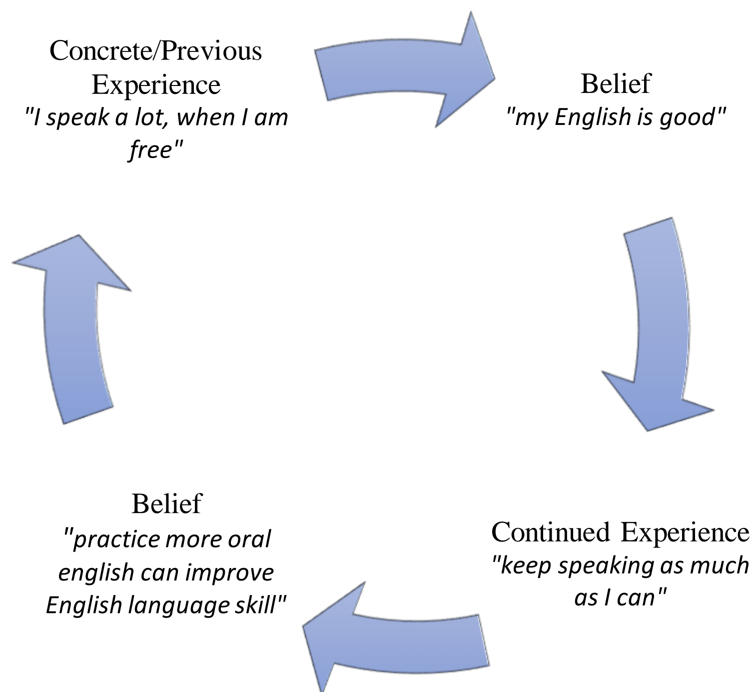


Figure 16: MuHan's example of Cyclical Influencing Process
Source: adapted from Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984)

In addition, as well as MuHan's belief, YuNong and MeiQi, also highlighted the importance of developing English communication skills. However, they raised concerns about the limited time and opportunities in speaking English. For example, YuNong claimed:

> *'it was a great pity that I don't have enough time to speak English in class in my junior school. I should speak more. So, in high school, I went to the English Corner where I had more chances to speak (English). And you know what. I was more confident in speaking English after I went there a few times. (YuNong)*

Because of the limited time in practicing speaking English, YuNong told me that he actively participated in an activity called 'English Corner', which provided him with many opportunities to speak English in high school. English Corner referred to an oral English practice activity to improve students' oral English (Gao, 2016). English Corner usually held on weekends and also at evenings, is basically set outdoors. Most of the junior schools, high schools, and universities, even the primary schools in China set up this activity. English Corner, as an out-of-class learning activity, had been widely applied in Chinese schools, because it had become a social community where students could find supportive peers and opportunities to practice and communicate in English (Gao, 2016). This activity was a non-formal activity, which would be further explained in next chapter. Back to YuNong's narrative, the new experience in the English Corner in high school *'built up self-confidence'*. He tended to believe that he could learn English well, and English study should be enjoyable. In junior school, YuNong saw English learning as *'a great pity'* because of his learning experiences. However, English Corner in high school positively impacted his beliefs about studying English.

To sum up, YuNong's confidence was built upon reflecting from his experiences in the English corner in high school. And YuNong's experience in the English corner was influenced by his negative feeling, which was caused by previous experiences in junior school. Accordingly, this influential process was like a spiral up process. A spiral process was not new in the field of experiential learning. In 2009, Kolb and Kolb constructed a spiralling learning process to emphasise the importance of concrete experiences. Their spiralling learning process indicated that the richer, broader and deeper new experiences/behaviours were enriched by reflecting, thinking

and transforming from previous experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). In light of this spiralling learning process theory, I re-constructed a spiralling influencing process on the basis of my participants' narratives. The Figure 17 below was the spiralling influencing process framework, which was adapted from Kolb & Kolb's (2009) spiralling learning process. It clearly presented the way how YuNong's new experiences were enriched by reflecting from previous experiences.

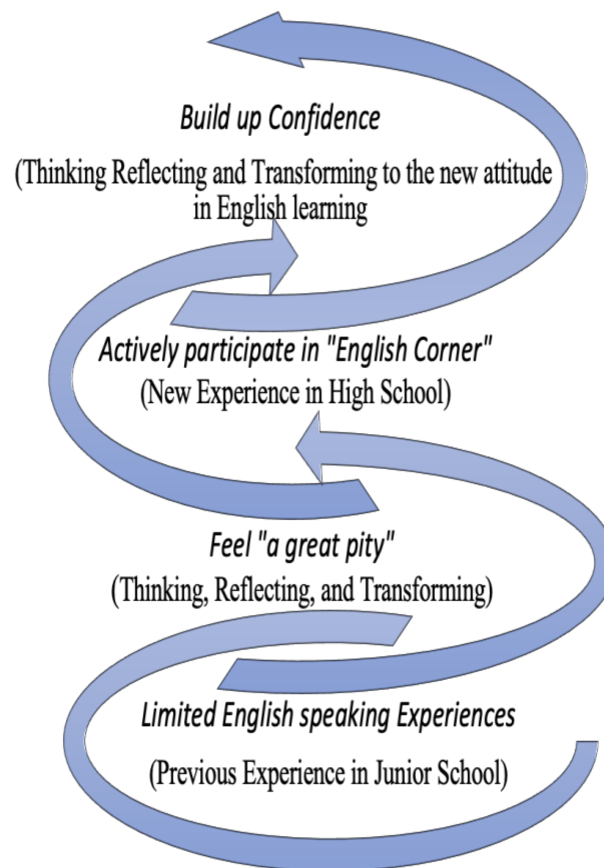


Figure 17: YuNong's Spiralling Influencing Process
Source: Updated from Spiralling Learning Process, Kolb and Kolb, 2009

This finding not only emerged from YuNong's narratives but also from MeiQi's learning experiences. MeiQi said:" *Yeah, I do learn English, but I don't speak English a lot. So, I don't know how to talk to foreigners. That's the reason why I take part in an oral English training class now."* MeiQi explained the reasons why she was willing to take an oral English training class in the university, and how she behaved differently. MeiQi's inability to speak to foreigners was her

reflections on previous experiences in high school, and her decision to take an 'oral English training class' was her changed behaviour. In other words, MeiQi's new experience in an English training class was spirally influenced by her reflection of previous experience in high school. The following Figure 18 presents the way how MeiQi's new experiences were enriched by reflecting from previous experiences.

Figure 18: MeiQi's Spiralling Influencing Process
Source: Updated from Spiralling Learning Process, Kolb and Kolb, 2009

To sum up, both of the two influencing processes bore a striking resemblance to previous research conducted in other countries (e.g., Kolb, 2014; 2009; Yang and Kim, 2011). Yang and Kim's (2011) research examined second language learners' beliefs changes and their impact on motivated second language learning behaviours. Their findings suggested that second language learners' beliefs were constantly evolving in accordance with their second language learning experiences. Yang and Kim also found that the learners' belief changes captured a process that led to learners' actions. They highlighted learners' previous learning experiences as key issues which had an impact of second

language learners' beliefs, then their actions. The cyclical influencing process and spiralling influencing process created in this study also showed that learners' language learning perceptions aligned with meaningful previous language learning experiences and could exert crucial influences on students' English language learning development.

5.2.3: Frequent English Examinations

Lastly, despite experiencing challenges in practising speaking English, the twelve students also were stressed about taking English examinations frequently (every week). Muhan was shaking his head all the time when we were discussing how often he needed to take an English quiz: '*…Tired, too tired. I don't want to talk more about the English tests. I am too tired of that…'* MuHan repeated the word *'tired'* three times, shook his head and was reluctant to talk about this issue. He could not clearly remember how regularly he had to take the tests, but at least every week, he would have an English quiz either in class or a quiz as homework. Leading from MuHan's direct feeling and actions, it was evident that MuHan experienced challenges with stress and, in particular, with taking English quizzes so often in schools. Part of MuHan's negative attitudes towards English learning in primary and junior schools came from his experiences with the repeated traditional learning approach. Moreover, the other part was experiencing weekly English tests. Besides the concerns over the frequent and repeated English tests, students' pressure was also commonly voiced by the test scores. Because 'test scores' were powerful, teachers and parents aimed to 'encourage' students to earn higher scores, and this exerted pressure on students. Such high expectations usually do not encourage students, but indeed they result in more anxiety (Oxford, 1998; Cui, 2011). For instance, XiaoFu perceived one test in High school as a *'scary test'*:

> '*…I am scared of the tests. I remembered I got a very low score on a test. Then, I was crying for a long time, like two or three hours. I thought I was not good at English anymore. I was disappointed about myself'. (XiaoFu)*

The fear of test scores or evaluations gave rise to self-denial awareness in XiaoFu's case. The test experience interacted with her inner emotions—causing her to become scared and disappointed and driving her to cry. It was evident that an interaction was occurring between the physical human

outer world and the sensorial, emotive and cognitive elements of the human inner world (Beard and Wilson, 2018). Yet, SiJia, who believed in the traditional learning approach, recognised the benefits of having English tests regularly:

> *'This is the right way. You have to take tests so that you know that you remember the English words, understand English passages, and can write in English…' (SiJia)*

SiJia concluded positively because she was successful in taking tests. She highlighted the practical value *('This is the right way.')* of having weekly-English tests within the Chinese context. She narrated a salient experience of reciting English words, which reaffirmed her belief in traditional learning:

> *'I love to recite English words. In Junior school, I was used to reciting ten new words every day. I found I did it well. I could remember around 70 new words in a week, and I achieved a great grade on the test. I was proud of myself. It made me feel full of achievement. So, I kept doing that (reciting ten new English words every day) until now'. (SiJia)*

SiJia's sense of 'self-achievement' in learning English had a vital impact on her self-improvement in the English learning experience. Also, SiJia realised a high practical value of reciting English vocabulary everyday *('I found I did it well').* There was a process in which the learning experience (human outer world) influenced the students' emotions (human inner world) (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Beard and Wilson, 2018). Then, influenced by her positive emotional engagement, SiJia continued learning English using this method. Therefore, SiJia's attitudes, values, beliefs and her behaviour of *'reciting English words'* was shaped by her positive emotions. It was another example supported Taylor and Statler's statement that emotional experience influenced the student's cognitive learning (Taylor and Statler, 2014). According to what was presented in the study, it seemed that students' various emotions and cognition were essential to learning (e.g., Liu, Xu, and Wetz, 2011; Beard and Wilson, 2018). Kolb (1984) had proposed that students' emotions, cognition and knowledge are created and transformed through experiences. Students' emotions were influenced by their prior English learning experiences, and these emotions also drove their English learning

cognition and behaviours. In SiJia's case, her sense of pride and self-achievement was gained through the experience of getting a good grade on an English test. Her cognition of the usefulness of reciting English words was driven by her positive emotion and transformed from the successful experience in English test. At the same time, SiJia's knowledge was gained when she was reciting new English words. Hence, similar to what Kolb found in 1984, SiJia's emotions, cognitions and knowledge were created and transformed from her English learning and testing experiences. Among the fifteen participants, SiJia was the only student who was agreeable toward frequent English tests, whereas all the other fourteen students disliked frequent English tests.

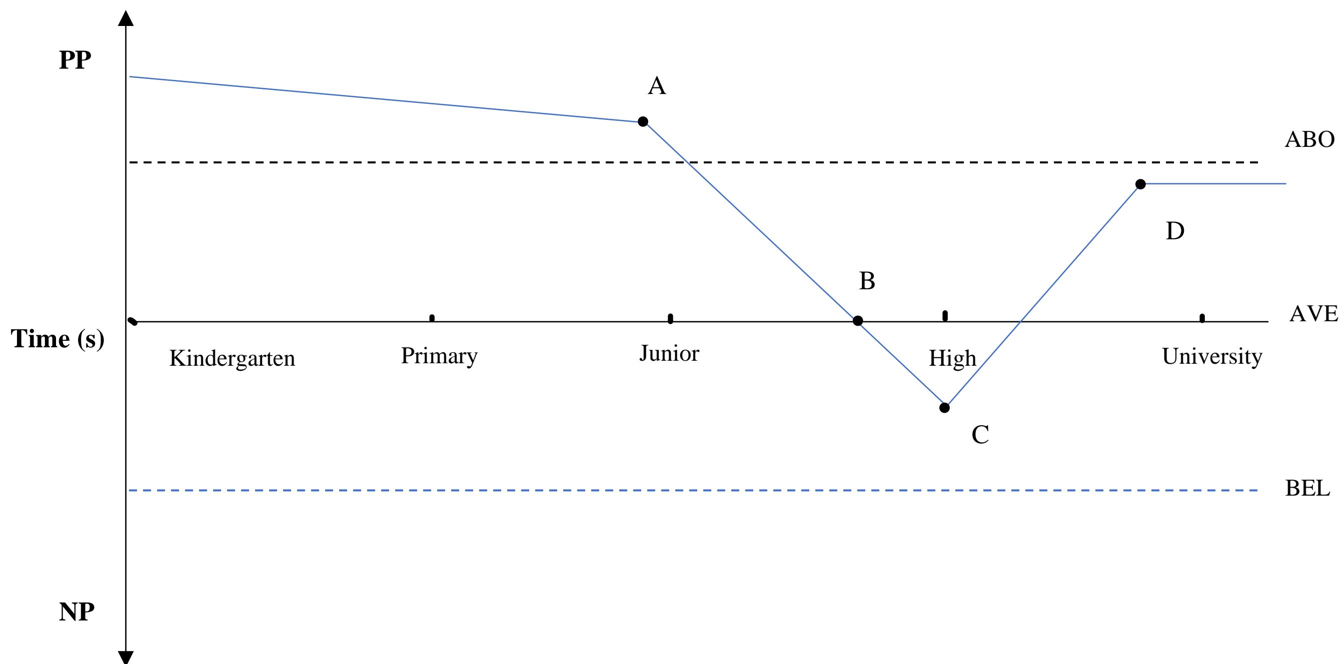
Although XiaoFu and SiJia showed totally different attitudes towards their experiences in having English tests, both of their cases indicated that the emotional competency that underpinned learning acted as a fundamental building block (Liu, Cu and Wetz, 2011; Beard and Wilson, 2018). Neuroscientist (Zull, 2006) had confirmed that emotion was not only found in the field of language learning education but also essential to learning. The Nobel Prize-winner, Daniel Kahneman (2011) wrote a book with a description of the emotional response and noted that it was hard to ignore because emotions had a close connection to thinking, reflecting and behaving. Compared to SiJia's positive emotions, fourteen students' previous painful learning experiences could easily drive people into negative attitudes, values and beliefs. This unexpected finding substantiated Postle (1993) and Beard's (2005) claims. They found that negative emotions and feelings were found to more obviously affect learning (Postle, 1993, Beard, 2005). These negative learning experiences were like distorted learning experiences that made the fourteen students feel English learning was hopeless or that they were not talented in acquiring a foreign language. However, it was not clear that students' emotions and cognition were transformed through experiences. From the analysis discussed above, it was evident that students' emotions and cognition were affected by their previous learning experiences.

5.3 The Importance of Key Relationships

Hinde and Hinde (1979) illustrated a human relationship, in which there were two interdependent participants. A relationship between two participants was comprised of a series of interactions that are interrelated and affected by each other (Hinde, 1981). Studies, like Berscheid (1983, 1985) and

Blumstein and Kollock (1988)'s research, with an aim on exploring close relationships enhance the understandings of the human relationship. Close relationship, additionally, often connotes the 'presence of positive' (Blumstein and Kollock 1988, p. 469) or the presence of negative (Berscheid, 1983, 1985), intense emotions. Following this research, interpersonal relationships were getting the attention of more and more scholars all over the world (e.g., Yoon, Kim, and Kim, 2011; Chung, 2014; Velmurugan, 2016). An interpersonal relationship was 'an association between two or more people that may range from fleeting to enduring' (Velmurugan, 2016, p. 1). Like a close relationship, the association of an interpersonal relation was based on persons' regular interactions. However, different to a close relationship, interpersonal relationship was not only based on interactions or social commitments, but also involves some level of interdependence (Velmurugan, 2016). Because of the interdependence, people in relationship tend to engage in activities together, share and communicate with each other, and may change or influence each other. I followed Velmurugan (2016) in defining an interpersonal relationship as one in which intense interactions and also interdependence occurred between two or more people. In this study, I used the term, key relationship, to describe students' narrative experiences with their teachers, classmates, parents, siblings, tutors, or significant others. It meant that there were intense interactions and involved some level of interdependence between participants and others.

In this section, I mainly presented the findings of teacher-student interpersonal relationship, because this kind of relationship was widely narrated from students' interviews. Regarding the key relationship that occurred through a formal learning approach, there were many common responses from students about what kind of teachers they liked best. In students' narratives, there were few interactions between students and their university teachers. So, the teacher-student relationship mainly referred to the relationship with teachers in kindergarten, primary, junior and high schools. Individual comments from students suggested that they would like to have more close, positive relationships with teachers to have more enjoyable and fun experiences in classes. From their perspectives, an English teacher should spend less time demonstrating passages, giving or reviewing homework and arranging tests in schools. Students' intense emotions were produced by interacting with their teachers. In MuHan's perceptions (see Figure 19), English learning experiences with English teachers played an essential role in his life.



Y Axis: Positive Perceptions (PP)/Negative Perceptions (NP)

X Axis: Time (s)

ABO: Above Average

AVE: Average

BEL: Below Average

Figure 19: MuHan's Self-reported Perceptions and Self-perceived Affective Experiences

Figure 19 was MuHan's self-reported English learning perceptions trajectory. It described how MuHan's self-reported feelings about English learning changed over time. Four points A, B, C and D were reported in primary, junior school, high school and university. These four points were reported as crucial from his responses. Specifically, MuHan stated that his positive attitude toward English learning started to drop in the last year in primary school at point A. It decreased to the average point at B in junior years, then the worst point in high school at point C. Regarding the changes, MuHan claimed that *'it was the teacher'*. From his narratives, the main factor influencing his attitudes towards English learning was the change in the teacher-student relationship in schools. After that, his attitude improved in high school. In university, which started at point D, MuHan showed a positive attitude toward English learning. As MuHan explained, one of the reasons MuHan's attitudes changed in high school was because of his tutor and girlfriend. The importance

of tutor-student and couples' relationships will be discussed and presented in the next chapter. In this section, I oscillated between the transcript's codes and Muhan's self-made line graph and focused on his narratives in explaining the change from kindergarten to high school. In kindergarten, MuHan kept his strong, positive attitudes towards English learning:

[Extract: From the First Interview]

> *Interviewer:*
> *Could you please explain why you said you like the learning approach in kindergarten? Could you give me an example?*
>
> *Student M:*
> *… I like my teacher there. She treated me as her grandson even though I was naughty. She made me feel happy and free to stay in her class… I feel learning English in that way (relaxed and informal learning method in kindergarten) is much more effective. English learning shouldn't be stressful or boring.*

As Muhan explained, one of his kindergarten teachers who came from Canada treated him as a grandson. This made MuHan feel happy and free to speak with her in English even though Muhan could not say a complete sentence. The phrase *'…treated me as her grandson…'* was coded as an impact of the teacher relationship, and the other two words '*happy'* and '*free'* were coded as positive feelings. MuHan's narrative learning experience with this teacher made him believe that English learning *'shouldn't be stressful or boring'*, and the learning method in kindergarten was '*much more effective'*. These two phrases were coded as positive beliefs. 'Positive feelings' revealed that MuHan experienced a very emotional learning journey with his kindergarten English teacher, and this impacted his enjoyment and relaxed his learning experience. However, the other code, 'positive beliefs' were MuHan's conscious thoughts or cognition, which were developed from his emotions. The first stage of thinking with feeling was regarded as developing MuHan's cognitive abilities that were mastered from experiential approaches to learning. Although Muhan's narrative sat very differently to MeiQi, YuNong and SiJia's, their emotions and cognitions were transformed from his experience. This finding reached a similar conclusion in Yang and Kim's

(2011) study, which emphasised the significance of learning experiences in second language learners' beliefs and actions.

However, since primary school, MuHan presented a poorer relationship with his English teacher. Especially in high school, he felt frustrated while taking English classes. MuHan narrating that he felt '*frustrated'* and *'did not dare to take English class…'* The word *'frustrated'* was coded as negative feeling and the phrase '*I did not dare to take English class…'* was also coded as an 'Impact of teacher-student relationship'. Driven by his negative feeling, MuHan was reluctant to take English classes. It could be inferred that MuHan's behaviour was influenced by his *'frustrated'* feelings. In other words, his experiences with his high school teacher impacted his journey of English learning. Wubbels, Brok, Tartwijk and Levy (2012) brought together research on interpersonal relationships in education. In their book, it was clear that positive teacher-student relationships strongly contributed to student learning, whereas the problematic relationships, on the other hand could be detrimental to students' outcomes and development (Opdenakker and Maulana, 2010; Wubbels Brok, Tartwijk, and Levy, 2012). Muhan's '*frustrated'* learning experience with his high school teacher led to poor teacher-student relationship. This problematic interpersonal relationship became the key obstacle in learning English from his perception. To present how Muhan explained the changes and influences of his experiences with English teachers, I focused more on his line graphs and the second interview contents.

[Extract: From the Second Interview]

> *Interviewer:*
> *Could you tell me more about why your feelings about English learning became more negative since primary school and improved again in high school?*
>
> *Student M:*
> *As I said in my last interview, I think it was the teacher. The teacher was different from my kindergarten teacher. I was happy in kindergarten. But I felt a bit* anxious *in primary, and, well, I can't remember clearly. But I was unhappy to do so much reciting work. It was boring. It tended to be worse in junior school. In high school, my English*

teacher's teaching style was similar to the one in junior school. I was not interested in learning English in school at all. But luckily, I had a good tutor. Remember? The tutor I mentioned last time. The one who would play WWE with me. We watched movies together. With his help, I found another way to learn English. I felt happy to learn with him.

From the extract of the second interview, three emotions—happy, anxious and boring—were reported from MuHan's narratives. These emotions were reported relevant to three attitudinal words toward English learning: positive, moderate and negative. MuHan's emotions changed from happy to anxious, then to be boring, then to be happy again. Accordingly, MuHan's attitudes were changed in a positive-moderate-negative-positive pattern. In light of this, MuHan's attitudes towards English learning were changed in a drastic changed pattern. Combined with MuHan's drawing, it could be inferred that his self-perceived affective experiences with the English teacher in the primary and junior schools had negatively affected his attitudes, values and beliefs in English learning. He showed negative attitudes and beliefs and questioned the practical value of the traditional English teaching style in primary and junior schools. Since high school, MuHan's learning experiences with his tutor appeared to positively affect the feelings that he perceived. He perceived that the practical value of learning with the tutor than the value of learning with his English teacher in classes. From MuHan's stories in kindergarten and in high school, it was evident that MuHan's feelings had a vital impact on his attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviour during the English learning experience.

Consequently, the learning process influenced the student's emotions, which was the same as what Kolb & Kolb (2005) found in their experiential learning theory. As MuHan's emotional engagement changed, his beliefs and behaviours changed as well. In a word, his beliefs and behaviours were shaped by his emotions. Like SiJia, YuNong and MeiQi's learning stories discussed in the last section, MuHan's story was another instance where emotional experience influenced the language learners' cognitive learning. Moreover, MuHan's effective learning experience with his tutor conduced to a positive tutor-student interpersonal relationship, which contributed to MuHan's English learning and stimulated his learning motivation. Regarding the motivators of learning, Opdenakker, Maulana and Brok's (2012) research found that teacher-

student interpersonal relationships are significant predictors of students' learning motivation. In this study, Muhan's English learning development was found to benefit from another interpersonal relationship, tutor-student relationship. Since this section was mainly about the formal teacher-student relationship, tutor-student relationship, as a type of non-formal relation would be further discussed in next chapter.

Another student, XiaoFu, had an enjoyable time learning English in primary school because she was fully supported by her teacher, who helped her improve her self-confidence. But, in junior school, she had a worse relationship with her English teacher. Because of this poor relationship, XiaoFu's interest in English learning decreased: *'Everything has changed since junior school… My teacher did most of the talking. I would like to join in more… listening to the teacher for a long time is boring...I always lost attention in class'.* XiaoFu's emotions changed from positive to negative mainly because of the changing relationships. In XiaoFu's mind, a sense of 'self-confidence' in learning English had a vital impact on XiaoFu's self-improvement. Furthermore, the learning experience influenced XiaoFu's emotions (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In junior school, influenced by XiaoFu's negative emotional engagement, XiaoFu *'lost attention in classes.'* Particularly, XiaoFu's behaviour was also shaped by her negative emotions, which influenced the student's cognitive learning (Taylor and Statler, 2014). The findings from MuHan and XiaoFu's narratives were similar to what was found in previous Western research (e.g., Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Beard, 2008; Simpson and Marshall, 2010), which noted that language learners' emotions shaped by their learning experience influenced their cognitive learning. Also, the finding discussed in this section bore a striking resemblance to the finding that emerged from last section: the importance of the traditional learning approach.

Moreover, another notion raised by students was non-native English-speaking teachers' professionality in teaching English as a foreign/second language. Medgyes (1999) carried out a survey which validated one assumption that native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (non-NESTs) differred in terms of their language proficiency. This assumption is also supported by Mahboob (2010), who found that non-NESTs were often accorded lower professional status than NESTs. By extension, the discrepancy in English language proficiency accounts for most of the differences found in NESTs and non-NESTs' teaching

behaviours (Medgyes, 1999, 2001). The standard varieties of British and American English had been accepted and promoted as standard English for many years (Li, 1993). However, a new view challenged in studies associated with "English as an International Language (EIL)" and "World Englishes" (Li, 1993; Hu, 2004; Jin, 2005). In light of this view, some linguists in China proposed that "China English" or "Chinglish" should stand alongside that standard British or American English. The word Chinglish referred to the phrase Chinese English, which was ungrammatically strung together (Hu, 2004). Some Chinese scholars (Li, 1993; Hu, 2004) considered that Chinglish 'is based on a Standard English, expresses Chinese culture, has Chinese characteristics in lexis, sentence structure and discourse but does not show any first language interference". In their minds, China English was more appropriate and desirable in a Chinese context. Not only these linguistic scholars in China, but also the Chinese students in Jin's (2005) study showed positive attitudes towards China English and they preferred a Chinese rather than a native-speaking teacher of English.

On the contrary, Chinese students in this study argued that Chinese teachers of English lack fluency, over-rely on books, have a limited insight into the intricacies of meaning, and have poor listening and speaking skills. Students in this research revealed that they had more access to learning English. For example, Yu, MuHan and HuiFan preferred to practice English pronunciation with an English native speaker face to face or online. In a formal English learning class, they argued that they were being taught by unqualified Chinese teachers of English. For these non-NESTs mentioned by my participants, Medgeys, in 2001, already identified that the major source of difficulty was 'the vocabulary, together with idiomatic and appropriate use of English' (p. 434). Taking this difficulty into consideration, non-NESTs usually used 'booklish' language, adopted a more guided teaching approach, placed an emphasis on accuracy, form and grammar rules (Selvi, 2011). Students in this study described Chinese teachers of English as:

> '*I have a Chinese accent when I speak English. Not only me, but also my classmates have the accent. I don't think that's our fault. We learned and practised with our English teachers who also have the Chinese English accent. That's how I practiced English.' (*HuiFan)

'It's difficult to speak English very professionally because I followed what my teacher said. She was not that professional'. (Yu)

Actually, ten years ago, Chinese teachers of English had been found to be usually preoccupied with accuracy, the formal features of English, the nuts and bolts of grammar, the printed word, and formal registers (He and Miller, 2011). Students' responses in this study backed up what was found in He and Miller's (2011) study. In addition, due to the Chinese culture of learning, particularly the influence of Confucianism, the role of the teacher is authoritative in the teaching and learning process (Hu, 2001). Influenced by Confucianism, learners are required to respect their teachers, and to obey the teachers' arrangements and decisions in classroom activities (Littlewood, 2000). During the interview, students mainly argued about the English teachers in their high schools and universities. They did not complain about their teachers in kindergarten, primary, and junior schools. Three students, HuiFan, Jing and MeiQi gave some explanations in our second interviews. First of all, students in kindergarten and primary schools with little or limited English skills were too young to make comments on their English teachers' proficiency. In addition, in kindergarten and primary schools, Chinese younger students who were told to obey and follow teachers seldom dared to challenge their teachers' proficiency. Finally, younger students had limited access to learn English in other ways. Learning from their English teachers in classes was the only way to develop their English skills.

In 2016, there was a study conducted by Cui, Liu, Liu and Wang in Chinese. Their study suggested that a good teacher-student relationship was conducive to enhancing students' self-confidence and positively relating academic achievement. Similar to Cui *et., al*'s study, the finding of this study revealed that students' negative beliefs about their teachers' professionality would cause a negative teacher-student relationship, which impeded learners' language learning achievement. This finding had also been presented in other studies conducted in different countries (e.g., Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Rifkin, 2000; Cui 2014). Additionally, HuiFan and Yu's mistrust in the teacher was against the core position of teachers in China, which also led to a poor teacher-student relationship. In turn, a problematic teacher-student relationship influenced HuiFan and Yu's achievement in English study. As Postle (1993) emphasised in his research, the previous negative learning experiences had significant power: they easily drove people into 'the most bizarre' attitude, value or belief of 'I

have to' or 'I cannot'. The negative links produced within the interactions between teachers and students were easily in an ongoing circle. Furthermore, HuiFan and Yu's continuing behaviours were demonstrated as higher learning anxiety and spending limited effort as found in previous research (Postle, 1993, Beard, 2005).

5.4 The Importance of Learning Locations

Egle (2007) suggested that the learning environment was important in the teaching-learning process. The learning environment experienced by learners in Egle's (2007) study included learning venues and learning time. Learning venues referred to the physical locations where students study, and learning time was students' preference of when to learn (Egle, 2007). According to the Chinese formal educational system, students who are in kindergarten, primary, junior and general high schools, must follow the compulsory schedule set in schools (Ministry of Education, 2018). The time for formal learning was during class hours, and the hours in doing assignments after each class. In a Chinese university, students do have more free time, rather than the scheduled formal learning time. Undergraduates' formal learning time varies by their different majors. Chinese students in Zhao, Selman and Haste's (2015) study complained about the tight learning schedule in schools. These students explained that because of the tight schedule and massive assignments, they had to study from early morning until night-time from Monday to Friday in schools.

However, surprisingly, participants in this study hardly mentioned scheduled formal learning time during interviews. ChongYang gave a probable explanation: *'...the learning time in each subject is the same. All the same for us, nothing special. We are already get used to it.'* In this section, therefore, students' narrated experiences about their learning environments mainly related to the physical locations where they carried out their formal learning. In kindergarten, primary and junior schools, students who were a younger age must be accompanied by guardians. These younger students mainly studied in classrooms or at home. For high school students and undergraduates who were adults, they were free to choose other places to study in addition to learning in the classroom or at home. Hence, kindergarten, primary and junior school students had formally experienced learning locations only in schools or at home, whereas high school students and

undergraduates experienced a wider range of different learning locations, such as the library, laboratories or the study hall.

From students' responses, their preference for studying in a comfortable and convenient place was determined by their various experiences in different places. Because students experienced a range of different learning locations, their attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning were also shaped by these learning experiences. Othman (2012) conducted a study that revealed that students' preferred learning locations and providing flexibility in learning locations were crucial for successful learning. Regarding learning in the classroom, SiHan and MuHan showed contrary opinions:

> *'I would study in school, especially in a library where it is very, very quiet, so I can focus on my studies and I can find a lot of useful books' (SiHan)*

> *'Sit in a class nicely made me a little bit uncomfortable. I feel free to study at home'. (MuHan)*

From SiHan's responses, her learning experiences in a quiet place shaped her preference of English study location. SiHan studied quietly in a library, and she also successfully found useful books in the library. For her, the preferred learning locations were a comfortable physical environment. However, MuHan had an uncomfortable experience in sitting in a classroom to study. His experience shaped his negative feelings on studying in a classroom and positive feelings on studying at home. Although they showed totally different feelings about studying in a classroom, both of their responses revealed that students' preferential learning locations provided them with 'a suitable emotional environment' (Green and Batool, 2017, p. 38). Green and Batool (2017) explained that a suitable emotional environment was one in which students' individual differences were valued, diversity was respected and their involvement was encouraged. Because SiHan described herself as a quiet girl, it could be inferred that quietness provided her with feelings of comfort. Hence, she preferred to study in a quiet and lonely environment where her characteristics were valued and respected. Then, she was actively studying English. SiHan's preferred learning venue created not only a suitable emotional environment but also an appropriate cognitive

environment, which was also highlighted by Green and Batool (2017). According to Green and Batool (2017), an appropriate cognitive environment is a place where 'learners feel what they learn is useful, relevant to their needs and linked to their previous knowledge' (p. 38). Previous knowledge was gained through previous learning experiences. That meant an appropriate cognitive environment was also relevant to learners' previous learning experiences. For SiHan said, *'focus on my study'* was her need. Studying in a library met her need. Also, SiHan could *'find a lot of useful books'* in a library was her previous successful experience. These two factors shaped SiHan decision about her preferred learning location, in which she realised it could contribute to her academic learning. Therefore, SiHan's decision to study in a library, which was linked to her previous study experiences, and also was relevant to her expectations.

In this study, not only MuHan did prefer to learn at home, but also YuNong, Yu, MeiQi, Dan and Ying liked to stay at home to study. On the contrary, HuiFan showed a different opinion about learning at home:

> *'At home, I had to struggle a little bit when I had difficulties in the assignment. At school, I could get help from teachers or my classmates' (HuiFan).*

Based on either the learning time or the learning venue that HuiFan preferred, she used to learn interactively. Egle (2007) explained that an environment that enabled students to interact with each other, learn from others and share with others was 'an adequate social environment' (Green and Batool, 2017, p. 38). Other researchers believed that such an affective environment was a learner-centred and non-threatening environment that could provide each student equal opportunity to contribute (Mezirow, 1994; Power 2008). For instance, Huifan had difficulties in studying at home, and Huifan's preference of learning location linked to previous learning experiences. From the aforementioned, it was clear that students' learning experiences were affective experiences that influence their emotions and cognitions of English learning. How students' emotions and cognition were affected by learning experiences were seen as a process of affective learning (Tooman, 2009). An overall environment, which was a comfortable physical environment, a suitable emotional environment, an appropriate cognitive environment and an adequate social environment was an

active, engaging and affective learning environment, which was needed to facilitate affective learning (Picard et al., 2004; Egle, 2007).

5.5 The Importance of Formal Activities

Students' experiences of participating in activities had also been discussed in relation to the learning methods in most cases. In thirteen students' narratives, the experiences of taking part in activities formally, non-formally and informally were weighted moderately in their journeys of English learning. It meant that participants' experiences of participating in formal activities played as the common role from their perceptions. The two remaining students, HuiFan and JiaJia, mentioned difficulties in participating in activities at school and after school. From the interviews carried out with the learners, they mentioned that formal activities in schools involved peer discussions, decision making and problem-solving activities; non-formal activities including summer-school programs, academic-exchange activities and study abroad programmes; and informal activities referred to extracurricular programs such as drama performances, role-playing activities and online activities. Compared to the traditional learning method, students' experiences in various activities were perceived to contribute to more effective learning. This finding was also stressed by Koohang and Durante in 2003. In their study, the activities and assignments, which were designed to meet the learners' needs, such as active learning, collaboration and cooperation were perceived to interactively promote learning (Koohang and Durante, 2003). This section presents the findings from students' formal activities, and the findings from non-formal and informal activities will be discussed in the next chapter.

From students' perspectives, taking part in class or school activities permitted chances to interact with others. The thirteen students acknowledged that formal activities, such as decision making, problem-solving and peer-discussion activities contributed to their English learning.

> *'Good. Our discussion is good. That's a useful way in an English course. We exchange our ideas. Sometimes we would have new ideas' (MeiQi).*

> *'During an English class, peer discussion was the only chance we could practice speaking English. That was good' (ChengYi).*

'Discussion' and *'peer discussion'* were coded as formal activities. *'Good', 'that was good', 'changing ideas', 'new ideas'* and *'practice speaking English'* were all coded as the impacts of formal activities (FA). Simultaneously, *'good'* and *'that was good'* were also coded as positive attitudes toward FA. Within the codes, peer discussions about numerous topics and small activities helped stimulate students' interests in learning. From students' narratives, they believed that these activities helped them improve their language skills. These activities were interactive activities that promoted students' communication skills in terms of generating ideas, suggestions, giving comments. As Koohang and Durante (2003) mentioned in their study, interactive activities promoted discussions and critical thinking.

5.6 Implication: Relationship between Attitudes, Values and Beliefs

As indicated by the findings presented above, students' formal learning experiences have a huge impact on their attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL Learning. Chinese EFL learners' performance and achievements were inseparably intertwined with students' attitudes, values and beliefs about FL/SL learning. Even though, in the findings above, the words 'attitude', 'values' and 'beliefs' were often used by the participants quite loosely, when I repeatedly examined the data, I found that these three words were as inseparable as Anderson and De Silva had argued in 2009. Therefore, this section illustrated how students' attitudes, values and beliefs were shifted by their learning experiences. As some researchers indicated, analysing language learners' learning attitudes, beliefs, and their learning capabilities, then effectively exploiting learning strategies was one way to enhance their learning potentially (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Oxford, 1990). This statement had received considerable attention from educators from different countries with different cultures and backgrounds (e.g., Shams, 2008; Al-Mamun, Rahman, and Hossain, 2012). Even, some studies suggested to investigate the relationship between language learners' attitudes, values and beliefs first, then to explore the ways that they guide or direct language learners' behaviours (e.g., Hayes, 2016; Clear IAS, 2019).

In the present study, Chinese students' attitudes, values and beliefs were found to be shifted through their learning experiences. Taking MuHan as an example, his learning experiences in kindergarten with his English teacher also revealed that there was a close interaction between attitudes, values and beliefs. MuHan's narratives involved a belief that *'English learning shouldn't be stressful or boring'* and expressed his attitude *'I like my teacher'*, the English teacher in his kindergarten. This statement also reflected a practical value that *'the English learning method (relaxed and informal learning method in kindergarten) is much more effective'*. MuHan's positive attitude interacted with the practical value of learning English in kindergarten, which closely linked to his belief about EFL learning. Together, as a whole, it carried a strong effect on MuHan's overall behaviour: *'happy and free to stay in her class'*. Similarly, MuHan's description of learning English in primary, junior, and high school expressed that his attitudes, values and beliefs were linked to each other. In primary, junior and high school, MuHan believed that English learning was '*boring*', and he was '*anxious*' to study. The practical value of English learning tended to be 'worse' in his mind. MuHan's negative attitude, beliefs and values shaped his behaviour—unwilling to learn English. From MuHan's narratives, it was evident that he showed totally different values and attitudes toward English learning at different ages, but he held the same belief about EFL learning. MuHan believed that English learning should not be boring and stressful. In kindergarten, learning with his teacher was not boring, so he showed a positive attitude and high practical value in English study. However, he experienced boring learning time with his primary, junior and high schools' teachers, so he displayed negative attitudes and low practical values of the learning method in his primary, junior and high schools. In other words, MuHan's belief about English learning played a central role in determining his attitudes, values and even behaviours in English development. This finding was similar to the findings of Sakui and Gais (1999) and Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000). Sakui and Gais pointed out that individuals' beliefs are the 'central constructs in every discipline which deals with human behaviour and learning' (p. 474), and Cabaroglu and Roberts considered beliefs as guiding principles of people's attitudes or even behaviours.

Another student, SiJia, believed in the traditional learning approach in junior and high schools, and she behaved totally different toward MuHan. Although other students argued for the traditional learning approach, SiJia held a strong belief about the traditional English learning approach. Because of her strong belief, she showed positive attitudes towards repeated learning routines and

limited oral English practice time. *'This is the right way'* represented the high practical value of the traditional English learning method in SiJia's mind. SiJia's attitudes and values were derived from her strong belief. Moreover, SiJia's belief made her experiences successful within the traditional learning method. From this point of view, SiJia's belief closely interacted with academic experiences and achievements as well as her attitudes and values (Sakui & Gaies, 1999). Regarding Chinese students' beliefs, as SiJia's strong belief in Chinese traditional learning method, previous research analysed the factors shaping or influencing their beliefs (e.g., Chen, Warden, and Chang, 2005; Li & Cutting, 2011; Chew, 2013). From their studies, one of the main factors was the Chinese Confucian Culture (CCC). Chinese students' beliefs are formed and shaped by Chinese traditional culture. As the Chinese proverb says, *'Day as a teacher, life for the father'*. Chinese students respected their teachers as their parents, and they should respect teachers for their whole lives. That means Chinese students seldom challenge their teachers and teachers' teaching and learning styles. In this study, SiJia is a typical Chinese Confucian student. The traditional belief she held influenced her attitudes, academic experiences and achievements. Also, influenced by her strong traditional belief, the cultural value of traditional English teaching and learning method was highlighted by SiJia.

However, other students, like Muhan, SiHan, Yu, XiaoFu, MeiQi, Ying and YuNong do not agree with SiJia. For example, Muhan, believed that language learning should not be boring or stressful. From MuHan's narratives, it can be inferred that his belief was influenced by his different learning experiences. Yu, who learned from foreign teachers in his junior school, realised how boring the traditional learning method was. All of them believed that traditional English learning was not an appropriate way to learn a foreign/second language. Accordingly, they showed negative attitudes towards the traditional English learning method, and mainly questioned practical values of this learning approach. Like Richardson stated in 1996, different kinds of experiences may lead to changes in beliefs. In this study, there was no doubt that the different experiences of Chinese students had diversely impacted their English traditional learning beliefs. In previous studies, individuals' beliefs were found to be the 'central constructs in every discipline which deals with human behaviour and learning' (Sakui & Gais 1999, p. 474); values derived from beliefs were the basis for persons' attitudes; attitudes expressed through words and behaviour are the way persons express or apply their beliefs and values (Anderson and De Silva, 2009). In the field of

second/foreign language education, this kind of relationship between personal beliefs, values and attitudes had been widely accepted (Hayes, 2016). Clear IAS (2019) presented a graph to demonstrate this type of relationship between personal attitudes, values and beliefs (see Figure 2 first showed in Chapter 2, p. 46).

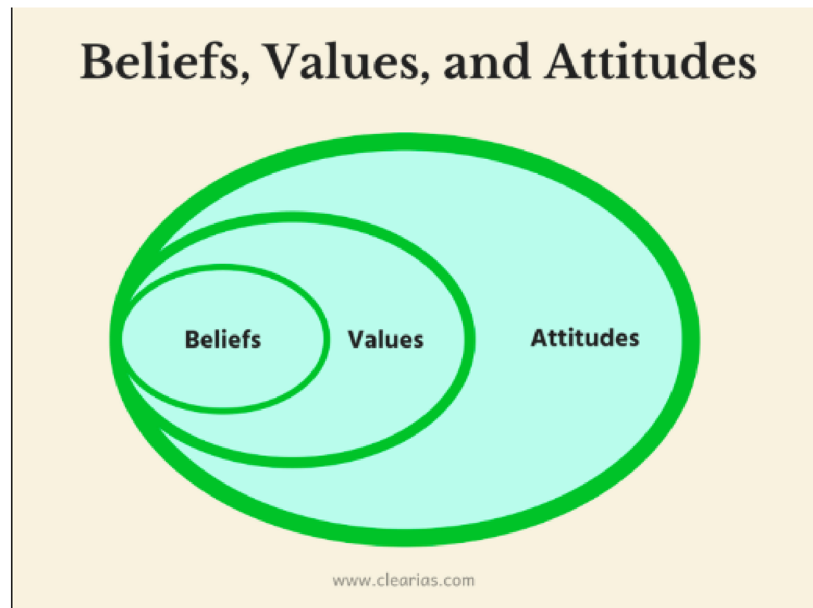


Figure 2: the relationship between personal beliefs, values and attitudes
Source: Attitude – Concepts Made Simple; With examples – Clear IAS, 2019

Some researchers had argued that the statement showed in Clear IAS (2019) was somewhat lopsided for a long time (e.g., Beatty et al., 199; Towles-Schwen and Fazio, 2001; Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002; Sutherland and Teacher, 2004). They believed that the relationship between language learners' attitudes, values and beliefs was more complex than the figure 2 showed. As I had illustrated this graph in previous chapter (Chapter 2), I listed it here again because this present study was skewed to this viewpoint. The findings of this research indicated that Chinese students' beliefs played a key role, and had the power to dominate their attitudes, values and behaviours. Moreover, this statement had taken Chinese traditional culture into consideration. Participants' beliefs about English learning were formed and shaped by Chinese traditional culture and influenced by their learning experiences.

5.7 Summary

In classifying students' narratives by themes, it became clear that their beliefs were as unique as their experiences. Directly stemming from these unique data, various findings emerged from their narratives. First, it was found that students' previous learning experiences act as a bridge, connecting students' feelings and behaviours with their continued experiences. Secondly, students' previous learning experiences were affective. There were two influencing processes found in this study. One was the spiralling influencing process, and the other one was the cyclical influencing process. In the spiralling influencing process, students' richer, broader and deeper new experience was spirally enriched by reflecting on, thinking about, and transforming from the previous experience. Students' behaviours or continued experiences were different from their former experiences. Yet, in the cyclical influencing process, participants' learning experiences intensified their attitudes, values and beliefs, which in turn impacted their behaviours and continued experiences. The continued experiences were usually the same as their previous learning experiences. Furthermore, the two influential process frameworks indicated that their human inner worlds (feelings and perceptions) and outer worlds (behaviours) were closely linked and interacted in a continuous flow of experiences (Beard, 2008).

Finally, it was found that during the influential processes, students' emotions and cognition were reconceptualised in two stages, which were independently contingent on the students' learning experiences. In the first stage, students experienced a very emotional learning journey, which contained their pleasure or displeasure, acceptance or rejection, relaxation or anxiety; this appeared to contribute to the establishment and maintenance of students' whole beings and their identities (Beard, 2005). Students' English learning anxiety in a classroom was one of the most pervasive emotions mentioned by participants. It was found that the anxiety debilitated language learning, especially anxiety of speaking English and frequent tests. Students' little experience in practising speaking English and repeated experiences in taking frequent English exams encouraged their English learning anxiety. In the second stage, students' conscious thoughts, which were seen as cognition, were developed. This stage of thinking with feeling was regarded as developing cognitive abilities that were mastered from experiential approaches to learning or behaving. Cognitive engagement, as well as emotional engagement, played a significant role in the process

of learning. These two independent stages illuminated a continuous flow of the possible transformation in a person's emotions and cognitions. These personal emotions and cognitions were responded to the stimuli from previous experiences. This finding was like what had been found in previous research (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Beard, 2008; Simpson and Marshall, 2010). This finding was striking, particularly in the field of English education in China.

Chapter 6 Analysis, Discussion and Findings:

Non-Formal and Informal Learning

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, formal learning is the focus with a detailed account of participants' narrated learning methods, processes, outcomes, and their perceptions of this kind of learning. Besides the analysis, discussion and findings of formal learning, this chapter will present the interpretations of participants' non-formal and informal learning experiences and contextualises these within the relevant literature. To facilitate readers' understandings of the findings presented herein, this chapter begins with a discussion (section 6.2) of the characteristics of participants' non-formal and informal learning experiences found within their narratives. Then, the impact of students' non-formal learning experiences on their attitudes, values and beliefs are discussed and presented in relation to four key themes (section 6.3 to 6.6):

6.3 Other Personal Relationships
6.4 Non-Formal Learning Locations
6.5 Non-Formal Learning Activities
6.6 Technology (in Non-Formal Learning)

Personal relationships discussed in section 6.3 refer to students' relationships with language training schools' teachers, tutor-student relationships, parent-child or family relationships, and relationships between friends and couples. Section 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 are discussions of impact of non-formal learning locations, activities, and technologies on students' English learning. Following by section 6.6, Sections 6.7 and 6.8 present analysis of these informal learning experiences:

6.7 Informal Learning environment
6.8 Social Media (in Informal Learning)

Participants' informal learning experiences are generally spontaneous and take place in the informal learning environment: examples include chatting with friends, common interactions with parents, and travelling to other cities and countries. Also, students' informal learning experiences

include using social media such as listening to English music and watching English movies, using social media, and travelling to other cities and countries. The discussions of these six themes (from section 6.3 to section 6.8) related to the first three specific research questions (SRQ):

> SRQ 1: What are Chinese undergraduates' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL *(non-formally/informally)* learning?
> SRQ 2: What are students' salient experiences of learning English *(non-formally/informally)*?
> SRQ 3: How do students see the respective roles and contributions of *(non-formal/informal)* learning experiences in their English language development?

The final set of findings in this chapter (section 6.9) is the implications (section 6.9.1 and section 6.9.2) which are related to the fourth specific research question.

> SRQ 4: How do students explain any influences of *(non-formal/informal)* learning experiences on their attitudes, values and beliefs about learning English?

Students' previous non-formal learning experiences are presented as various motivators in their English learning journey. Hence, section 6.9.1 (a discussion based on the evidence presented from section 6.3 to 6.6) describes the respective roles and contributions of non-formal learning experiences in students' language development. After this section, the non-formal and informal learning experiences, as the comprehensive influencing factors, will be interpreted in the section 6.9.2. This section, which is based on evidence showed from sections 6.3 to 6.8, surprisingly shows that non-formal and informal learning experiences have a comprehensive impact on students' English study. Finally, this chapter will end with a summary in section 6.10.

6.2 Characteristics of Non-Formal and Informal Learning Experiences

6.2.1 Characteristics of Non-formal Learning Experiences

There was much discussion as to what learning non-formally means; however, no agreed definition of what the term non-formal learning constitutes (Marsenille, 2015). Nonetheless, a Chinese article reviewed non-formal learning research literature in China, including journal publications and degree theses from 2004 to 2012. Results of this review indicated that non-formal learning research had not been well developed (Weiping and Li'e, 2012). Weiping and Li'e (2012) emphasised that there were very few studies focusing on non-formal learning of children, youth, juniors and seniors. On the contrary, studies conducted in other countries reveal common characteristics of non-formal learning, which is considered a less restricted form of learning. As defined in the literature review chapter, students' non-formal learning 'is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective' (European Commission, 2001, p. 32). In other words, non-formal learning experiences referred to the full variety of students' lived experiences which occurred in a less-organised manner and might be led by experts, teachers, or trained professionals. Underpinning the present study was the idea that learners who narrated learning experiences which included the characteristics above could be describing non-formal learning experiences.

In this study, students believed that their learning experiences with teachers in training institutions, and experiences with tutors or parents at home could be described as neither formal nor informal learning experiences. These learning experiences which occurred outside of the formal school system are perceived as non-formal learning experiences. For example, SiHan sought help from her father at home, MuHan was supported by his tutor, and XiaoFu takes part in a language training class in a language training institution. *"My Dad speaks English well. I learn a lot from my Dad. He helps me with my homework. Some questions I do not dare to ask my teacher, I can ask my Dad. It's not a kind of formal learning, but I, actually, learn a lot."* From SiHan's narratives, there was no doubt that SiHan was supported by her father. Similarly, MuHan reported that he was supported by his tutor with English learning: "*considering English language learning, I think learning with my tutors is neither formal learning nor informal learning."* Besides them, XiaoFu had fixed learning schedules and objectives in her language training school. She said: *"Learning from the English teacher who is in XingDongFang (a language training institution) is totally different from learning with my English teacher in school."* These three students believed that learning from

tutors, family members, and in a language training school differed from their formal learning experiences within the school system. From their narratives, it could be inferred that non-formal learning, like formal learning, needs to be structured. As Ahmed (2017) stated, structure was a characteristic of formal and non-formal learning, and was the major feature distinguishing it from informal learning. Moreover, seeking support from family members and tutors, and choosing to study in a language training school, were SiHan, MuHan and XiaoFu's intentional decisions. This indicated that students' non-formal learning experiences are characterised by intentionality. This result is consistent with some scholars' (e.g., Marsenille, 2015; Ahmed, 2017; Partnership et al., 2021) views of intentional learning. In these scholars' perceptions, intentional learning was clarified as a feature of both formal and non-formal learning. Additionally, MuHan's narrative revealed that he considers non-formal learning intentional. This finding was consistent with the European Commission's (2001) definition of non-formal learning.

Additionally, participants in this study identified other factors that differentiated non-formal from formal learning. For example, JiaJia and MeiQi pointed out that learning with or without the presence of school teachers was the factor to distinguish formal and non-formal learning:

> *The teacher. If not learning from my English teacher, I don't think it is formal learning. (JiaJia)*

> *It (learning via an app) is different. (To) study formally means I need to be in school, take classes, listen to my teachers, and follow the school rules. (MeiQi)*

In China, which was influenced by a Confucian heritage culture, formal learning was predominantly teacher-centred (Wen & Clement, 2003). Due to the traditional role of schoolteacher as authoritative figure, Chinese students believed that following their teachers' guidance, obeying their teachers' scheduling, and completing homework assigned by teachers were characteristics of formal learning. Therefore, different to formal learning, students in this study perceived that non-formal learning created a learning environment that no traditional teacher could accomplish. Besides that, two other participants, Yu and MuHan, also stated that physical learning locations,

academic supporting materials, and learning approaches were further factors distinguishing formal and non-formal learning.

> *Having (a) 45-minute class in school is formal learning. Other (methods), like afterschool activities, online learning, and learning through apps are not formal learning. We don't have a very definite learning target. But (it's) not informal learning either. Umm… (it's) like "semi-formal' learning. (Yu)*

> *There is a select bibliography of books in school which is required by the educational department. But I didn't use these textbooks in XinDongFang. That language training school produced its own learning materials for us to study. I don't know why they (teachers in the language training school) cannot use the educational required textbooks. Maybe the teachers there (in the language training school) are not permitted to teach with the required textbooks. (MuHan)*

From Yu and MuHan's narratives, we can see that different learning conditions, including learning times, learning locations, and course materials are some factors differentiating formal, non-formal, and informal learning. However, non-formal learning can also occur within school settings, such as during collaborative writing exercises. Collaborative writing refers to groups or pairs working together during the writing process (Storch, 2019). Such writing activities were not led or guided by teachers. Students in groups can choose topics they were interested in, and were encouraged to share ideas, work together, solve problems cooperatively, and learn from each other. In addition, Yu believed that his experiences in afterschool activities were non-formal learning experiences. In China, a wide variety of afterschool programs, including English drama courses, aim to encourage students to practice English and increase their knowledge of Western culture. Other similar language learning activities include participating in English Corner sessions, holding social events with English teachers, and taking part in international transfer programs (Zhou, 2016). Yet more approaches to learning English, such as learning through apps and online, were welcomed enthusiastically among Chinese students (Borau, Ullrich, Feng, & Shen, 2009; Harmandaoglu, 2012). All these various learning activities and methods provided opportunities for Chinese students to practice and develop their English skills. Although these afterschool and online learning

activities were practiced with learning objectives in mind, these objectives were considered, in students' perceptions, less official than those of formal learning while more organised than informal learning. As Yu remarked, the learning targets of various non-formal learning activities were not particularly '*definite*'. Hence, China's traditional school system assigns heavier, more in-depth learning targets for students, whereas non-formal learning activities set lighter or no targets. This finding echoed Krashen's (2013) statement that students' non-targeted learning could be referred to as non-formal and informal learning.

6.2.2 Characteristics of Informal Learning Experiences

Gola (2009), Marsick (2009) and Schugurensky (2013) described informal learning by originating it from intentional learning, incidental learning and tacit learning. Schugurensky (2013) explained that informal learning can be self-directed learning, which was intentional and conscious; incidental learning that was unintentional though conscious; or tacit learning, which meant unintentional and unconscious learning. Participants, in this study, perceived that their non-formal learning was intentional and conscious; whereas they saw their informal learning was incidental or unintentional. For example, YuNong incidentally found that communicating with a high-level of English proficiency peer to be an effective informal learning means of improving his English language ability:

> *Surprisingly, I found that talking to my English friends for some time could improve my oral English skills…I would love to talk to them who have a higher level of English language ability. I found learning English (means I) need to interact and communicate with others to progress my English language improvement. (YuNong)*

It could be inferred from the word 'surprisingly' that YuNong's communicative experiences with his English friends happen unintentionally. However, the phrase "*interact and communicate with others to progress my English language improvement"* revealed that YuNong realised the importance of communicating with foreign friends in improving his English skills. Hence, YuNong's informal learning experiences took place intentionally but consciously. This was

consistent with characteristics of informal learning, which were defined as incidental learning (Schugurensky, 2013). MuHan narrated similar informal learning experiences:

> *… during the dinner, I was chatting with my French friend and his friends all (the) time. I could feel cool that my girlfriend enjoyed listening to what we were talking about, even though she did not understand what we said. After the dinner, I asked her, "Are you happy tonight?" She stared at me with a smiling face and said: "I never knew you could speak English so well." Then she asked me: "will you take me to travel around the world? If I can go with you, I don't need to worry about talking with them (foreigners)." (MuHan)*

'French friend', *'girlfriend'* and *'I'* (MuHan) in this story were narratively coded as people; *'chatting', 'stared at me with a smiling face' and 'travel around the world'* were coded as interactions; and '*I could feel cool that my girlfriend enjoyed listening to what we were talking'* was coded as *consequence.* From MuHan's narrative, he felt '*cool*' for being able to communicate fluently in English, but he felt even cooler if he was doing it in front of his girlfriend. MuHan was encouraged by both his girlfriend's facial expressions (e.g., '*smiling face*') and spoken language (e.g., '*I never knew you could speak English so well').* Although MuHan did not realise that communicating with a French friend and encouraged by his girlfriend could develop his English language, he tended to show more positive attitudes towards practising English. That was to say, MuHan's informal learning experiences with his French friend and girlfriend were unintentional and unconscious. Compared to YuNong's narrated incidental learning experiences(presented in p. 175), MuHan's such informal learning experiences could be seen as tacit learning experiences (Schugurensky, 2013). Moreover, similar to MuHan who was encouraged by his girlfriend in English study, other students, like Ying and Yu, revealed that they were fully supported and encouraged by their parents in their daily lives. From their daily life experiences, the influence of parents was not only in providing financial support, but also in their active involvement in and encouragement of their children's English language learning.

In addition, there were other informal learning experiences narrated by students, such as using TikTok for sharing and watching short videos, WeChat for personal communications, and Sina

Weibo for searching information. Barrot (2021) indicated that social media is a form of the informal language learning environment. Social media as an informal foreign/second language learning platform had exponentially grown in the past 12 years (Barrot, 2021). However, many researchers also found that technology, including social media provided the non-formal learning environment (e.g., Falk et al., 2009). They accepted the possibility of a further category of non-formal learning given the broadness of informal learning definition. The characteristics of non-formal learning experiences had been discussed in last sub-section. It could be inferred that non-formal learning could be both targeted learning, which was also known as intentional learning, and non-targeted learning (incidental learning). In building the foreign/second language competence, Brebera (2018) highly suggested combining intentional and incidental learning since the "incidental learning may lead to the intentional learning" and at the same time the "intentional learning always contains also unplanned learning" (p. 54). Hence, the relation between intentional (formal or non-formal) learning and incidental (non-formal or informal) learning found in this study is consistent with Rogers's (2013) Learning Continuum (see figure 2 on page 46). Rogers's (2013) figure also highly proved that the three forms of learning (formal, non-formal and informal learning) interact each other and were closely interdependent.

Non-Formal Learning Experiences (from Section 6.3 to Section 6.6)

6.3 Other Personal Relationships (contact other than formal teachers)

The importance and impact of teacher-student relationships were illustrated and discussed in the previous chapter. In addition to the formal learning experiences involving teachers narrated by all participants in the present study, some also shared their non-formal experiences of learning from others, like teachers in language training institutions, tutors, family members, and friends. The following figure (Figure 20) summarised the thematic network of the key theme 'Other Personal Relationships'. This theme's name differentiated it from another key theme, teacher-student relationships, presented in the previous chapter. The *'teacher'* in the term '*teacher-student relationship'* referred to teachers in formal schools or teachers within the school educational system; however, *'teacher'* mentioned in this section refers to teachers in language training institutions. Hence, the theme '*other personal relationships'* discussed in the following paragraphs include

students' relationships with teachers in language training institutions, tutor-student relationships, parent-child or family relationships, and relationships between friends and couples. The impacts of these relationships were analysed and interpreted based on students' narratives of non-formal learning experiences. The thematic network (Figure 20) provided a clear picture of the key emerging themes, with four sub-themes and various codes working outward and inward. From this illustration, one would be able to see how these four kinds of personal relationships impact students' English language learning development. This table was an illustrative example for this entire chapter, so the rest of the chapter would not list other thematic networks which followed the same pattern of discussion as had been adopted for this 'other personal relationships' theme.

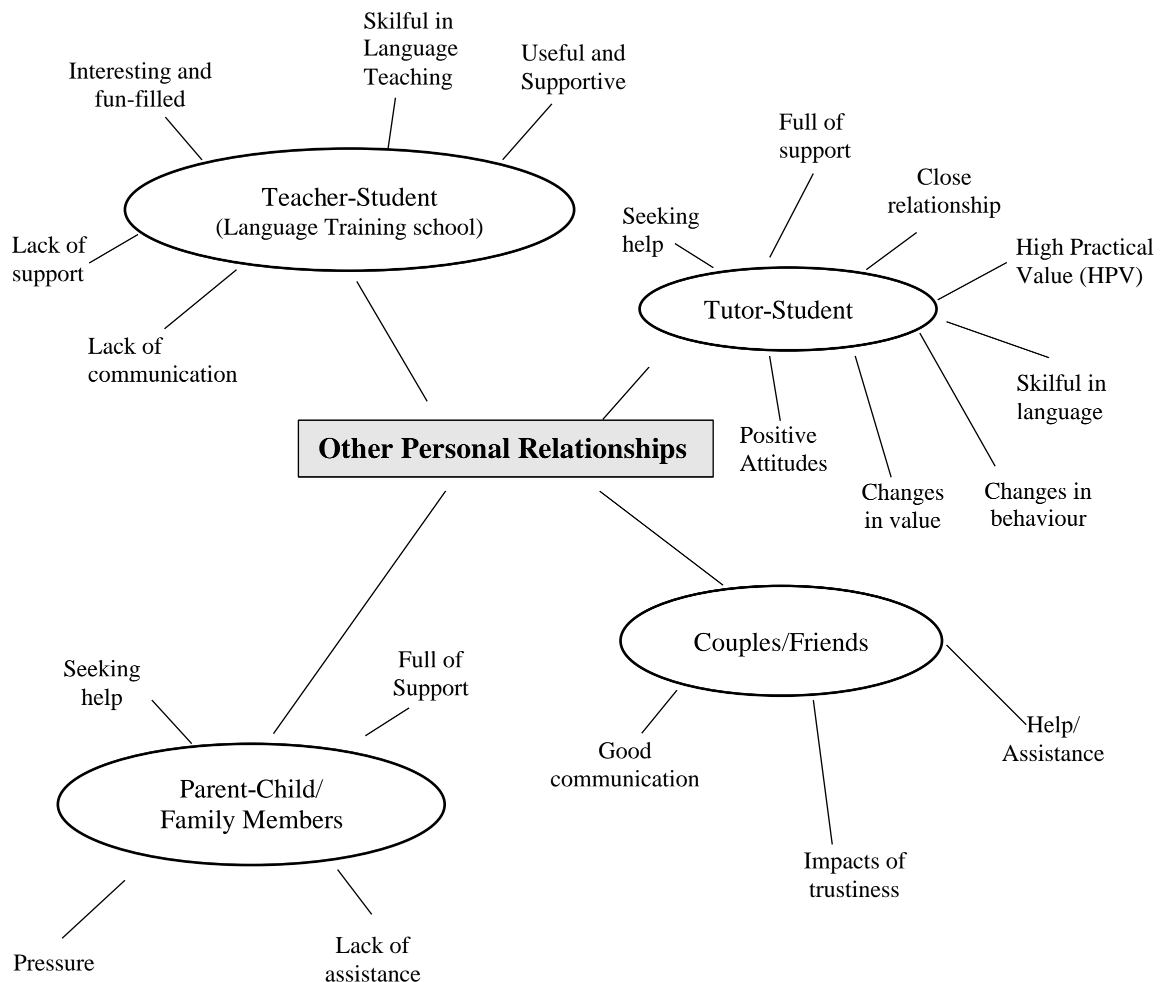


Figure 20: Thematic Network of 'Other Personal Relationship'

Source: Adapted from Attride-Stiring 2001, p. 388

The experiences discussed in this section mainly occurred in non-formal learning settings. Students perceived that their learning experiences with different people played different roles in their English language development. The two following charts (Table 10 and Table 11) related to participants' formal and non-formal learning. In Table 10, the highlighted section clearly showed that the teacher-student relationship weighed moderately or heavily in most participants' lives, whereas in Table 11, other relationships, encapsulating those with teachers in training institutions, tutors, family and friends, weigh lightly and moderately. The concept of weighting, which was to present the different *'roles'* of students' learning experiences in their attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning shows in these two charts. *'H'* stands for *'Heavily Weight'* means *'Central Role'*, 'M' stands for *'Moderately Weight'* means '*Common Role*', and *'L'* stands for *'Lightly Weight'* means *'Insignificant Role'*. Of note, two participants (marked '/' in Table 11) did not believe personal relationships influenced their attitudes, values and beliefs regarding EFL learning. Among the fifteen students, MuHan was the only one who perceived his relationship with his tutor as weighing heavily in his life and English language learning development.

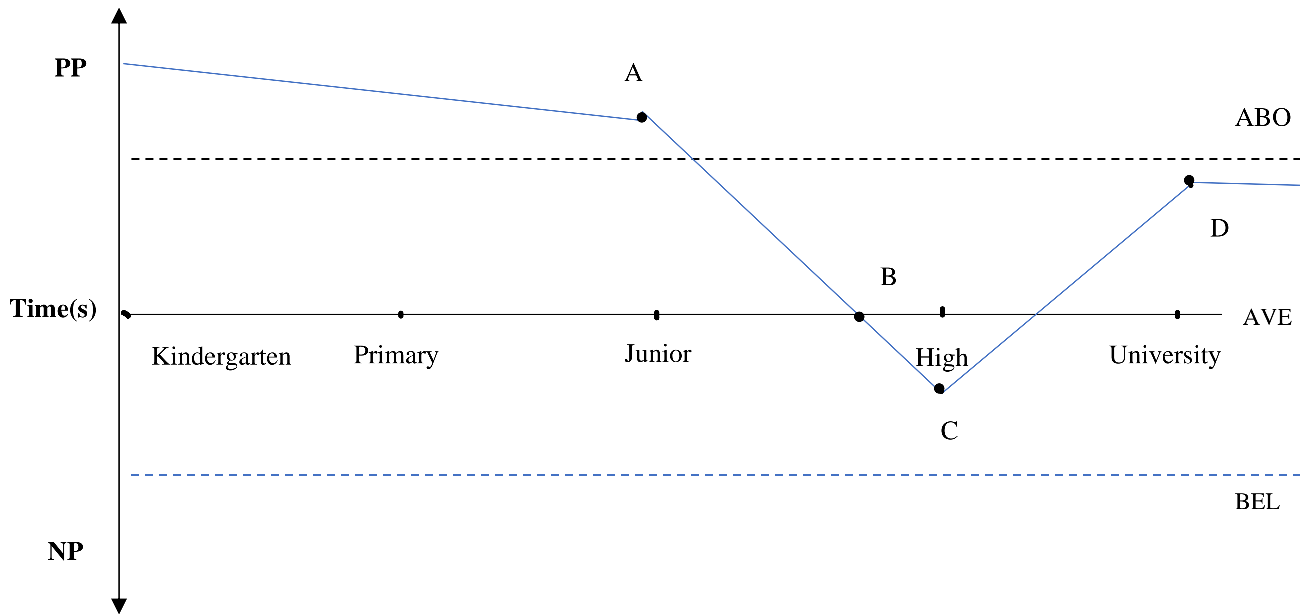
	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
Formal Learning	The Traditional Learning Method	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
	Teacher-Student Relationship	M	M	M	M	L	M	L	H	H	M	M	H	L	H	M
	Classmates Relationship	/	L	/	/	L	/	/	M	H	L	/	H	L	/	M
	Formal Learning Locations	L	L	M	M	L	M	L	M	M	L	M	L	M	M	M
	Formal Activities	H	M	L	/	/	M	L	L	H	M	L	M	L	M	M

Table 10: Weighting of 'Teacher-Student Relationship'

	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
Non-Formal Learning	Other Personal Relationship (Teachers in institutions/tutors/ families/friends)	L	L	M	L	L	L	L	/	M	M	L	H	/	M	M
	Non-Formal Learning Locations	/	/	L	/	/	/	/	M	H	M	/	H	H	/	/
	Non-Formal Activities	M	/	H	/	L	L	M	H	H	M	L	H	L	H	H
	Technology	H	M	H	M	M	H	M	L	M	L	M	M	M	L	L

Table 11: Weighting of 'Other Personal Relationships'

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, MuHan believed that his prior experiences with teachers were an important part of his English learning journey. However, he stressed that his close relationship with his tutors also played an important role in his English development. Regarding the role of personal relationships, Opdenakker, Maulana and Brok (2012) concluded in their study that personal relationships were significant predictors of students' academic learning attitudes, behaviours, and motivation. Consistent with Opdenakker, Maulana and Brok's (2012) finding, MuHan's narratives revealed that his non-formal learning experiences with his tutor greatly stimulated a close relationship with his tutor, which influenced his attitudes, values and beliefs about learning English. Hence, it could be inferred that participants' non-formal learning experiences with different people, which occurred as part of different personal relationships, had impacted their attitudes, values and beliefs regarding EFL learning. The significant role of students' non-formal learning experiences was new and different to what Opdenakker, Maulana and Brok (2012) found in their study. The following Figure 19 (was showed in p. 153) visualised MuHan's self-reported learning English learning perceptions trajectory, which was covered in the previous chapter. MuHan's non-formal learning experiences, what would be discussed in the following paragraphs, were noted next to the changing point C. Hence, I list this figure here again was to make MuHan's narratives easier for readers to understand.



Y Axis: Positive Perceptions (PP)/Negative Perceptions (NP)

X Axis: Time (s)

ABO: Above Average

AVE: Average

BEL: Below Average

Figure 19: MuHan's Self-Reported Perceptions and Self-Perceived Affective Experiences

MuHan's self-made graph was reproduced here to aid our discussion and interpretation of the link between his learning experiences with his tutor and his perceptions towards English learning. MuHan's positive attitude towards English learning began to drop in primary school, at point A. It decreased to the average, at point B, during junior years, then dipped to the lowest point during high school, at point C. In MuHan's mind, one reason for this dip was his poor relationship with his formal English teachers. After point C, MuHan's attitude began to rise. With a strong interest in discovering the factors influencing MuHan's attitude towards English learning in high school, I encouraged him to narrate more stories of that period in the second interview. MuHan explained that one reason for his attitude shift was the close relationship he developed with his tutor. MuHan's interest in learning English began to increase with his tutor's support. Since high school, he had tended to show a more positive attitude towards learning English. Different to learn from the formal English teacher in junior school, MuHan was supported by his tutor in English learning in a non-

formal way. Hence, MuHan's tutor-student relationship was another personal relationship that differed to teacher-student relationship discussed in last chapter. During the interview, MuHan further narrated:

> *We watched all of these videos without subtitles. At the first, it was too difficult for me to understand (the videos). But he explained for me and encouraged me to watch more and more videos. Later, I felt it was easier for me; I could understand part of the videos, then the whole video. It's so cool! So glad to have my tutor. Learning English with him was one of the most unexpected things. I can say that he changed a certain way of learning English for me. I would love to watch more in English.*

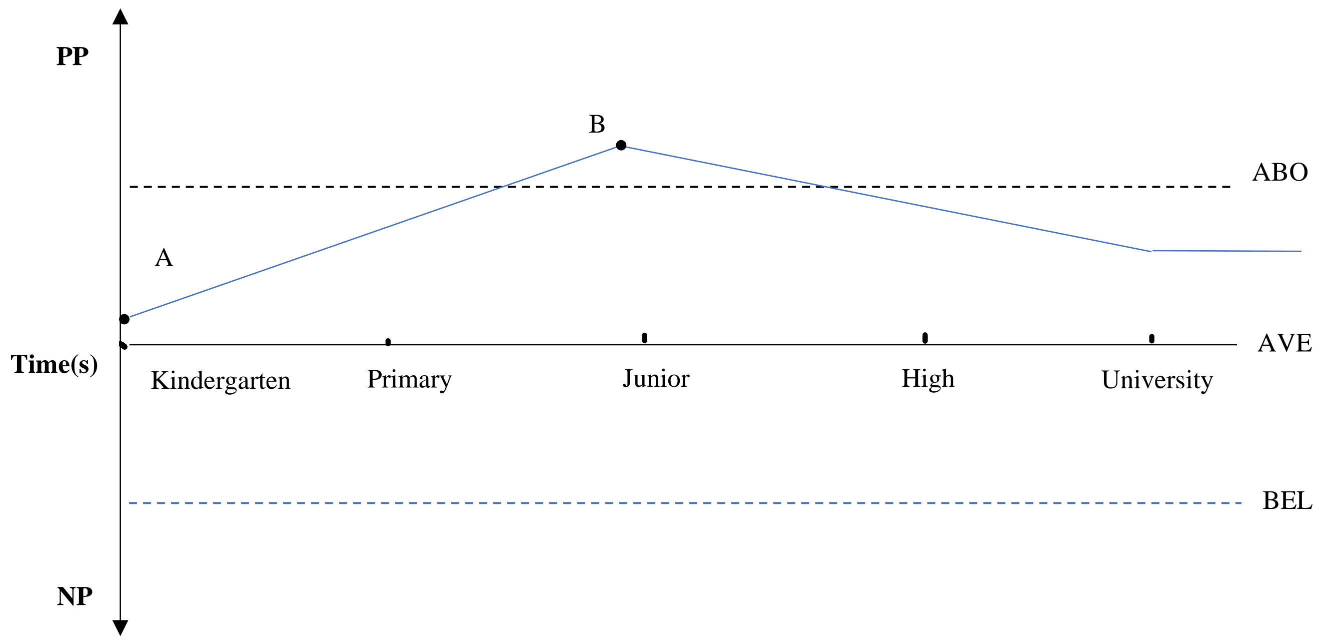
This narrative included three words or phrases with positive emotional connotations: '*cool*', '*glad*' and '*love to*'. These were MuHan's emotional reactions to his experiences of watching English videos without subtitles. It could be inferred that MuHan had a close and friendly relationship with his tutor. Some experiential learning specialists (e.g., Kolb, 1984; Beard and Wilson, 2006, 2018) described these emotional reactions as emotional experiences. They pointed out that all experiences were largely emotional experiences because emotions were experienced in the mind, where the emotional hub was located (Beard and Wilson, 2006, 2018). MuHan's emotional responses could not be dismissed because they connected closely to his reflections: '*learning English with him was one of the most unexpected things*'; his thought: '*he changed a certain way of learning English for me*'; and his attitudes: '*I would love to watch more in English*'. Hence, MuHan's emotions played an important role in his English language development. This finding was consistent with some scholars' (e.g., Kayes, 2002; Liu, Xu, and Wetz, 2011; Beard and Wilson, 2018) views on emotional engagement in learning. Kayes (2002) had emphasised that there is always a degree of emotional engagement in learning; Liu, Xu, and Wetz (2011) offered empirical evidence that positive emotion was positively interrelated with learning; and Beard and Wilson (2018) advocated for improved understanding of the role of emotional competency in learning. MuHan's non-formal learning experiences contributed to his conscious thoughts regarding English learning: he realised that it became easier to understand English videos the more he watched, and also found a more effective way to learn English. In addition to emotional engagement, MuHan's cognitive engagement played a significant role in his learning process. From MuHan's narrative, it can be

inferred that learning with his tutor involved an integration of his emotions and cognitions. At a theoretical level, this result conformed with previous findings that learning involves more than just gaining knowledge, but also integrated 'the total person-thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving' (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194).

Another student, SiHan, reported that she enjoyed studying English with her father at home because she could seek help from him in ways that she would not dare ask her English teacher at school. As SiHan explained, her father fully supported her:

> '*My Dad speaks English well. I learn a lot from my Dad. He helps me with my homework. Some questions I do not dare to ask my teacher, I can ask my Dad.*'

SiHan's interactions with her father revealed that she greatly trusted her father. SiHan held a firm belief in her father's ability to help her study English. From SiHan's narrative, it could be inferred that her successful previous learning experience with her father ('*He helps me with my homework'* coded as 'non-formal learning experience' and narratively coded as 'interaction') contributed to build up SiHan's trust in her father (*'learn a lot'* coded as consequence). Driven by this trust, SiHan continued to learn from her father non-formally that she found it could contribute to her English study. These findings echoed those presented in the previous chapter and in prior Western research (e.g., Simpson & Marshall, 2010; Rowe, Fitness, and Wood, 2015; King and Chen, 2019), which claimed that language learners' perceptions, shaped by their learning experiences, influence their cognitions. In addition to these findings, SiHan's trust in her father showed that they had a close relationship. This also supported some scholars' observations that trust was the key to positive interpersonal relationships (McKnight and Chervany, 1996). In the second interview with SiHan, she returned in her narrative to pick up an earlier point on the theme 'close relationship with parents'. As SiHan emphasised, the main reason that her interest in learning English remained positive since kindergarten was her close relationship with her father.



Y Axis: Positive Perceptions (PP)/Negative Perceptions (NP)

X Axis: Time (s)

ABO: Above Average

AVE: Average

BEL: Below Average

Figure 21: SiHan's Self-Reported Perceptions and Self-Perceived Affective Experiences

Figure 21 showed SiHan's self-reported English learning perceptions trajectory. It illustrated how Sihan's self-reported feelings regarding English learning changed over time. Two points, A and B, were reported in her responses as crucial. SiHan stated that her positive attitude towards English learning began when she was in kindergarten. She narratively explained that:

> *He (SiHan's father) would sing English songs for me when I was little. Then in my kindergarten, I could sing some English songs that my classmates could not. Having (a) Dad who (can) speak English is cool."*

SiHan's narratives (including narratives presented in p. 183 and p. 184) expressed that she achieved a sense of pride from learning from her father, even when she was little. Dawson and McHugh (2002) explained in their research that during the first few years of life, the emotional experience

of the child developed through sounds and images stored and processed in the brain. Tracing point A to point B in the line graph indicated that SiHan's pleasant home experiences in her early years contributed to her positive attitude towards English learning. Although this positive attitude began to fall after point B, SiHan still demonstrated positive behaviour in relation to English learning. The previously covered impacts of traditional learning approaches were an influence upon SiHan's change in attitude.

6.4 Non-Formal Learning Locations

The previous chapter, section 5.4 *the Importance of Learning Locations,* discussed participants' preferences regarding formal learning locations, and clarified the importance of learning locations. In a similar vein, this section primarily presents the impacts of physical non-formal learning locations upon Chinese students' English learning perceptions. The highlighted row in the following Table 12 related to the impacts of non-formal learning locations, impacts which were relevant to this section. It was clear that most students did not perceive non-formal learning locations as important in their lives. Nine students did not discuss their views regarding non-formal learning locations during their interviews. However, SiHan, XiaoFu and Ying believed that non-formal learning locations potentially influenced their attitudes, values and beliefs surrounding English study.

	AVBE in relation to	ChengYi	ChongYang	Dan	HuiFan	JiaJia	MeiQi	MengLin	MuHan	SiHan	SiJia	XiaoJing	XiaoFu	Ying	Yu	YuNong
Non-Formal Learning	Other Personal Relationship (Teachers in institutions/tutors/ families/friends)	L	L	M	L	L	L	L	/	M	M	L	H	/	M	M
	Non-Formal Learning Locations	/	/	L	/	/	/	/	M	H	M	/	H	H	/	/
	Non-Formal Activities	M	/	H	/	L	L	M	H	H	M	L	H	L	H	H
	Technology	H	M	H	M	M	H	M	L	M	L	M	M	M	L	L

Table 12: Weighting of 'Non-Formal Learning Locations'

As stated in the previous chapter, in China, from kindergarten to junior school, students of a younger age usually studied in classrooms or at home accompanied by teachers, parents or guardians. Hence, students' formal learning locations primarily consisted of schools and home.

The participants' formal learning experiences usually took place indoors, while their non-formal learning experiences occurred both inside and outside. Taking SiHan and Ying as examples:

> *I would try to communicate with my Dad in English at home, where there were no other persons. Speaking in front of people made me nervous, but at home, it wouldn't. Home is a better place for me. (SiHan)*

SiHan's responses showed how her experiences of practising English at home shaped her preferences of oral English practice location. For her, the preferred location was a comfortable place in which she was less nervous. The preference of non-formal learning locations weighed heavily in SiHan's English study. Ying's narrative sat very differently to SiHan's story. Ying preferred to take part in 'English Corner' activities, during which she could practice speaking English outside. Her experiences in English Corner sessions shaped her positive feelings around speaking English in an outdoor location.

> *(When we) jump out of classes, the school, and home, (it) is full of fresh air. We usually held our English Corner activities outside, where students can enjoy the sunshine or moonlight. (Ying)*

Although SiHan and Ying exhibited completely different feelings when it came to English practice locations, both their responses, again, revealed that students' preferential learning locations are their most suitable emotional learning environments (Green & Batool, 2017). As Green and Batool (2017) explained, emotional learning environments varied according to students' individual differences. Hence, SiHan and Ying had different preferences. SiHan recognised that she was more willing to practice English when at home with her father, and Ying found that studying in an environment with fresh air, sunshine, or moonlight increased her interest in learning English. These cognitions were affected by their previous English-speaking experiences. That was to say: SiHan and Ying's differing preferences of English learning locations were not only related to their most suitable emotional environments, but also their appropriate cognitive environments. As explained in the previous chapter, an appropriate cognitive environment referred to a place which was relevant to a student's needs and linked to their previous experiences (Green & Batool, 2017). In

the present section, SiHan and Ying's narratives revealed that in addition to formal learning locations, students' preferred non-formal learning locations were dependent upon their individual characteristics and previous learning experiences. This finding was consistent with what had been found in relation to students' preferences regarding formal learning locations. Additionally, the finding of this section was consistent with those of Egle (2007), as well as Green and Batool (2017), who stated that an overall environment which encompassed a comfortable physical environment, a suitable emotional environment, and an appropriate cognitive environment constituted the kind of active, engaging and affective environment necessary to facilitate effective learning.

6.5 Non-Formal Learning Activities

In the previous chapter, formal learning activities, such as discussions with peers, decision making and problem-solving activities were found to contribute, in students' perceptions, to effective learning. Compared to these formal learning activities, non-formal activities seemed to act as students' English learning motivators. Students described non-formal and informal activities as more *'enjoyable'* (Dan) and *'desirable'* (SiJia). The impacts of non-formal activities on students' English study would be discussed in this section, whereas informal activities would be covered in the *Section 6.8 Social Media in Informal Learning*. SiHan, Dan, SiJia, and XiaoFu perceived non-formal activities as including collaborative writing in classes, practising speaking English in the English Corner, attending English drama performances, and taking part in summer-school programs. SiHan appreciated the exchange of ideas when conducting collaborative writing activities with her classmates; Dan enjoyed taking part in the English Corner; XiaoFu found a transfer program helpful for improving her oral English; and SiJia loved English drama performances, which were, for her, a desirable means of improving her English skills. These non-formal experiences stimulated the four participants' further interest in studying English.

Analysis of SiHan's narratives found that her experiences in collaborative writing with her classmates influenced how she valued peer assistance and group friendships, further impacting her attitudes towards learning English:

At first, I (didn't) think it would work well to write collaboratively with my classmates. You know, we all had our own ideas. We had some arguments about which topic we should choose. Different people had different ideas. But we tried to figure out which was the best one for us. So, we shared our own ideas, we exchanged our ideas, and we discussed about all the topics together. Then, an agreement on this issue was almost universal. We took three weeks to write up the article. We discussed in school, at home or even online. We tended to be open to each other and trusted in each other. When we finished our article, we were all so happy and proud of ourselves. (SiHan)

Over the last decade, collaborative writing had received considerable attention from language learning researchers (e.g., Shehadeh, 2011; Dobao, 2012; Storch, 2013). While these scholars had emphasised that individuals construct developmental knowledge through their social interactions, little focus had been given to the role that experiences of social interaction played in affective patterns of language learning. SiHan's narratives revealed that the changes in her cognitions, such as her coming to value groupwork and friendship, were influenced by her experiences of writing collaboratively. Moreover, SiHan's beliefs surrounding English learning were altered in turn by these developed cognitions:

So learning English was not like (learning) a subject. We could learn well by ourselves, but it (English study) also could be better if we talked to each other in (the) right way(s), we helped each other and we learned from each other. (SiHan)

SiHan used to think that to learn a language meant to work hard on it individually; however, she found that peer assistance and groupwork also contributed to developing her English skills. Although SiHan's attitudes towards English learning were not influenced by her collaborative learning experiences, her beliefs regarding English learning approaches changed. The use of collaborative writing was supported by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which held that individuals developed knowledge through social interactions and that learning results come from the internalisation of these interactions. Additionally, SiHan's experience of collaborative writing proved effective in developing her beliefs surrounding English learning.

While all participants had opportunities to practice oral English in the English Corner, because this non-formal learning activity was welcomed by Chinese schools, Dan was the most willing and enthusiastic participant in this activity. Dan expressed her strong inclination to take part in her high school's English Corner, as follows:

> *I enjoyed staying with my friends in the English Corner. It looked like we were chatting just like we did every day, but we were chatting in English actually. That's a useful way to practice oral English. At least, I think so. I believed that if I kept practising, I could overcome my fear of talking to an English native speaker. Even, I think I can speak fluently as an English native speaker. You know, it's also good for my career later. (Dan)*

'Action' codes included *'chatting in English'* and *'kept practicing'; '*place' code referrd to *'the English Corner';* and the code 'consequence' involved *'useful way', 'overcome my fear'* and *'good for my career later'*. These narrative codes were grouped to a sub-them 'positive non-formal learning activity', and then to a key theme 'non-formal learning activity'. As Dan had a keen interest in English study for the development of her future career, she wanted to keep participating in English Corner sessions, which she realised were effective for improving English skills. Ushioda (2008, p. 21) stated that intrinsic motivation included 'doing something as an end in itself, for its own self-sustaining pleasurable rewards of enjoyment, interest, challenge or skill and knowledge development.' In this sense, Dan was highly intrinsically motivated to engage in practising English in the English Corner. She obviously 'enjoyed' these experiences. Moreover, Dan believed that more opportunities to practice speaking would be of great advantage in prevailing over her shortcomings and achieving a better future career. Hence, these non-formal learning experiences stimulated her strong interest in continuing to practice English.

Another student, SiJia's narrative sat very close to Dan's story. SiJia's full discussion of the afterschool activity she enjoyed was illustrated below:

> *I loved one afterschool activity: the English drama training course. There were different levels of the course. Drama activities were conducted in the first semester (in*

high school) and lasted for a whole year (until) the final upcoming public speaking course. From page to performance, we were so proud of ourselves that we could make it. And I found myself falling love with the Western countries. From that course, I decided to go abroad for further study. (SiJia)

SiJia's positive attitude towards Western culture was further compounded through the non-formal learning activity she had attended and her highly self-motivated English learning style. SiJia's feelings of pride and self-satisfaction from performing drama in English contributed to this positive attitude. Like Dan and SiJia, XiaoFu was also willing to develop her English skills, but for slightly different reasons. Firstly, XiaoFu was motivated by an opportunity to learn English through an international transfer program. Secondly, the decision of participating in an overseas transferring program was recommended by her parents. From XiaoFu's narrative, her positive presentation of taking part in a non-formal learning activity sat closely to Dan and SiJia's.

Taking part in the overseas transferring program was full of fun. Although my parents asked me to take part in this activity at first, I found I could make friends with a lot of English native students, and I could learn a lot of idiomatic English from them. Also, having a chance to travel around the Western countries made me decide that I must learn English well so I can go to these countries again. (XiaoFu)

XiaoFu spent three months in New Zealand for an academic exchanging program (coded as non-formal learning activity/action). This program was designed for students to experience different lives in other countries, with the aim of encouraging them to study and live in another country independently. As XiaoFu explained, this program was '*full of fun*' (positive feeling/consequence); she '*made friends*' (consequence) and learned '*idiomatic English from English native speakers'* (consequence). More importantly, XiaoFu's transfer experience contributed to stimulating her interest in learning English. Even though Dan, SiJia and XiaoFu were keen to learn English non-formally, two students (Dan and SiJia) were more self-motivated (by factors such as personal interest, professional development, self-satisfaction, and feelings of pride), whereas XiaoFu was fundamentally influenced by a situational condition (such as her parents' recommendations).

Nevertheless, all of their positive presentations of Western countries or Western culture were influenced by their such non-formal learning experience.

6.6 Technology (in Non-Formal Learning)

The increased use of mobile devices has been accompanied by rapid growth in learning apps, a development welcomed by students, parents, and teachers alike. In China from February 2020 to February 2021, about 1.6 billion mobile phone subscriptions had been registered (Statics, 2021). It had hit a new highest landmark of mobile users in 2021 (Statis, 2021). That was to say, mobile apps were widely known and used by Chinese. Gao, Yang, and Krogstie (2015) already found that the mobile apps were seen as an effective self-directed English learning tool. In the field of English education, mobile-assisted English learning apps had been widely used both in classes and outside of the classroom. More and more Chinese students were realising both the importance of practising English and the limits of speaking English in a classroom context, as shown by a few participants in this study who enjoyed practising their oral English via speaking and listening apps. An App called English Liulishuo, was one of the apps mostly welcomed by Chinese students. The English Liulishuo app contained voice overs for short movie clips and both reading and recorded listening material from native speakers (Wang and Christiansen, 2019). The Chinese name of this app literally meant *'to help students speak English fluently'*. SiHan was motivated to speak English via this app:

> *Do you know there is an iPhone app called Liulishuo? I used it a lot. I loved it. I listen(ed) to the movie clips several times, then I started to imitate the native speaker's voice. It's difficult, but I could spend an hour to recording one clip again and again. When I found it was similar what the original speaker recorded, I was proud of myself. And then I would love to play it for my parents; they were happy for me, too. Almost every day, I would read and record at least one short clip." (SiHan)*

Based on SiHan's narrative, the following figure (Figure 22) was created. This figure consists of four stages which show how SiHan's learning experiences influenced her attitudes and motivation in an ongoing cycle. Each stage would be discussed in detail.

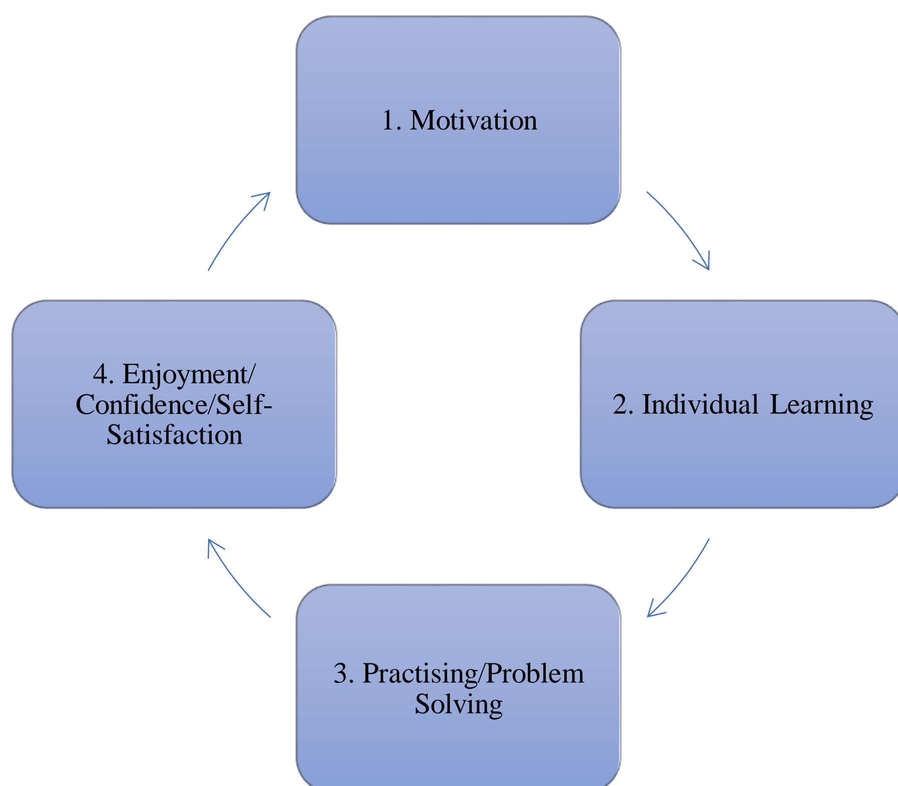


Figure 22: A learning cycle for students using an English learning App

From SiHan's other narratives regarding learning English, it can be inferred that she showed a keen interest in speaking English (stage 1: motivation). SiHan's English teacher in junior school and her close relationship with her father were motivational factors which drove her continuous improvement of her oral English skills. Through practising with the Liulishuo app, SiHan started demonstrating individual learning (stage 2). While practising, she encountered difficulties and tried to solve problems by practising more and more (stage 3: practising/problem solving). This demonstrates that mobile apps enable learners' autonomy (Khaddage et al., 2016) and are able to be adjusted to suit students' individual paces based on their available time and learning needs (Elias, 2011). After practising several times, SiHan exhibited improvement in her oral English learning, built confidence, and became satisfied with herself. This enjoyment, confidence, and self-satisfaction further boosted her motivation for learning English (stage 4). Finally, SiHan's motivation became the beginning of another oral English practice cycle. At this stage, SiHan remained highly intrinsically motivated to learn English via the Liulishuo app (back to stage 1:

motivation). As Wallace (2015) stated, students' intrinsic motivation helps them discover the pleasures of gaining understanding and skills.

Some other students, YuNong, MengLin, and Ying, shared their learning experiences with another English learning mobile app, BaiCiZhan. Unlike SiHan, they were seldom motivated by this app. Influenced by the Chinese traditional learning approach, expanding students' English vocabulary is an important English learning tasks for students. Therefore, in recent years, numerous apps had been developed to increase Chinese students' English vocabulary through mobile learning. BaiCiZhan was a Chinese app developed by the Chengdu Chaoyouai Tech Company and designed to improve English vocabulary. It was relatively popular, and consists of pictures, audio, video, and quizzes in both Chinese and English (Wang and Christiansen, 2019). Past research had observed that mobile learning has particular advantages such as flexibility, compactness, and user-friendliness (Kim, Rueckert, Kim, & Seo, 2013; Gao, Yang, and Krogstie, 2015). Participants YuNong, MengLin, MeiQi, Ying, and ChengYi, who utilised two English learning apps, said that they began using mobile apps when they were in high school. However, their use of mobile phones at school or at home was limited until they went to university. Past Chinese scholars had found that undergraduates and college students in China are highly motivated to use technical resources, like mobile apps, to improve their English language learning (Wu, 2015; Zou, Yan & Li, 2020). On the contrary, participants in this study expressed more muted reactions:

> *BaiCiZhan is the app I use to learn new English words, just because it is convenient to learn some new words on my phone, instead of carrying a heavy dictionary. (YuNong)*

> *That app (Shanbei Vocabulary) was recommended by my English teacher. So I used it. It was okay. I just learned a new word, but still, I didn't know how to use it. (MengLin)*

> *I can learn English new words (through the app) when I am on a bus or a train. But I found I only know how to spell new words, not using them. So, I think reciting words from the app is probably not a very effective learning method. Learning English is to use English. (Ying)*

YuNong, MengLin and Ying were willing to use mobile apps to learn English outside of the classroom because of mobile devices' small sizes and light weights, making them convenient for students to carry. However, the debate as to whether mobile apps offered significant benefits in English learning remains ongoing. Four participants in this study questioned the effectiveness of reciting a new word without learning how it is used in context. Their experiences of learning from apps contradicted their beliefs as to how English should be learned (e.g., '*Learning English is to use English*'). In addition, their perceptions of these apps were fundamentally influenced by situational conditions (e.g., teachers' requests and convenience). Compared to SiHan's positive attitudes toward mobile apps, YuNong, MengLin and Ying showed less interest in continuing to learn English via the apps. This indicated that participants' feelings, perceptions, and preferences were influenced by their different learning experiences. The selection of apps with different functions and features may also had impacted their attitudes. This implication had also been raised by Wang and Christiansen's (2019) research, which aimed to explore Chinese adults' attitudes towards English learning mobile apps. As Wang and Christiansen (2019) suggested, future studies could investigate the reasons why Chinese students choose specific learning apps, and examine the impacts of different apps upon them.

Additionally, technology, also as a tool of formal learning had been widely adopted in English classes to make students find English courses more interesting and enjoyable. Various schools and language training agencies had encouraged a shift to learning through the technologies, because technologies were perceived as exerting influence on students, making them feel classes are 'novel' and motivating their interests in learning English. However, JiaJia suggested that the high frequency of technical problems occurring in classes disrupted lessons and caused frustration for students:

> *What we most expect(ed) from having English classes was to watch an English video in classes… But sometimes the computer did not work well. We were very, very disappointed because we could only watch it (these videos) on Friday. We have waited for the whole week, but the computer did not work... (JiaJia)*

Jiajia's experiences with technology in class changed his attitude from expectant to '*disappointed*'. Cardoso and Bidarra (2007) conducted a study which showed that technology in learning could be both a solution and a problem. Sentiments reflecting this statement were also revealed from MeiQi and ChengYi's experiences in learning with technology at home. Both experienced difficulties in submitting their assignments via emails or websites. They both agreed that the email process and their course website were sometimes not user-friendly, and that insufficient technical support was provided for them at home (Cardoso and Bidarra, 2007; Greener, 2015).

Informal Learning Experiences (Section 6.7 and Section 6.8)

6.7 Informal Language Learning Environments (Friends and Home Environment)

In parallel with the influence of students' teachers, tutors, classmates and parents in formal and non-formal learning, participants also perceived that their relationships with friends and parents in their everyday lives were quite important in their quest for English proficiency. In Chapter 5, participants reported feeling that teachers were one of the most influential factors on their English language journeys. These students also perceived that their tutors, teachers in language training institutions, and parents, through the latter's provision of financial support, were of significant importance. In addition, since some participants treated the English language as a communication tool, friends were considered partners with whom they could increase communicative competence. This form of external support was key, as some students believed they had little opportunity to use English in classes. One participant, YuNong, emphasised the importance in English language learning of communication with high-level peers. YuNong believed that such communication would be an effective means of improving his English language ability. In YuNong's mind, high-level peers meant his friends who possessed a high level of English proficiency, like native English speakers.

> *I would love to talk to them (foreign friends) who have a higher level of English language ability. I found learning English (means I) need to interact and communicate with others to progress my English language improvement. Interacting or talking with*

lower-level friends, I might not learn anything. At least, I could not find any mistakes with my English usage. (YuNong)

YuNong's experiences of communicating with his foreign friends made him believe that it was necessary to communicate and practice with peers who possessed high-level English proficiency in order to improve English skills. Like YuNong, MuHan also treated English as a communication tool. However, in a slightly different case to that of YuNong, MuHan found that speaking English with his friends, especially in front of his girlfriend, successfully fulfilled his need for learning satisfaction. This experience stimulated his intrinsic motivation to learn English (*Student M* stands for MuHan):

Student M:
Don't you think it would be very cool to chat smoothly with a foreigner when you are with your girlfriend?

Interviewer:
It sounds interesting. Do you have any specific stories?

Student M:
I remember once I invited my girlfriend to a restaurant, which was opened by a French friend of mine. Her (MuHan's girlfriend's) English was not very good. She could speak some simple English. So, during the dinner, I was chatting with my French friend and his friends all (the) time. I could feel that my girlfriend enjoyed listening to what we were talking about although she did not understand what we said. After the dinner, I asked her, "Are you happy tonight?" She stared at me with a smiling face and said: "I never knew you could speak English so well." Then she asked me: "Will you take me to travel around the world? If I can go with you, I don't need to worry about talking with them (foreigners)."

In university, MuHan regained his former highly positive attitude towards learning English. One factor MuHan mentioned was the high frequency of English use at university. As MuHan explained,

he felt '*cool*' for being able to communicate fluently in English, but felt even '*cooler*' if he was doing it in front of his girlfriend. Beard (2008) named such feelings inner world senses, which in this case, were produced by the interactions between MuHan and his friends and girlfriend. Influenced by these inner world senses, MuHan continued his informal English learning experience: using English frequently. In Beard's (2008) terminology, MuHan's experiences of speaking English with friends would be called outer world experiences. Beard (2008) believed that attitudes, like those of MuHan's towards speaking English, were influenced by inner world senses linking inner world feelings with outer world experiences. Moreover, it seemed that MuHan's interest in learning English grew when he received positive encouragement from his girlfriend. This finding echoed previous research which has observed that strengthening students' positive actions via encouragement can lead to the formation of desirable behaviours and habits within them (Zamani, 2021). This encouragement can be expressed both verbally and non-verbally. MuHan was encouraged by both his girlfriend's facial expressions (e.g., '*smiling face*') and spoken language (e.g., '*I never knew you could speak English so well.')*

Nearly all participants reported that their parents provided financial support for their studies, including their English language learning, both in school and outside of school. One participant, Yu, particularly emphasised his belief that financial support had influenced his English language learning proficiency to some extent:

> *My parents provide me financial support, to buy books, extra exercise books, pay the language training fees. They supported me with everything I need(ed). Because of their active attitude towards my English language learning, I told myself I must try my hard(est) to learn English well. Now I think they are happy and satisfied with my English ability. (Yu)*

Yu's life experiences had a major impact on his English language learning development. The influence of parents, as understood by various participants, was not only in providing financial support, but also in their active involvement in and encouragement of their children's English language learning. For example, while Ying supported the idea of studying English, she disliked her junior school English teacher. She wished her teacher could have been more available to offer

help with writing in English and provide further opportunities for using English in class. Ying made the unfortunate observation that:

> *Sometimes when I'm stuck (like when doing reading comprehension exercises) the teacher is too busy with the naughty students. I could not get any help. (Ying)*

In English classes, Ying preferred to read English books instead of paying attention to the class. Although she was aware that her teachers and classmates disagreed with and were dissatisfied with her approach, Ying did not change her learning style. With an interest in exploring how Ying's attitudes and beliefs towards English learning were influenced by her poor relationship with her teachers, I detected further evidence of the significant impacts of parent-child relationships. Although Ying had a poor relationship with her teachers and classmates, she had close ties to her family. She explained everything to her parents, hoping they could help her resolve the issue:

> *I knew they (my English teacher and classmates) did not like me. I told my parents that I was upset, but I did not want to change. I am lucky that my parents totally understand me. And they made an appointment with my English teacher to discuss about my issue with my English teacher. I felt much better after that, because my teacher paid more attention on what I need. I was thankful to my parents. They always agreed with me and fully supported me. (Ying)*

Ying maintained a positive attitude towards English learning even though she disliked the learning style at school because she had an open-minded family who fully supported her (narrative code: interaction), as long as she worked hard (narrative code: action). Several narrative studies (e.g., Bahar & Adiguzel, 2016; Sellami et al., 2017) reported similar findings showing that parental influence on students' self-efficacy and educational goal-setting was stronger than that of any other social group. More importantly, Ying's attitude towards English learning changed (narrative code: consequence) after her parents' meeting with the English teacher (narrative code: action). That is to say: Ying's parental involvement in her study seemed to directly influence her English language development. In the field of English language education, there had been a silent increase in popularity and acknowledgement of the importance of parental involvement in students' success

at school. Like Ying, SiJia's confidence in studying English was strengthened by parental support and encouragement:

> *In Los Angeles, one day, I had to buy a hamburger by myself, because my parents didn't speak English. Actually, they wanted me to try to use English. They didn't force me to do that, they just told me "I can do it. I can make it." So I pushed myself to speak up and I successfully bought the hamburger, in English; I was so proud of myself. Even, I started to dare to talk with foreigners in English, after that. (SiJia)*

The experience of buying a hamburger in English built up SiJia's confidence, gave her a fresh attitude towards English speaking, and improved her learning abilities. SiJia's positive feelings ('*proud*') and her positively changed behaviours ('*dare to talk with foreigners in English*') were influenced by her experience. More importantly, her willingness to use English was influenced by her parents' encouragement. Both of Ying and SiJia's parents played an active role in the improvement of their children's attitudes and motivations towards learning English. In 1985, Gardner had already identified two important roles of parents in their children's second/foreign language learning process. These roles were known as active and passive (Gardner, 1985). According to Gardner (1985), when parents encouraged and support children's study of another language, parents who monitored their children's language learning performance were said to be taking an active role, whereas a passive role entails parents' aptitudes and attitudes towards their child's language learning. To use Gardner's (1985) terminology, Ying and SiJia's parents can take 'an active role on the improvement of attitudes and motivation in the child that could manipulate second language acquisition' (quoted in Asgari and Mustapha, 2011, pp. 9–10).

In recent years, more scholars had begun to agree with Gardner's (1985) observations regarding parental involvement. Panferov (2010) highlighted that the relationship between parental involvement and EFL students' learning has been firmly established. Wei & Zhou (2012), along with Shim (2013), had further asserted that parental involvement acts as a notable factor in improving EFL students' learning abilities. In Asgari and Mustapha's (2011) study, they found that parents had an impact on students' English vocabulary learning. In the informal learning environment, parents acted as an active role in vocabulary learning. Similar to Asgari and

Mustapha’s (2011) findings, the present study showed that the active role of parents usually occurred in the way of non-formal learning. However, different to Asgari and Mustapha’s (2011) study, this study also revealed that the passive role of parents occurred on students’ formal learning processes. As discussed in the last Chapter, parents acted as the passive role in encouraging students in English learning. For example, both of MeiQi and Dan narrated that their parents would ask their school English teachers for advice in helping them with English learning. In MeiQi and Dan’s minds, their parents preferred to follow formal English teachers passively instead of supporting them in English learning actively. Hence, MeiQi and Dan’s parents, who had not monitored their child in language learning actively, acted as a passive role in improving thei English learning.

6.8 Social Media (in Informal Learning)

In recent years, the use of social media had surged globally. Social media had been defined in various ways. In this section, I used Bryer and Zavatarro’s (2011, p. 327) definition: ‘social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration and enable deliberation across stakeholders. These technologies included blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, networking platforms (including Facebook), and virtual worlds.’ In China, Sina Weibo (新浪微博) served the same function as blogs, Baidu (百度) was the equivalent to wikis, WeChat (微信) was similar to WhatsApp, the RenRen (人人网) networking platform functioned as an equivalent to Facebook, and TikTok (抖音) was a platform for sharing short videos. The popularity and high penetration rates of Sina Weibo, WeChat, and TikTok in China made them the country’s three most widely used forms of social media (China Internet Network Information Center, 2018). Participants in this study showed particular interests in using WeChat, Sina Weibo, TikTok, and watching videos, movies or dramas on other media platforms in their daily lives.

All interviewees primarily used social media when in high school and university, because when they were young, they were not allowed to use social media often or required parental/guardian supervision when using media platforms. Participants’ narratives revealed they predominantly used

social media for personal reasons, rather than for academic, research-related, or professional purposes:

> *I watched short videos on TikTok, just for fun. (ChongYang)*

> *WeChat is used for chatting with my friends. Sometimes we share some learning experiences or stories in school. We talked to each other in Chinese, so I don't think it is related to my English learning. (HuiFan)*

> *There (is) a lot of news on Sina Weibo: news in China and worldwide. It helps me know more about what happens in the world. But it's hard to tell how these news (are) related to my English study.' (ChengYi)*

Like ChongYang, HuiFan and ChengYi, the majority of this study's participants used TikTok for sharing and watching short videos, WeChat for personal communications, and Sina Weibo for searching information. Some other online services mentioned in the interviews include 51 Qiancheng for professional connections, RenRen for creating personal blogs, and various media platforms for watching movies. All participants used social media in their daily lives. As Chen and Bryer (2012) have observed, students use social media for 'benefits at leisure because the technologies are user-friendly' (p. 92). Unfortunately, in participants' views, there was limited education-related activity on social media platforms. This finding is similar to that of Selwyn (2009), as well as Smith & Borreson (2010). Both studies reported that social media use was limited in the academic world. In Smith & Borreson's (2010) study, even fewer students reported using technologies such as video/photo sharing sites, blogs, social bookmarking tools, and other online virtual worlds in an educational setting. Nevertheless, both SiHan and MuHan believed that informally integrating social media into learning could improve academic performance:

> *You know we used WeChat every day. I have my (university) teacher's WeChat. Sometimes we would talk to each other about my study, current living issues, or my future career. I think if we could talk in English just like I talk to my foreign friends, it*

(would be) another way to use English in (our) daily lives. It would be good for us to improve (our) English. (SiHan)

I watched English movies without subtitles. I found it quite useful to improve my English. If my English teacher could encourage and guide us to do such an activity when we were not studying, I (believe) it could help a lot of students improve English skills or stimulate their English learning interests. (MuHan)

SiHan's experiences talking to foreigners on WeChat and MuHan's experiences watching English movies made them believe that learning could happen anywhere, at any time. As Ahmed (2017) identified, experiences like SiHan and MuHan's are incidental learning experiences that can occur in many modes, including social media activities. Both SiHan and MuHan realised that acquiring knowledge could happen informally as well as formally. Accordingly, their beliefs surrounding learning English were incidentally changed. Hence it could be inferred that informal learning experiences may influence students' beliefs in relation to studying English. Furthermore, both SiHan and MuHan suggested that integrating social media within formal learning could benefit students' English development. Both their responses express the idea that informal learning can potentially enrich and complement formal learning. This finding is consistent with the research of Chen and Bryer (2012), as well as Peeter et al. (2014), which indicated the 'potential personal, educational and societal benefits of revealing informal learning within formal education' (Peeter et al., p. 181).

In addition, as Ahmed (2017) had stated, informal learning had become more and more important because learners can acquire knowledge as a function of interactions between connected partners anytime and anywhere. However, the way in which informal learning could potentially be integrated within formal education remains an important concern. SiHan and MuHan's narratives suggested that social media could help students learn if this social media use was guided by teachers or under instructors' close supervision (e.g., talking to teachers in English on WeChat, or being encouraged/guided by teachers to watch English movies). Chen and Bryer's (2012) study proved that teaching strategies can be integrated with technology, not just in formal in-class environments, but more importantly, to encourage social and active learning that was learner-centred and informal.

They emphasised that educators should use social media to bridge formal and informal learning so that students can connect in new and meaningful ways. The interest in combining formal and informal learning awakened after the year 2000 (Folkestad, 2006). Many studies had highlighted the potential usage of Twitter, a multi-platform Social Networking Site (SNS), as a tool for language learning (Borau, Ullrich, Feng, & Shen, 2009; Harmandaoglu, 2012). These authors claimed that social media could serve as a medium for both formal and informal learning (Rosell-Aguilar et al., 2018). Patterns of learning considered less credible than formal learning but more organised than informal learning, referred to as non-formal in this study, could also form part of this bridge between social media, formal, and informal learning.

6.9 Implications:

6.9.1 Relationship between Non-Formal Learning Experiences and Learning Motivation

As Motivational Theory (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017) indicated, a second language (L2) learning motivation referred to the learner's internal desire to become an effective L2 user; social pressures coming from the learner's environment to master the L2; and the actual experiences of being engaged in the L2 learning process. This theory pertained to L2 learners' reasons why they were engaged in English learning. According to Dörnyei (2017), the primary source of intrinsic motivation was language learners' internal desire to become a L2 user, and the other two primary sources—the social pressures and the actual experiences in L2 learning—were defined as extrinsic motivators. Based on evidence presented above, participants' conceptualisation of motivation in English learning was also explored from their non-formal learning narratives. All the participants accepted the need to stimulate English learning interests unquestionably. There was thus a strong sense of English learning motivation among students. From participants' non-formal learning stories, their actual experience could not only play a significant role in influencing students' learning motivation but also be the primary source of learning motivation, whether the intrinsic or extrinsic motivators are related. This finding was similar to the results in Bond (1996), Rao (1996) Chang (2001), and Luk & Lin's (2007) studies.

In terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, scholars (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura, 1989) had provided clear definitions. In this study, intrinsic motivation referred to Chinese EFL learners who were motivated because they believed learning English carried its own rewards. In other words, it pertained to learners' perceptions of the reasons why he or she was engaged in English learning. The motivation for learning English was mostly related to students' interests or curiosity. For example, SiHan worked much on oral exercise, because it was enjoyable and challenging while she was using the English learning app. SiHan experienced a sense of achievement and satisfication when she could immitate English native speaker's prounciation fluently. Also, another student, SiJia, was also highly self-motivated in her English study. SiJia's feelings of pride and self-satisfaction from performing drama in English contributed to this positive attitude. Both of SiHan and SiJia did not expect to receive a reward or a prize after improving his oral English skills. Or they were not forced to practice speaking English. It was mainly the self-satisfaction experiences that gave SiHan and SiJia the motivation to speak and learn English. On the other side, extrinsic motivation referred to learners who work hard on English learning because they believed English learning would provide them with praise, benefits or a better future. For instance, Dan believed that more opportunities to practice speaking would be of great advantage in prevailing over her shortcomings and achieving a better future career. Hence, these non-formal learning experiences stimulated her strong interest in continuing to practice English.

Gaining knowledge, improving oneself, and fulfilling self-satisfaction were considered as reasons for pursing learning English. Additionally, being competitive, having a better future, or gaining rewards were also the reasons for learners to be involved in English. Although some students showed little interests in English, they still took English courses because of parents' requirements, teachers' pressure, and the requirements of the English education system. The core in the conceptualisation of English study was the learning motivation. From the data, one of the possible reasons that motivated students to learn English was their prior successful learning experiences, especially the non-formal learning experiences, that led to the interest in taking English classes, engaging in assignments, or participating in English activities. Participants in this study who had positive attitudes toward English language learning were more enthusiastic toward English learning and attributed to highly motivated English learning. This finding supported Shams (2008), Al-

Mamun, Rahman, and Hossain's (2012) statements about the close relationship between learning motivation and learning attitudes, values and beliefs.

However, in China, the factors in defining students as intrinsic or extrinsic students had been widely researched before (e.g., Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005; Pan, Zang, and Wu, 2010; Li and Zhou, 2017). More and more critical papers began to analyse factors that influence students' learning motivation, such as Chinese traditional culture, personal confidence, interests and other extrinsic motivators that tended to impact Chinese EFL learners' English performance. In the field of education, Dewey (1953) and Itin (1999) determined the significance of actual experiences. Itin (1999) stated that 'it was insufficient to simply know without doing and impossible to fully understand without doing' (p. 92). Furthermore, the importance of actual learning experiences had been clearly defined by researchers in Western countries (Dewey, 1953; Itin, 1999, Dörnyei, 2017), but not in China. In this study, Chinese students' actual non-formal learning experiences were found to be the motivators in their English learning.

6.9.2 Non-Formal and Informal Learning Experiences as the Comprehensive Influential Factors

The comprehensive input, which concerned the great importance of receptive skills in the second language (SL) acquisition process, was one of the famous SL acquisition theories (Krashen, 1992). Stephen Krashen (1992) claimed that 'an important condition for language acquisition to occur is that the acquirer understood input language that contained a structure a bit beyond his or her current level of competence.' In other words, if an acquirer was at stage 'i', the input he or she can comprehend should contain 'i + 1'. In Krashen's belief, the Input Hypothesis was the most important part of his theory of second language acquisition. Many educators held Krashen's Comprehensible Input theory in high regard. Some articles supporting this theory were published thirty years ago (e.g., Gregg, 1986; Di Carlo, 1994;); and others were published recently (e.g., Qi, 2016; Patrick, 2019; Mason and Krashen, 2019). Its continuing relevance proved this theory's longevity, and it had been updated so that it can apply to contemporary education systems. In 1987, Lafford had already explained that 'the ability to produce language is based primarily on comprehensible input, i.e., listening comprehension and reading.' (p. 263). Lafford's article

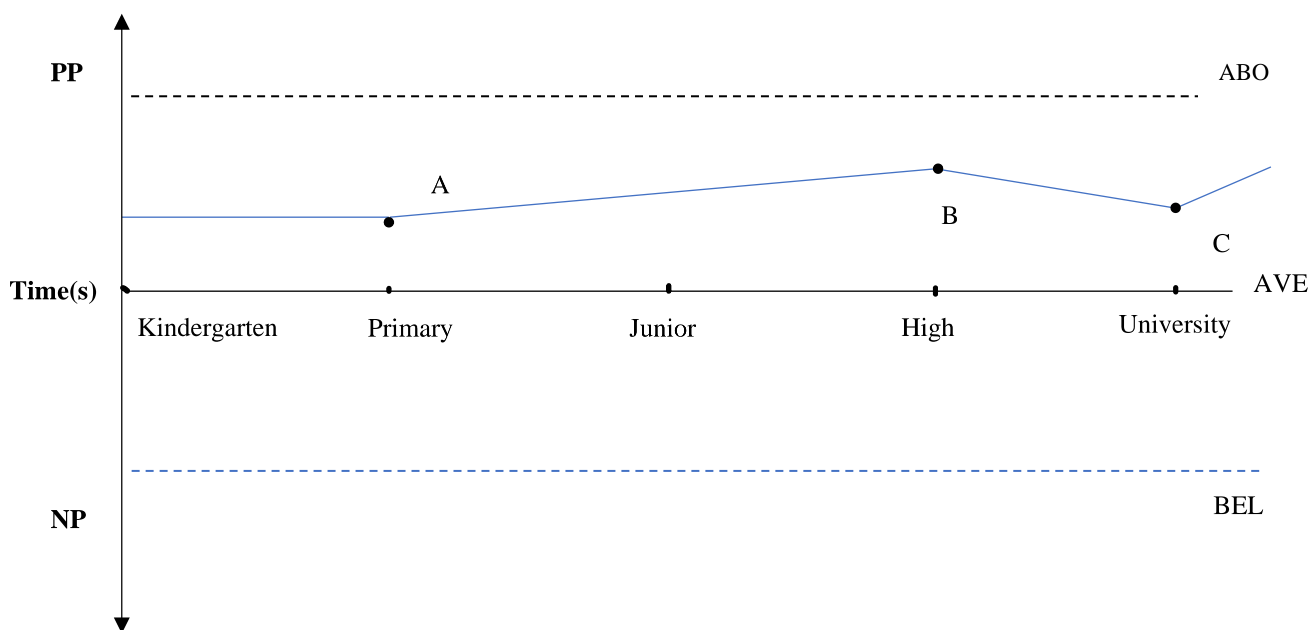
explored various ways in which communicating with advanced speakers may provide comprehensible spoken and written input for students' second/foreign language acquisition.

Another study, conducted by Di Carlo (1994), suggested that visual and video texts such as documents, TV commercials, talk shows, dramas, movies, sports and game shows can help foreign students learn a second language. Di Carlo explained that these multimedia forms can convey information and promote cultural awareness and socialisation. In most English language classes in China, the syllabus included the vocabulary and grammar on which students were expected to focus. Usually, this was referred to as 'target' vocabulary and grammar (Bolton and Graddol, 2012; Qi, 2016). Utilising traditional learning methods, English course exercises aimed to instil conscious learning of this target vocabulary and grammar. Such exercises can include reading, listening, brief speaking exercises and writing, all of which tended to be packed with target items. This was the Chinese traditional formal learning or conscious input learning approach. However, researchers (Di Carlo, 1994; Mostafa, Hamdy and Kamel, 2009; Krashen, 2013) had pointed out the disadvantages associated with the traditional target input method in foreign/second language learning. These researchers argued that language acquisition did not need to focus so heavily on formal learning, while highlighting that comprehensible influence can mitigate formal learning shortcomings (Krashen, 2013). In recent years, there had been an increase in the use of multimedia teaching tools to help students in China learn foreign languages (Sun and Dong, 2004; Zhen, 2016; Guan, Song and Li, 2018). This wide usage of multimedia techniques in English classrooms substantiated the hypothesis that informal learning tools did indeed contribute to students' English study. That was to say: informal learning provided comprehensible input for second/foreign language acquisition. These techniques were used to help Chinese students learn English:

> '*My hobby is sing(ing). I find that I could learn English words and practice English through a song*' *(HuiFan).*

> '*A lot of new words (were) there when I played games. I have to know what they mean, otherwise I can't play. After I use these words several times, I can remember these words*' *(ChengYi).*

From HuiFan and ChengYi's narratives, it could be inferred that they experienced success in learning English via multimedia techniques. In addition to informal learning approaches, students were in favour of learning English non-formally instead of through formal methods. Also, all participants demonstrated positive attitudes towards learning English in non-formal or informal contexts. To explore how these students' informal and non-formal learning experiences influenced their English learning, I examined their reflections collected in their second interviews in accompaniment with their self-made line graphs. SiHan, for example, narrated a non-formal learning experience regarding her use of an app which increased her interest in learning English in the university (see point C in the Figure 21). The following figure, which was shown in the Section 6.3 on page 184, listed here again was for a reminder.



Y Axis: Positive Perceptions (PP)/Negative Perceptions (NP)

X Axis: Time (s)

ABO: Above Average

AVE: Average

BEL: Below Average

Figure 21: SiHan's Self-Reported Perceptions and Self-Perceived Affective Experiences

In university, beginning at point C, SiHan began to demonstrate a positive attitude towards English learning that has persisted until the present. Regarding this change, SiHan spoke of the following learning experience:

> *Do you know there is an iPhone App called BaiCiZhan? I used it a lot. I like it better instead of reciting English words directly in school. I didn't have a vocabulary list I need(ed) to focus on. But I found it was easier to learn and remember new words through this app, because there were stories (which) contained explanatory pictures which were useful in understanding a word or a sentence. It gives me a sense of achievement when I make it to the end of every story. (SiHan)*

According to the definition of non-formal learning experiences utilised in this study, SiHan's experiences using BaiCiZhan were non-formal learning experiences. She expressed significantly different attitudes towards learning new English vocabulary in formal contexts, and non-formally through the app. SiHan's direct feeling was that it was '*easier*' to learn English through the app, and she was comprehensively influenced by the sense of '*achievement*' this learning experience provided. As Krashen (1992) had stated, if an acquirer was at stage 'i', the input they understood should contain 'i + 1'. Echoing Krashen's theory, SiHan's '*easier*' feeling represents stage 'i', while her sense of '*achievement*' is the comprehensive input containing 'i + 1'. Therefore, SiHan's non-formal learning experiences, also called non-targeted learning experiences, impacted her English language acquisition. In this study, I had named this influential process *comprehensive influencing process.*

6.10 Summary

Same as what was found in Chapter 5, students' previous non-formal and informal learning experiences were also affective. Participants' non-formal and informal learning experiences were also found to act as a bridge that connected students' feelings and behaviours. To bespecific, some participants were found to be active, enjoying and motivated when they learned English non-formally. In another word, students' non-formal learning experiences were the indicators that perhaps contributed the learners to keep learning motivation. In addition, the informal learning

environment was found to contribute to strengthen students' positive actions via encouragement. Also, in some participants' minds, social media, which could provide learning tasks or activities, maintain students' interests, and motivate students being an independent English learner. In particular, participants' some non-formal and informal learning experiences were found to impact their English language achievements comprehensively. I named this influential process *comprehensive influencing process*. Although many educators held Krashen's (1992) Comprehensible Input theory in high regard (e.g., Di Carlo, 1994; Qi, 2016; Patrick, 2019; Mason and Krashen, 2019), the idea of comprehensive influence process was striking, particularly in the field of EFL acquisition in China.

Chapter 7 Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter is designed to provide a critical synthesis of the findings, offer explanations of the key elements presented in previous findings chapters, and answer the four specific research questions (SRQs). The following SRQs, which have been presented in the *Chapter 1: Introduction*, list here again is for a reminder:

> SRQ1: What are Chinese undergraduates' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning?
> SRQ2: What are students' salient experiences of learning English formally, non-formally and informally?
> SRQ3: How do students see the respective roles and contributions of learning experiences in their English language development?
> SRQ4: How do students explain any influences of learning experiences on their attitudes, values and beliefs about learning English?

Section 7.2, offering the conclusions, will be expanded to answer each specific research question. Section 7.3 will present my reflections on the process of this research afterwards. On a personal level, conducting this study has enabled me to become a more experienced researcher in the field of English education in China. Based on the processes of reviewing previous literature, collecting, and analysing data, and presenting findings, I would like to offer a personal perspective on what I have found significant. Then, Section 7.4 will provide the significant contributions to knowledge based on the findings of this project. After that, Section 7.5 is a discussion of the limitations that I experienced and learned from this study. In the following Section 7.6, I will propose ideas for practical implications regarding the school-based EFL teachers and instructors, career advisors, and Asian students in Japan and Korea. Further to this, some recommendations for educational policy and practice, and for further research will also be provided. Finally, this chapter will end with a summary (Section 7.7).

7.2 Conclusions

SRQ 1: What are Chinese undergraduates' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning?

The question listed above is an overall question prepared for each participant in the first interview to collect their general attitudes, values and beliefs about English language in China. From participants' responses, it could be concluded that students in the current study have a predominantly positive view of the importance of learning English, and see a knowledge of English as beneficial for personal advancement. In other words, no participant in this study doubts the need to learn English as a foreign language. The finding from this study is consistent with Liu, Lin and Wiely's (2016) results that the Chinese students perceive English as an indispensable foreign language. Participants in this study further explain that as China has become one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, so the global language of English has correspondingly developed as the priority foreign language in China. This view agrees with Wang, Smyth and Cheng (2017), who finds that heterogeneity in the Chinese economy correlated with higher levels of English education. Hence, participants in this study show a positive attitude, strong belief and high practical value in the importance of English learning. However, there are contradictions between the participants' overall attitudes, values and beliefs about English study and their attitudes, values and beliefs about learning English formally, non-formally or informally. To be specific, students' values are referred primarily to the personal, practical and economic values they attribute to different English learning approaches.

From the participants' responses, formal approaches in learning English refer to traditional Chinese learning methods, including rote-learning and a teacher-dependent and examination-oriented learning approach (Zheng, 2015). Chinese students learn other academic subjects – such as Chinese, mathematics and science – in this way. Participants' formal learning experiences also indicate that students would follow teachers' instructions as and when requested; however, most of them are found to be negative about most of the issues that were related to their previous traditional learning experiences. Only one participant shows a positive attitude towards this traditional approach to learning English and strongly believes that this learning method is the most appropriate as it is of very practical value in meeting Chinese educational policies and requirements regarding the

learning of English. Besides this participant, the majority of participants show a negative attitude to this approach, question its effectiveness, and values in meeting contemporary needs. These students believe that it is more important to improve practical English skills than to learn the language as an academic subject. In their views, the formal method of learning English is of less value for practical purposes. The current findings of students' attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning formally disagree with Hofstede's (1986) and Venter's (2003), which find Asians as expecting to rely on a teacher-centred learning style. Nevertheless, the findings are clearly supported by Joughin (2006) who stresses that the notions of Asian students as passive rote learners are no longer realistic. Participants' prior formal learning experiences of receiving knowledge from teachers, transmitting knowledge and teacher-student interactions are also found to influence and shape the Chinese students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning.

Most of the participants show negative attitudes and beleifs about EFL learning formally, whereas they show positive attitudes and beliefs about learning English non-formally and informally. Even so, a few participants still concern about the economic values of studying English non-formally and informally. For example, these participants argue about the cost of taking English training courses in a language institution, the fees of downloading phone apps related to practice English and the high cost of taking part in overseas transferring programs. Regarding non-formal and informal approaches to learning English, the attitudes, values and beliefs of the participants are varied and dependent on their prior learning experiences. Hence, participants' attitudes, values and beliefs about English study is found to be impacted by their prior learning experiences, formal, non-formal or informal learning experiences. This finding is consistent with many previous studies (e.g., Dalgety, Coll and Jones, 2003; Mok, 2010; Lin and Schunn, 2016) in various research fields that have found that individuals' attitudes, values and beliefs are related to their experiences. In the field of second/foreign language acquisition, this finding has received considerable attention worldwide from educators (e.g., Kormos, Kiddle and Csizér, 2011; Tódor and Degi, 2016; Aslan and Thompson, 2021). It may be inferred from these studies that language learners' experiences can lead to changes in attitudes, values and beliefs, but these, in turn, also play a significant role in determining learners' academic experience and achievement (Aslan and Thompson, 2021). A further major finding from this project is how Chinese students' experiences influence their

attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning, as explained in the following sub-sections SRQ 3 and SRQ 4.

In addition, this study also identifies that age and gender differences may influence students' perceptions of studying English. Student reflections show much stronger attitudes, values and beliefs about learning English when they are in junior school, high school and university than they do in primary school or kindergarten. Moreover, female students are more positive and more active in learning English than their male counterparts. This finding is supported by Okuniewski (2014). Okuniewski (2014) finds that older, female students show a more integrative attitude than younger, male students. This view is also supported by Kobayashi (2002) in the context of Asian students' attitudes to long-term English learning. Similarly, when the participants were in kindergarten or primary schools (when their ages are between three and twelve years old), their views on learning English were driven by the beliefs of their parents and teachers whereas when they are older (in secondary school or university), they place greater value on the English culture and practice in the English language. Also, there are various studies that have explored the relationship between learners' ages and second/foreign language learning beliefs (e.g., Muñoz and Muñoz, 2006; Okuniewski, 2014; Nikolov and Timpe-Laughlin, 2021). As these scholars (Okuniewski, 2014; Kobayashi, 2002; Nikolov and Timpe-Laughlin, 2021) suggested, gender and age differences, therefore, should be considered when exploring learners' attitudes to language learning. and Fujiwara (2011) found that diverse ethnic backgrounds and other essential characteristics could potentially influence language-learning perceptions.

However, these potential affective components do not need to be considered in this study, as the participants are all Chinese native speakers and final-year undergraduate students studying at universities in mainland China. They have all received a similar education in their primary, junior and senior schools, following the curriculum set by the Chinese Ministry of Education, before enrolling at university. In this project, the only potential influencing factor in the students' attitudes, values and beliefs may be the participants' different academic subjects studied at their universities. This factor could be explored in future studies.

SRQ 2: What are students' salient experiences of learning English formally, non-formally and informally?

At first sight, this study seems to draw on students' previous learning experiences in different situations. Yet in practice, participants mainly narrate their previous learning experiences that are related to English study formally. Participants' formal learning experiences are presented as a full description of students' lived experiences of organised education, led by experts, teachers or trained professionals, and traditionally conducted indoors, such as classroom teaching, language laboratories and curriculum-related assignments. The analysis of the interview data summarises students' formal learning experiences as teacher-centeredness and examination experiences. Participants are found to be teacher dependent in which they are mostly respectful, polite and obedient. The findings from the current study agree with previous studies (Venter, 2003, Joy & Kolb, 2009), which find that Asians as expected to display an emphasis on teacher-centred learning style. It means that learners, especially Asian students, expect the teacher initiate communication, transfer knowledge, and guide students in learning (Othman, 2012). As Othman (2012) states, Chinese students are not used to self-directed learning. There are three reasons that can be concluded from Chinese students' teacher-centred learning experiences in this study. First, Chinese EFL learners are dependent on their teachers or facilitators most often because they lack confidence and are afraid of making mistakes. In other words, Chinese students need assurance from teachers or facilitators that they are on the right track in carrying out tasks. Second, students are used to seeking advice from their teachers or facilitators on developing their foreign language study. Finally, influenced by the traditional Confucian culture, learners are required to respect their teachers, and to obey the teachers' arrangements and decisions in classroom activities (Littlewood, 2000, Perez and Shin, 2016). This requirement underlines the dominating authority of teachers in the classroom process, respecting one's ancestors, and strengthening basic human relationships (Fan 2010).

In addition, from the transcripts analysis, results show that a few students are expressive are motivated by their non-formal and informal learning experiences. Non-formal learning experiences, in most cases, usually take part in a less formal setting but are more organised than informal learning experiences. Non-formal learning experiences in this study include students' experiences

in language training institutions, experiences with English teachers at social events, experiences of participating in overseas exchange programmes or learning with parents or tutors at home. Some learners are found to be active, enjoyed and motivated when they learn English non-formally. To be specific these are indicators of learners and parents, or learners and teachers acknowledging each other. Also, students' non-formal learning experiences are the indicators perhaps contribute the learners to keep learning motivation. Besides the non-formal learning experiences, other learning experiences described by students are the informal learning experiences that occur outside the formal educational curriculum. In this study, students' informal learning experiences include communication with friends, experience with various forms of social media, travelling around the world and other informal learning activities. The findings of students' informal learning experiences indicate that most of the students are comfortable with the informal learning environment. The informal learning environment is found to contribute to strengthen students' positive actions via encouragement. The findings in this study also indicate that students are relaxing, enjoying and motivated when they practice English via social media. Some social media with provides learning tasks or activities that maintain interest and motivate students being an independent English learner.

From students' formal learning experiences, learners are found as not self-directed, teacher-dependent, passive and they seem to have difficulties in sharing ideas, communicating in English and lacking in confidence. However, from students' non-formal and informal learning experiences analysis, findings show that students participate actively in non-formal and informal activities and explicitly interact and collaborate actively. The findings from the current study could be explained through Othman's (2012) suggestions. As Othman (2012) states, non-formal and informal learning environment offer a non-threatening situation and anonymity environment where students are active and motivated in learning. Whereas compared to the non-formal and informal learning environment, in the formal learning environment, students need to follow teachers' guidance and obey schools' rules that result in a teacher-dependent learning style (Othman, 2012). Furthermore, as stated by Panferov (2010), and Asgari and Mustapha (2011) and Zamani (2021), non-formal and informal learning activities and tasks provided by the facilitators or social media to the students that motivate and encourage students to practice English, solve problems, share ideas, collaborate with others and be independent learners. Nevertheless, in this study, the value of being an

independent learner cannot be taken for granted. The findings of this study could only show that students' non-formal and informal experiences play an important role in this aspect.

SRQ 3: How do students see the respective roles and contributions of learning experiences in their English language development?

As can be seen in the previous chapters describing the findings, it may be concluded that prior learning experiences are significant in English language development. Within the review of participants' previous formal learning experiences, most participants question the effectiveness of traditional methods of learning English. The learners' formal experiences of learning English have been moulded since the age of 6 in a traditional face-to-face classroom setting. Participants in this study are found to rely heavily on teachers and follow teachers' instructions as and when requested, showing high levels of respect and obedience. This is in line with Botha's (2014) results which claim that Chinese students' formal learning experiences are formed from years of following the Chinese educational system, which does not encourage critical thinking or independent learning. In the analysis of the interview transcripts, negative emotions and feelings were shown in the students' experiences of formal learning in schools. These painful learning experiences are found to be 'distressed learning' – learning with distress due to forced learning and compliance, a finding in line with Postle (1993) and Beard (2005), who both find that previous negative learning experiences affect a person's type of learning, ability to derive enjoyment from learning, and their learning achievement. In the present study, reporting the characteristics of students' formal learning experiences, it is consistently found that Chinese students' attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours towards learning English are cyclically or spirally influenced by previous learning experiences. Adapted from Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, the cyclical and the spiralling influencing processes in the contents of this study are identified. In both influencing processes, participants' attitudes, values and beliefs – which are impacted by their previous learning experiences –create links between previous learning experiences and continued behaviours or experiences. In the field of EFL/SFL education, as suggested by previous studies (e.g., Kolb, 2009, 2014; Yang and Kim, 2011), language learners' reflections or perceptions, aligned with meaningful previous learning experiences, could exert a crucial influence on the target-language learning behaviours and actions.

In addition, some participants emphasise the importance of oral English practice – taking part in activities such as the English Corner, chatting with foreign friends, imitating actors in English films and practising with the Liulishuo App. The idea of oral English practice links well to EFL learning approaches in previous studies (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Gan, 2013; Gao, 2016; Xie, 2018). These studies also make links between the practice of oral English and the acquisition of English language learning skills. The participants' positive attitudes towards English speaking, their strong beliefs in the importance of speaking English and the values they attribute to oral practice are impacted by their previous experiences and, in turn, influence their behaviours and achievement in English language development. As a result of a high level of achievement in speaking another language, students set clear goals (short-term or long-term) and they undertook practice to achieve these goals. In other words, these non-formal and informal learning experiences act as motivators for English language learning. As the participants have explained, they are supported by their tutors and parents, and informally motivated by social media and English language apps. These participants show a willingness to acquire English-language knowledge, and want to learn more about English culture. They also realise the value of support from parents, tutors, peers, social media and technology. The importance of actual learning experiences has been clearly articulated by researchers in Western countries (Dewey, 1953; Itin, 1999; Dörnyei, 2017) but not in China. It is found that the Chinese students' actual learning experiences could not only play a significant role in influencing their learning motivation but could also be the primary source of learning motivation, whether related to intrinsic or extrinsic motivators. As learning motivation is argued to be an affective component in language development (Eshghinejad, 2016; Sardegna and Kusey, 2018), it could be inferred that students' learning experience, as a learning motivator, could have an impact on language learners' achievement.

SRQ 4: How do students explain any influences of learning experiences on their attitudes, values and beliefs about learning English?

As Li and Cutting (2011) and Peng (2011) suggest, Chinese EFL learners' learning experiences – and their attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning – should be acknowledged and valued to facilitate the quality of English education in China. From the analysis of the interview data, it is clear that all the participants strongly believed that it is necessary to study English, respect the

value of English as an indispensable language and show a positive attitude towards the need to learn English. These attitudes, values and beliefs have not changed over time. However, the participants' attitudes, values and beliefs about different approaches to learning English are found to vary, clearly influenced by their prior learning experiences. Regarding the majority of participants in this study, the attitudes, values and beliefs that underpinned formal learning experiences are these participants having preference of being respectful but passive. Students who are being respectful but passive that will lead them to have little interest in becoming participative, encouraging and motivating in English study formally. Furthermore, in this study, the attitudes, values and beliefs that are underpinned learners' non-formal and informal learning experiences are learners preference of being enjoyable and active. Students, who are enjoyable and active by their prior non-formal and informal learning experiences, possess their positive attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. Then, students' such attitudes, values and beliefs lead them to have preference in becoming participative, interactive, encouraging and motivating in learning English non-formally and informally.

The existence of affective learning experiences have impact on the participants' emotions and cognitions which influence their attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning. Students, who have experienced a positive emotional learning journey, would contribute to feelings of pleasure, acceptance and relaxation. These positive emotions appear to contribute to the promotion and maintenance of students' cognition and overall well-being. Although students in this study report that they enjoy the opportunities to practise speaking English outside the classroom, they have limited time to speak English in class. Hence, students in this study enjoy and being active in practicing English non-formal and informally. Whereas, they criticise the limited opportunities to practise English in class and doubt the effectiveness of traditional approaches to learning English and show negative attitudes towards the formal study of English. As Gan (2013) indicates, Chinese EFL/ESL learners perceive difficulties regarding conventional academic methods of teaching speaking skills as well as the opportunities offered to use English. Additionally, students are found to be heavily dependent on teachers that lead to negative attitudes among students towards traditional methods of learning English, causing them to question the value of formal approaches to learning English and influencing their beliefs about appropriate language-acquisition methods. Previous formal learning experiences cause some participants anxiety about learning English.

Negative emotions and feelings then affect attitudes, values and beliefs about formal learning and even inhibit present and future learning. This finding is confirmed by Postle (1993) and Beard (2005), who find that painful emotions and feelings are very powerful.

In this study, changes in emotions and cognitions that respond to the stimuli of experiences are found to have an impact on students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning as well as on their behaviours. It is similar to Beard and Wilson's (2018) concept of experiential learning, learners' feelings, thoughts and self-beings were related to their prior learning experiences. The way in which students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning is influenced by their prior learning experiences are examined using Beard's (2008) Model of Learning Combination Lock, and it is updated from Kolb's (1984) Cycle Experiential Learning Model and the framework of a spiralling learning process created by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2004). The process of influence presented in this study is based on the notion that an individual interacts with the outer world through senses, reflections or thoughts. The two influencing processes have been presented and discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Moreover, the attitudes, values and beliefs of Chinese students are also found to shift as a result of their learning experiences. Influenced by prior learning experiences, participants' values in EFL learning are related to their attitudes and beliefs about English language learning; while their beliefs about English learning play a central role in determining their attitudes, values and even behaviours. As in previous studies, individuals' beliefs are found to be the 'central constructs in every discipline which deals with human behaviour and learning' (Sakui and Gais 1999, p. 474); values derived from beliefs form the basis for individuals' attitudes, and attitudes expressed through words and behaviour are the way in which individuals express or apply their beliefs and values (Anderson and De Silva, 2009).

Figure 23 listed in the following summarises the way how students' prior learning experiences influence their attitudes, values and beliefs in this present study. Students' prior learning experiences happen in the 'outer world', while their emotions and cognitions are found in the 'sensing' world, and their attitudes, values and beliefs in the 'feeling' world (echoed in Beard and Wilson, 2018, p. 76). From the Figure 23, it can be concluded that there are other factors as well as students' previous learning experiences, need to be acknowledged and valued. Further studies can go through exploring these factors and examining how these factors influence Chinese students'

EFL learning. Also, as seen in Figure 23, there is a need of the inclusion of emotional and cognitive presence indicators in students' previous learning experiences. Learners' emotional and cognitive presence indicators, which are characterised by Garrison (2007) as 'exploration, construction, resolution and confirmation of understanding' (p. 65), are found to help the process of developing students' critical thinking (Garrison, 2007). This study should be beneficial for Chinese educators of the English language, enabling them to explore and develop their pedagogical methods to provide more effective English teaching and learning methods within a Chinese context. These teaching and learning methods should be developed incorporating greater flexibility in meeting the diverse needs of Chinese EFL learners.

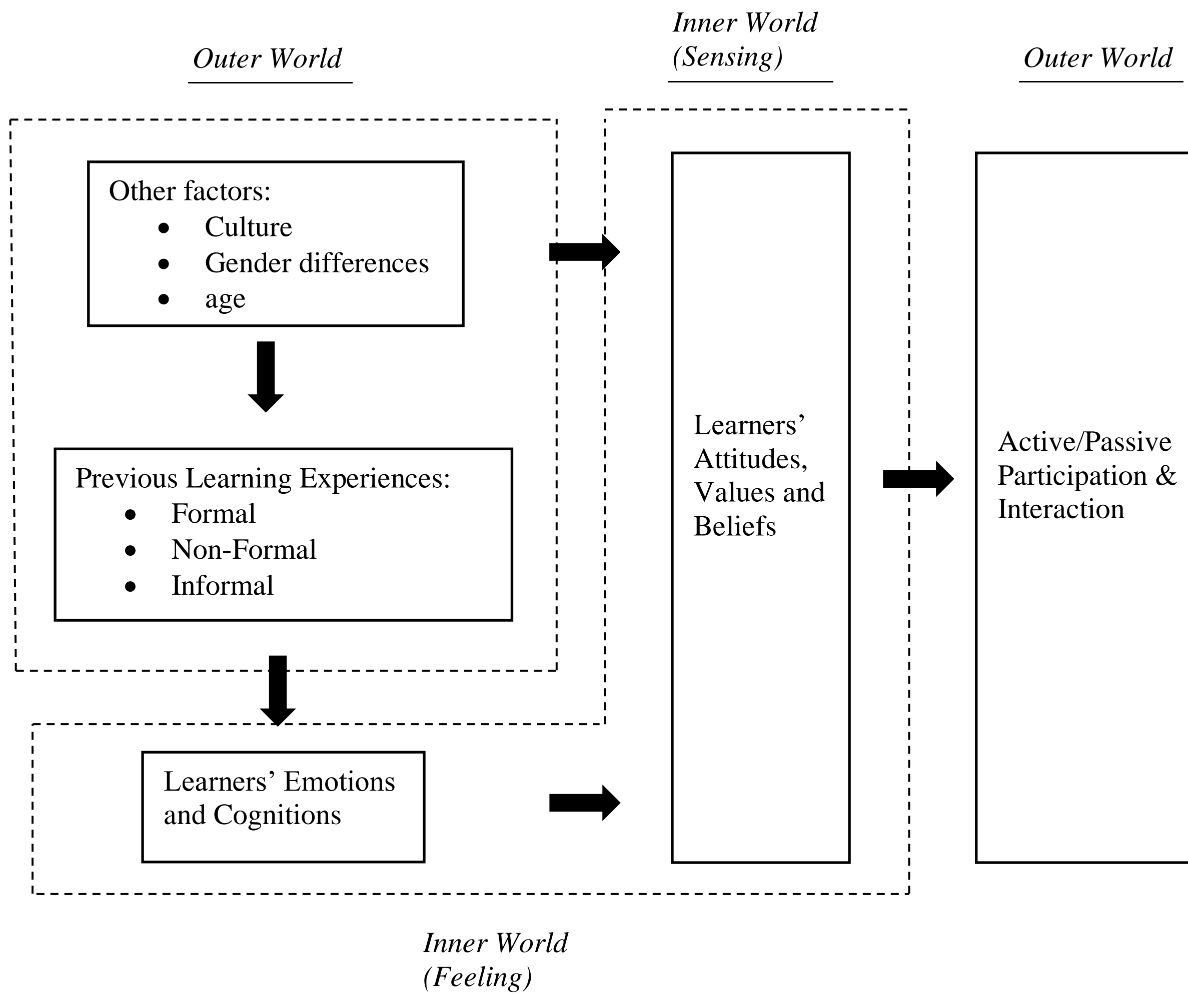


Figure 23: Summary of Previous Learning Experiences that Influence Students' Attitudes, Values and Beliefs

Findings from interviews and the figure listed above suggest that enjoyable activities and flexible learning locations meet students' needs either fulfilling their personal needs, satisfactions or professional demands are preferable which in turn help influence students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. Hofstede's (1986) and Venter's (2003) describe the characteristics of Asian students as less participative actively due to the teacher-centred learning style. However, it is unrealistic based on the findings of current study. The participants in this study are seen to be participating actively especially in the enjoyable activities and flexible learning environment. In other words, the awareness of students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning non-formally and informally besides requiring them to study English formally would help achieve effective English learning approaches. As Chen (2007) explains to foster a critical discourse in the English learning environment, being aware and understanding language learners' needs and their perceptions should be a priority. Next is to determine an appropriate learning approach or alignment of curriculum, teacher-student relationship, parent-child interaction, guiding principles, learning objectives and activities and learning environment are essential. As Di Carlo (1994), Krashe (2013) and Patrick (2019) state that language acquisition does not need to focus so heavily on formal learning, while highlighting that comprehensible influence from other types of learning. The present study highlights the diversity of exploring and investigating students' non-formal and informal learning experiences can mitigate formal learning shortcomings.

7.3 Personal Reflections

7.3.1 Challenges

Lichtman (2013) states that qualitative researchers should engage in self-reflection in order to be aware of their influence on the research: by acknowledging the role of the researcher-self in a qualitative study, the researcher can sort through bias and think about how they affect the research. Since 'research is a process, not just a product' (England, 1994, p. 82), qualitative researchers should involve themselves in the process of conducting the research, including gathering, interpreting and presenting the data (Lichtman, 2013; Berger, 2015). Berger (2015) emphasises the importance of the researcher's process of self-reflection, through which they may become aware of potential bias influencing the research. Thus, the researcher should monitor their thoughts and

actions to identify any biased tendencies, to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Chen, 2020). In this study, I, the researcher, am both a researcher and a Chinese learner of the English language. It is important to recognise that my background and language-learning experiences might impact this project. As I have similar learning experiences to the participants and work within the EFL learning field, there is potential for bias in the interpretation of the findings. However, my familiarity with the research field and context are used to motivate participants to be more willing to share their experiences with me, as they see me as understanding their situations. Thus, I have shared my identity as a tool to support this research rather than as a barrier.

This study has investigated only one ethnic group – Chinese EFL learners – but will be read by scholars worldwide. Translating the original interview data and interpreting the analysed data appropriately is important but challenging for me. Since differences in cultural background may influence understandings of the perceptions of Chinese EFL learners, some findings on cultural influences need an explanation to be readily understood by people from different ethnic backgrounds. Given the language issue, the collected interview data and protocols are double-checked by a native English-speaking professional in the translation domain to ensure that they were clear. In addition, I frequently and regularly share and discuss the progress of the research with my supervisors to minimise the aforementioned effects on this project. My reflections on the processes follow in this study lead me to consider its value. As Bourke (2014) states, research is an ongoing process and does not stop once we complete the dissemination of the findings; thus, it may be argued that the research continues as the researcher reflects on the implications of the current study and on the continued development of the research idea. Moreover, reflections may take shape in other ways: my reflections on this study led me to consider how my interactions with the female participants differed from those with the male participants.

England (1994) claims that research is a shared space, shaped by both the researcher and participants, whose identities – and the interactions between whom – have the potential to impact the research. 'Within positionality theory, it is acknowledged that people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identities…', noted Kezar (2002, p.96).. As previously mentioned, I share my identity to help the participants understand the

context of this project. The associated risks of researcher bias and subjective interpretation have been discussed under ethical considerations in Chapter 3. As the interviewer and researcher, I acknowledge that, by interviewing participants, I have gathered their perceptions and respondents may have been influenced by other factors in offering their opinions, such as perhaps a desire to portray themselves in a positive light. Since I am also a Chinese learner of the English language, I need to seriously consider how to avoid a personal interpretation of the data. I have tried to avoid leading participants talk during interviews. Hence, throughout my preparations for this research, from the formulation of the initial interview questions, my positionality as an EFL learner remains at the forefront of my mind. Nonetheless, I find that male participants need to be encouraged more than female participants, who are more willing to talk during the interviews. My positionality as a female EFL learner could cause issues when interviewing participants. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss this issue and the assumptions I have made through the research process.

I am a female EFL learner. I have been learning English for more than 17 years since I am 7 years old. I believe I am still developing my English skills, such as writing in English academically, speak English natively, and pronounce British English appropriately. Until I am 24 years old, I have lived mostly in southern mainland China. I start to learn English in kindergarten. My experiences of studying with teachers, classmates, parents and friends have influenced my attitudes, values and beliefs about studying English and lead to my interest in conducting qualitative research to learn more about the role played by the Chinese EFL students' previous experiences. I am very glad that all my participants want to take part in the semi-structured interviews and, despite other challenges I have faced during the interviews, I appreciate that they all attend on time. Through conversations with the female participants, I have heard stories of happiness or struggles with learning English; these participants want their stories to be heard. I originally enter into the research in the hope of developing an understanding of the perceptions of Chinese EFL learners regarding their prior learning experiences and exploring how these experiences influence their English language development. The female participants in this study show greater understandings of this project, and they are willing to share their learning stories with me. In the 1980s, feminists in sociology suggest that due to women's general experience of gender subordination, a 'non-hierarchical' relationship contributes to a fluid conversation when women interview women (e.g., Finch 1984; Riessman, 1987; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Ribbens, 1989; Tang, 2002). As Finch (1984)

claims that a woman can share a subordinate structural position in society so is enthusiastic about talking to a female researcher.

In contrast, the principal challenge I faced in conversations with male participants was encouraging them to share more fully their learning stories or narrate their learning experiences in detail. The majority of male participants preferred to answer questions I asked rather than actively sharing their learning stories. I would frequently comment, 'That's quite interesting. Would you please talk more about that?' or 'I am quite interested in ... Could you explain more?' Sometimes, these motivating questions were effective, but not on all occasions. Hence, the interviews with female students were more fluid than those with males. As Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) noted, three main challenges regarding gender relations arise in female–male interviews: 'intense control negotiations during the interviews; the interviewees' sense of being misunderstood due to differences in gendered experience; and sexual objectification of the interview by the interviewee' (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, cited in Prior and Peled, 2021, pp. 1–2). In China, multiple studies have shown that, in schools, girls' internal motivation in English learning is stronger than that of boys, and girls achieve more highly in language acquisition than their male peers (Gangyi, 1997; Li and Zhang, 2001; Xiong, 2010). JiaJia and ChongYang, the two male participants in this study, who showed low levels of interest in studying English, echoed these findings:

> *'Girls were better at that [English study]' (JiaJia).*

> *'English was difficult. My classmates, especially the girls, they were good at learning English. I was not. I tried my best. You probably could not understand' (ChongYang).*

JiaJia and ChongYang believed that they had different learning experiences and feelings from their female classmates, or me, and ChongYang even questioned my ability to understand his English learning experience. Hence, their entrenched sense of the different experiences of males and females studying English created a barrier in the interviews. Of the other male participants, some talked in a low voice and some tried to avoid eye contact with me during the interviews; gender differences made them feel a little uncomfortable in talking to me. Since they were sensitive to the issue of gender roles, I shared my brother's learning experiences with them, hoping these would

resonate with the male participants. While Haddow (2021) argued that her femininity benefited her relationship with male participants, leading them to be more responsive and collaborative during the research. However, in this study, gender differences seem to create a barrier in interviews.

In addition to the challenges I faced during the interviews, writing up the thesis in English – a foreign language – was a further challenge for me, a Chinese researcher. Although I have learned English for more than 17 years, it was a different matter, and very difficult, to write up a thesis in a foreign language at this academic level: not only are the English words, phrases and structures different to Chinese, but the culture and backgrounds of the two countries also differ greatly. For example, I am aware that the education system in China is different to that in the UK; I could not simply translate *'基础教育'* as 'primary education' in English, because the enrolment requirements and the school years spent in primary education in China differ from those in the UK. As scholars (e.g., Hyland and Tse, 2005; Biber, 2006, Lancaster, 2016; Wu and Paltridge, 2021) suggests, academic writing should be regarded as being interactional in nature as well as reflecting perspectives, opinions and assessments. Hence, to provide readers with a clear background to the Chinese education system as regards learning English, and to help readers understand the participants in this study, cultural differences needed to be taken into consideration when translating from Chinese to English.

Last but not least, my baby Lori was born during the four-year PhD journey, presenting additional challenges but also great happiness. Having a baby and taking care of her was a new challenge for me because she is my first child. It was difficult to learn how to be a mother and to focus on my studies at the same time: during the day, I tried hard to study but at night I had to wake several times to settle her. Despite my tiredness, I strove to be a good mother and a hard worker so that I can proudly tell Lori how her mother tried to be a good example even when she was little. Moreover, in the final year of my PhD, the novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic brought another huge challenge, affecting my supervisor team and me: the university had to cease face-to-face instruction and meetings and switch to online meetings. The whole educational system from primary to higher education has been collapsed during the lockdown period of the COVID-19 not only in the United Kingdom but across the globe (Daniel, 2020). However, fortunately, my

supervisors fully supported my wish to return to China where my family could help me with my baby during the period of pandemic.

7.3.2 The PhD as a Journey

As Miller and Brimicombe (2010) suggested, the PhD process can be viewed as a journey, and my journey brought a mixture of emotions. It has been like travelling to an unfamiliar country: foreign travel involves exploring unknown territories and encountering different cultures. Similarly, my PhD journey was stimulating but daunting, full of laughter and tears, challenging and exhausting. When I enrolled for my PhD at this university, I was ambitious but also concerned, happy but at the same time nervous. I did not know what life would be like in London, in the United Kingdom. I was especially lucky that I had an exceptionally supportive supervisory team, who made me feel that I had a new family in London and lessened my nerves. Before starting the PhD, I thought I knew where it was heading. However, I began to lose my focus, confidence and myself in the first year. There were so many junctions along this long meandering road; for example, most of the time, I found reading, understanding and developing my critical thinking very difficult, because all the journals, articles and books were in English and I easily felt lost when I was reading. I also faced many critical points when I needed to re-think and re-structure my research proposal, slowing down my PhD journey. Even when I felt I was driving on my way, I needed to make many emergency stops. Initially, I was considering conducting research on the area of English language teaching and learning modes in China, a very wide research topic and was unsure how to narrow it down. My supervisors attempted to guide me in narrowing the research topic by thinking about it differently and encouraged me to read journals and articles with a focus on Chinese EFL learners. My principal supervisor told me that I was the one who had to decide the best way to undertake the PhD, but they would guide, support and help me whenever I needed it.

With my supervisors' help, my journey in the following years went more smoothly than in the first year. In 2019, the second year of my PhD, my project abstract was accepted by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), so I had the opportunity to present my study in front of many scholars from across the world for the first time, a very exciting but nerve-wracking opportunity. I received so many valued comments and suggestions that enabled me to improve my

way of thinking and develop my research methodology. During the four years of my PhD, I did not only learn how to conduct academic PhD research but made friends with many postgraduate students, fellows and supervisors. They all came from different countries with different research areas, but we attended seminars together, shared and discussed our own research topics and developed a shared social life together – I enjoyed this journey immensely!

With greater knowledge, admiration and empathy, the exploring, investigating, and writing of this research project enabled me to reflect on my learning experiences with my parents and the ways I want to educate my daughter. I talked to my parents about their expectations of my English study.

> *"This is one of your compulsory courses. You must learn" (My Mom)*
> *"Study hard. You may use this language one day." (My Dad)*

What I do remember was how my parents followed the English teacher's guidance and helped me with English study at home. In their minds, the English course was a compulsory subject like Mathematics and Science. What I should do was to study hard in all compulsory courses. Their dream was that their daughter could read, understand and communicate in English. I was told that I must practice English at home, because English was a language which I need to speak up. The contradiction of this expectation for me was the limited opportunities in speaking English with my parents at home. I seldomly received enough support in practising English at home. Only my father could speak some simple English. Luckily for my daughter, Lori, whose parents could speak English well. Lori, definitely, will be the EFL learner. My ideas about her English study had been shifted over the course of this study. I had a discussion with my husband and we both agreed that we should create a bilingual language environment for our child from her birth. We placed English music at home, we talked to Lori in both Chinese and English, we read both Chinese and English stories for her, and we introduced our international friends (English native speakers) to Lori. What we did was trying our best to let Lori notice that English was the same as Chinese. As Genesee and Nicoladis (2007) noted that younger children were better at acquiring bilingual or multilingual languages. My husband and I, therefore, wanted Lori to get used to listening and speaking some English since she was little.

7.4 Significant Contributions to Knowledge

The contributions which this research has made will be summarised from three main perspectives: research findings, methodology and exploration of a wide range of previous studies undertaken in China.

Learners' previous learning experiences have been identified as a central factor influencing students' attitudes, values and beliefs in other countries (e.g., Amuzie and Winke, 2009; Kolb, 2014, 2009; Yang and Kim, 2011). However, the perceptions of English learners' learning experiences have not received much attention. This study offers a starting point for thinking about the best support for Chinese learners in English language classrooms and out of schools, and it contributes to the field of English education and English practice in mainland China. Developing an English education system and curriculum is essential for stimulating and sustaining students' interests in English classes (Habiburrahim, 2017; Zhang, 2012); however, paying little attention to English learners' needs and perceptions can be problematic and have a negative influence on their English language achievement. Based on the findings of the present study, the main contributions centre around offering advice for understanding students' language learning needs and being aware of students' perceptions about EFL learning. This work is motivated by the lack of explicit research focusing on EFL learners themselves in the field of English education in China. Notwithstanding the small sample size, this study offers insights into the understanding of Chinese EFL learners, their English language learning experiences and attitudes, and their values and beliefs about EFL learning.

In addition, this study contributes to knowledge in that it conducts a *qualitative* study in the field of EFL education in China. The narrative approach applied through the use of semi-structured interviews scheduled for the 15 participants puts their voices centre stage, giving them space to narrate and reflect on their previous learning experiences. Rather than a formal interview, the informal framing of the interview questions aimed to facilitate a more fluid, relaxed and open approach towards a research conversation (Ludhra, 2015; Ludhra and Chappell, 2011). In Chapter 3, valuable studies are referenced that draw on semi-structured interviews in qualitative research. Different to these studies, alongside semi-structured interviews, visual data (graphic) aids in

analysing, illustrating and presenting this study's findings. Some previous studies in the field of EFL used large-scale questionnaires, surveys, observations or diaries with the interviews (e.g., Karabenick and Noda, 2004; Li and Zhou, 2017; Liu and Huang, 2011). Other works have included participants other than learners, such as teachers or parents (e.g., Chen, 2020; Karabenick and Noda, 2004). In comparison, this work mainly draws on semi-structured interviews and focuses only on Chinese EFL learners, thus contributing to the richness of data gathered for an in-depth qualitative study.

Finally, considering that there are few studies investigating Chinese EFL learners' learning experiences, there is a lack of literature exploring the impact of students' learning experiences in a Chinese context. The present project has shed further light on understanding Chinese EFL learners' learning needs through their narrative learning experiences. This study focuses on how the prior learning experiences of Chinese EFL learners influenced their attitudes, values and beliefs about English language learning. This study, however, does not consider whether learning experiences impact on the achievement of Chinese students English study or the proficiency in English might be influenced. While competence in one area does not ensure competence in another, it could be inferred that exploring and investigating the prior learning experiences of Chinese EFL learners provide meaningful information about English language learning in China. This will have implications for Chinese scholars and educators facing a lack of research on Chinese EFL learners, especially their English language learning needs and expectations. Furthermore, this study will potentially support future plans for developing traditional teaching and learning methods to incorporate greater flexibility that in order to meet the diverse needs of Chinese learners.

7.5 Limitations

Despite the contributions mentioned in Section 7.4, there are potential limitations in this study. The purpose of this research is not to provide generalisations relevant to all areas; rather, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data from a relatively small sample (15 participants). These 15 participants came from three universities located in the urban areas of Beijing City and Hangzhou City. Despite its rapid economic growth, China has never managed to reduce inequalities between rural and urban education (Zhang, 2017): children receive a better education in urban areas

and cities (Li and Placier, 2015; Zhang, 2017) and, therefore, increasing numbers of migrant rural children move with their parents to cities to find a better education (Zhang, 2017). That the current study only investigated students from cities may be seen as a limitation, since the different cultural backgrounds of children from rural areas may influence their learning experiences and their perceptions of English learning, and some findings in relation to cultural influences may not apply to rural groups. Hence, a different or wider sample of EFL learners from other areas may have produced different findings. Therefore, based on the above, it would be valuable to undertake research on Chinese students from rural areas and investigate how their prior learning experiences influence their proficiency and achievement in learning English.

In addition, when it comes to exploring the relationship between Chinese students' prior learning experiences and their attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning, several potential influential factors have been excluded: individual characteristics (e.g., gender differences, parents' support and time for English study) and contextual variables (e.g., curriculum materials, team-teachers support and technical teaching support). In other words, this study may lack the insight that could be gained from exploring other factors impacting on Chinese students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning.

7.6 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, this study could potentially prove valuable to the following audiences: school-based EFL teachers and instructors, career advisors, and Asian students from other countries in their englsih study. Moreover, the experience of this study suggests some recommendations for educational policy and practice, and for further research.

7.6.1 Recommendations for School-Based EFL Teachers and Instructors

Since this project is the work of one who is a former EFL assistant teacher, current EFL researcher and future EFL educator, the three recommendations in the following are mainly for school-based EFL teachers.

1. This thesis devotes more attention to Chinese EFL learners' language learning needs in individualised ways, as there can be enormous differences even among learners with the same background and similar learning experiences. Chinese students' English learning needs should not be regarded as more or less identical. In Chapter 2, references have been included indicating that little attention had been paid to students' English learning needs in China. Not only school-based teachers, educators, instructors and EFL educationalists in writing curriculum materials, but also parents and carers, educational policy and practice, and career advisors are recommended to consider how students perceive English learning, what they prefer to do and are capable of doing in or after English class, and why they desire to learn English in their preferred ways.

2. This thesis sets a framework designed to collect and understand Chinese EFL learners' learning needs, demonstrate students' actions and bring together aspects of proficient language learners' learning needs and characteristics of Chinese EFL learners. It is suggested that this framework should be developed to address the needs of Chinese EFL learners, and it builds on Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) framework of 'Target Needs'. The details of this framework will be further explained with an example (see Table 13, p. 230). This framework enables school-based English teachers, instructors or educators to plan for quality time to talk to students (and their parents or carers if possible) regarding key issues in students' EFL learning processes. These matters include adopting a teaching and learning style with which the learners are familiar, assessing appropriate or ineffective teaching and learning methods, providing instructional academic materials, reviewing study location preferences, providing supportive technologies in class, identifying knowledge of specialised content that teachers should have, assessing the time of study and identifying expectations that learners want to achieve in class and in English learning activities.

3. Having considered learners' EFL learning needs, tracking their curriculum vitae and additional academic learning experiences beyond those of English learning experiences are also important. This process, as well as the above process of constructing a framework to address students' learning needs, would encourage educational policy makers and curriculum developers to explore gaps in different learning experiences. Teachers should be encouraged to update existing courses, develop the current English education curriculum and create communicative language learning approaches.

Concerning the three points above, a 'weighted continuum' (Figure 11 on page 124) has been presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 for explaining the roles of various learning experiences in participants' English learning journeys. As explained in Chapter 4, the idea of using the concept of 'weighting' is developed from Ludhra's (2015) concept of using a 'weighted continuum' for explaining her participants' cultural identities. Furthermore, a weighting chart (Table 8 on page 124) and a colour tree map (Figure 12 on page 127) developed to illustrate how participants perceive different learning experiences in their lives. The weighting chart (Table 8) is built upon the weighted continuum, provides a broader picture across the 15 participants with a different way of presenting the roles of their learning experiences in their lives, and it illustrates the data themes constructed from the interview transcripts. The colour tree map (Figure 12) is another way of representing the data themes from the weighting chart. Hence, the weighting chart (Table 8) indicates different weights students assign to their perceptions of similar experiences, whereas the tree-map (Figure 12) illustrates various weights of different experiences in each student's life. Finally, a simple line graph (Figure 10 on page 123) made by each participant depicts whether a student's attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning are influenced by narrative learning experiences, and how the influencing process occurs. All the above figures and the table (Figure 11, Table 8, Figure 12 and Figure 10), which are shown in previous chapters, discussed here again because they help to make recommendations for school-based teachers and instructors. All of these figures and table highlight the importance of students' previous learning experiences in their journeys of English learning. School-based teachers and instructors are suggested to look into their prior learning experiences and focus more on students.

Based on the analysed data and the findings from the three figures above, a framework (Table 13, shown below) is suggested (in point two) to investigate Chinese EFL students' needs. This framework is developed from Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) idea of understanding English learners' target needs. 'Target needs' refer to 'what the learner needs to do in the target situation' (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 54). A learning-centred approach that can meet language learners' target needs is 'the best route to convey learners from the starting point to the target situation' (Kaewpet, 2009, p. 211). The target in the field of English education in China is to develop and improve students' English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Zheng, 2015).

However, from this study, target situations could refer to numerous factors in English learning, such as appropriate teaching and learning methods, supportive materials, study time and location preferences, students' expectations in class and so on. Based on the findings from Chapters 5 and 6, nine target situations related to students' previous learning experiences are listed in the framework. Moreover, EFL learners' target needs, which are described as what learners think they need, are named as 'wants' and are shown in the first row of the framework (Table 13). Next to the 'wants', 'knows' means what the learners must know to function effectively in the target situations. 'Lacks' are defined as gaps between what the learner knows and wants to know. Scholars have highlighted the significance of learner-centredness in language acquisition (e.g., Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Chen, 2007; Zheng, 2015; Zhao 2022). Therefore, this study recommends that school-based EFL teachers and instructors should collect, analyse and understand Chinese EFL learners' needs rather than only focusing on developing the Chinese English education system.

	Knows	**Lacks**	**Wants**
Teaching and learning style in classes			
Appropriate teaching and learning methods			
Instructional academic materials			
English learning locations			
Supportive technologies			
Knowledge of specialised content that teachers should have			
English learning activities			
Time of study			
Expectations you want to achieve			

Table 13: Framework for Investigating Chinese EFL Learners' Learning Needs

7.6.2 Recommendations for Career Advisors

Another future direction to promote EFL is to develop EFL teachers' English teaching proficiency. All primary, secondary and high school EFL teachers should have a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) or Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree. In some European countries, such as Finland and the Netherlands, and in some states of the United States, being a teacher in any field requires a B.Ed. or M.Ed. degree (Patel, 2017). For further education institutions such as colleges and universities, EFL teachers should have an even higher degree. In addition to having the required degrees, certified EFL teachers in each school should improve their proficiency in English and develop skills in providing instrumental guidance and systematic support for Chinese students in English learning. In addition to revamping the existing B.Ed. and M.Ed. programme, there could be an annual specific EFL training course for EFL teachers. This training programme should be a skill- and quality-based programme with 20% EFL theory and 80% practical training. All EFL teachers would be required to pass the common graduate test after completing the EFL training programme. This type of training programme could be funded and instructed by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) institution in China.

7.6.3 Recommendations for Other Asian Students

Most participants complain about the limited practice time and opportunities, their fear of making mistakes and the consequent fear of negative evaluation from their teachers and peers. Chinese students' English learning anxiety in the English classroom stems from the traditional learning method. EFL anxiety is not only found in Chinese students but also found in Japanese and Korean students (Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Joughin, 2006; Zhao, 2007). The Japanese and Korean students' learning styles, in other words, are also influenced by the Confucian culture. One possible reason is the close geographic locations of China, Japan and Korea. The Confucian culture could easily and widely spread among these three countries. Influenced by the Confucian culture, the centredness of teachers in classes, the fear of negative evaluations, and the passive learning style along with the intended effort, cause these Asian students learning anxiety.

One direction for promoting EFL learning is to encourage students to use an informal-combined learning strategy (Peeters et al., 2014). In light of this, Japanese and Korean EFL learners could try to participate in oral activities in small groups, such as chatting with close friends in English. Young learners could receive the combined-strategy instruction online or from apps for English reading and speaking to improve their skills. As they begin to speak English, students could take time to rephrase and repeat what the online teachers have said. Then, students could try to read with subtitles. Finally, they could start to communicate ideas in English. The respondents in this study are seen to actively participate, particularly in enjoyable activities, with online or mobile learning apps and when in a flexible learning environment. In a conclusion, the suggestion of using an informal-combined learning strategy for Chinese EFL learners, also fits Japanese and Korean EFL learners.

7.6.4 Recommendations for Educational Policy and Practice

English education reform in China is looking at motivating students to be self-directed learners (Zheng and Davison, 2008; Kilinc, 2014; Zheng, 2015). Even though English education in China has been utilising new teaching and learning strategies (e.g., Zhang and Zhan, 2020; An, Wang, Li, Gan and Li, 2021; Gao, 2021), Chinese EFL learners' demotivation and anxiety in formal English learning still remain in Chinese English education. From the present study, it can be seen that Chinese students are more motivated and self-directed in English learning non-formally and informally. Although self-directed learning acquisition might be developed by Chinese EFL learners themselves over time (Ceylaner and Karakus, 2018; Shi, 2021), this could be positively impacted by teachers' enhanced understanding, instrumental guidance and systematic support in educational contexts. Hence, there is a need for educational policy makers to explore the two fields (non-formal and informal English learning) to consider how students' non-formal and informal English learning attitudes, values and beliefs could inform teachers and contribute to formal learning.

Furthermore, exploring the use of technology and providing sufficient guidance for supporting EFL students is vital. Participants in this study are accustomed to using various technologies, as these have been rapidly developed for supporting language study in the past 12 years (Barrot, 2021).

English speaking practice apps, English vocabulary learning apps and digital reading are becoming common in China (Wang and Christiansen, 2019). Hence, English language teachers must be aware of how to use technologies to enhance their teaching and support students in English classes. Taking WeChat as an example, the app is currently the most popular communication platform in China (Zhou et al., 2017). Policy-makers, especially the educationalists who design the EFL curriculum scheme, could suggest school-based teachers create an English-medium group on WeChat. This English-medium group would be a motivating pedagogical tool for teachers and instructors who teach English. EFL teachers could motivate their students to join such a group for chatting in English and help them learn from each other. In this group, students could share their puppies, happiness or sadness in English only, while the teacher should provide sufficient help whenever required by students. This suggestion serves to develop an informal way of generally improving EFL students' language proficiency, making EFL learning interesting and enjoyable, and helping students have the capacity to overcome challenges and limitations while they are using English.

7.6.5 Recommendations for Further Research

a. *Studies of Other Regional Groups*

As stated in section 7.4, Limitations, the fact that this study only investigated students from urban areas may be seen as a limitation. Since the different cultural background of children from rural areas may influence their learning experiences and their perceptions of English learning, some findings in relation to cultural influences from this study may not apply to rural groups; further studies, therefore, need to be conducted with a different or wider sample of EFL learners from other areas in China. Given that China is a very large country with enormous regional differences in terms of geographic characteristics, ethnicity, economic development, demographic density, and educational development, it would be valuable to undertake research on Chinese students from various regions, such as rural areas. Data from such studies could then be compared for variations as well as similarities. Furthermore, considering the fact that students from different regions may have different perceptions about their learning experiences, more studies with different samples

would provide a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese EFL learners and capture a full picture of English education in China.

b. *Studies on Factors that Influence Chinese EFL Learners' Attitudes, Values and Beliefs*

This study has intentionally shown that female Chinese students are more likely to have positive emotional reactions to English study than male students. Also, experiences with native English-speaking teachers explain participants' positive attitudes, values and beliefs about English study. In addition, students with social science majors show more positive emotional reactions to English study than science majors do. However, to what extent and how these factors affect the perceptions of Chinese students towards English learning remains unknown. To fulfil this objective, future research could be conducted to examine the relationship between Chinese EFL learners' attitudes, values and beliefs, and other influencing factors in English learning contexts through multiple interviews, observations and documents analysis.

c. *Studies on Chinese Students' English Proficiency*

Given China's endeavours to modernise and globalise —signalling that English is an indispensable tool (Zheng, 2015)—developing Chinese students' English proficiency will continue to be the focus in the Chinese education system. This study, however, finds that Chinese EFL learners' learning needs have not been met. Much research is needed to identify the kinds and levels of English proficiency that Chinese EFL learners need to achieve, so that educational policy makers can appropriately prepare to meet their needs. With respect to this, extensive research on understanding Chinese students' English learning needs would be necessary. In addition, with a focus on understanding Chinese students' learning needs, the current study has found that Chinese EFL learners' attitudes, values and beliefs are influenced by their formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences. However, this study does not consider whether learning experiences impact on the achievement of Chinese students learning English or how proficiency in English might be influenced. Much research is needed to investigate and gain deeper insights into how students' prior learning experiences impact on their English proficiency.

7.7 Summary

This empirical study examines the participants' previous learning experiences – formal, non-formal and informal – to gain insight into their influence on students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. The main reason for exploring this relationship is to improve English education in China, help Chinese educators know more about their students, and support English teachers in their generation of effective teaching strategies. This qualitative study focuses on 15 Chinese undergraduates from three Chinese universities in mainland China. It is designed with a narrative approach to data collection. In the qualitative analysis of interview data, a combination of thematic and visual data analysis is adopted. In presenting the findings, thematic networks constructed from the thematic analysis serve as an organising framework and a principal illustrative tool. Also, students' line graphs, a weighting chart and tree maps complement the interview data. Students' previous learning experiences are found to have an impact on their attitudes, values and beliefs about English learning. Students' emotions and cognitions originating from experiences, whether positive or negative, impact students' attitudes, values and beliefs about EFL learning. Positive emotional reactions reported by participants impact positively, and negative emotional reactions affect students not only negatively but also sometimes positively. The findings from this project emphasise that Chinese EFL learners' learning needs should be considered essential to developing an English language educational system and curriculum. This study has primarily made suggestions for school-based teachers, educators and instructors, parents and carers, Chinese EFL learners (especially students in higher education), and Asian students from other countries in their learning of English. Moreover, more efforts may be needed not only at the school-based teacher level but also at the governmental level, including recommendations for educational policy-makers, career advisors, and educationalists in writing curriculum materials. Finally, this study contributes to becoming a qualitative researcher in China.

Final Words:

I have chosen XiaoFu to end, as her reflection summarises not only the essence of this research journey (as a participant), but also the effect of this study on her:

> To be honest, I have never tried to look back on my English learning journey over the past years. I only know that I need to learn English under the guidance of my teachers and parents. I am very happy to be part of this research. Because it was you, gave me a chance to review these years of English study. This is also the first time for me to reminisce with my heart, to reflect on the most real feelings of my English learning journey. In these two interviews, I have a clearer understanding of my true feelings about the English learning methods and processes I have experienced. Umm…I can't say that all my English learning experiences were unhappy, but I felt that I was learning English passively. This study allows me to face myself in a more confident state and makes me start to think how to learn English in a more active way! Changing, maybe, it is too late for me. But in the future, I will be a mom, I want my child to learn and progress in a happier and more active way.
>
> *(XiaoFu, Extract from the 2nd Interview)*

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1. The Ministry of Education (MOE): the agency of the State Council of the People's Republic of China that regulates all aspects of the educational system in mainland China, including compulsory basic education, vocational education, and tertiary education.
2. National College English Test - Band 4/Band 6 (CET-4/6): a national English as a Foreign Language test in China. It is to ensure that Chinese undergraduates and postgraduates reach the required English levels specified in the National College English Teaching Syllabuses (NCETS). Band 4 is the lower-level test for non-English Majors, whereas the Band 6 is the higher-level test.
3. "Open Door" policy refers to the new police announced by Deng Xiaoping in December 1978 to open the door to foreign businesses that wanted to set up in China.
4. World Trade Organization (WTO): The WTO is the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations. The goal is to help producers of goods and services, exports and importers conduct their business.
5. Group of Twenty (G20): The G20 is an intergovernmental forum comprising 19 countries and the European Union (EU). It works to address major issues related to the global economy, such as international financial stability, climate change mitigation, and sustainable development.
6. Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC): Asian countries with Confucian heritage culture such as China Vietnam, Singapore, Korea and Japan.
7. International English Language Testing System (IELTS): The IELTS is a test to assess English language learners' abilities in listening, reading, writing and speaking in English. It is jointly owned by the British Council. IELTS is designed to help non-native English speakers work, study or migrate to a country where English is native language. This includes countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and United States of America.
8. National College English Test-Spoken English Test (CET-SET): In 1999, the Spoken English Test (SET) was added to the CET. The SET aims at emphasizing the test's speaking and listening components, and strengthening the practical application of the English language in the learning and professional environments.

9. Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC): ESRC is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), a new organisation that brings together the UK's seven research councils, Innovate UK and Research England to maximise the contribution of each council and create the best environment for research and innovation to flourish. The vision is to ensure the UK maintains its world-leading position in research and innovation.
10. British Educational Research Association (BERA): BERA is a membership association and learned society committed to advancing research quality, building research capacity and fostering research engagement. BERA aims to inform the development of policy and practice by promoting the best quality evidence produced by educational research.
11. The Data Protection Act (2018): The Data Protection Act 2018 is the UK's implementation of the General Data protection Regulation (GDPR). It controls how your personal information is used by organisations, businesses or the government.
12. General Certification of Secondary Education (GCSE): The GCSE is an academic qualification in a particular subject, taken in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Each GCSE qualification is offered in a specific school subject, such as Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, Art, Design and Technology, etc.

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Appendix 1: Interviewees Consent Form (English Version)

An Investigation into How Chinese Undergraduates' Learning Experiences Influence their Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs about EFL Learning

Sichen Chen

APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS STUDY TO BE CARRIED OUT BETWEEN 05/08/2019 AND 16/03/2020

The participant (or their legal representative) should complete the whole of this sheet.		
	YES	NO
Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?	☐	☐
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? (via email/phone for electronic surveys)	☐	☐
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? (via email/phone for electronic surveys)	☐	☐
Who have you spoken to about the study?		
Do you understand that you will not be referred to by name in any report concerning this study?	☐	☐
Do you understand that:		
• You are free to withdraw from this study at any time • You don't have to give any reason for withdrawing • Choosing not to participate or withdrawing will not affect your access to services • You can withdraw your data any time up to 28/10/2019	☐	☐
I agree to my interview being audio recording	☐	☐
I agree to the use of non-attributable quotes when the study is written up or published	☐	☐
The procedures regarding confidentiality have been explained to me	☐	☐
I agree that my anonymised data can be stored and shared with other researchers for use in future projects.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in this study.	☐	☐

Signature of research participant:
Print name:
Date:

Appendix 2: Interviewees Consent Form (Chinese Version)

关于中国大学生过往的学习经历如何影响他们对英语学习的态度、价值观和信念的调查

陈巳宸

本研究已获批准 2 于 019 年 8 月 5 日至 2020 年 3 月 16 日之间进行

参与者（或其法定代表人）应完成此表的全部内容。		
	是	否
您是否阅读过参与者信息表？	☐	☐
您是否有机会提出问题并参与讨论这项研究？（通过电子邮件或电话进行电子调查）	☐	☐
您所有的问题都得到满意的答复了吗？（通过电子邮件或电话进行电子调查）	☐	☐
您和谁讨论过这项研究？		
您是否知情，在关于本研究的报告中不会提及您的姓名？	☐	☐
您是否知情：		
• 您可以随时退出本研究 • 退出本研究时，您无需给出任何推出理由 • 无论您选择不参与或者退出本研究都不会影响您应得的服务 • 您可以在 2019 年 10 月 28 日之前随时撤回您的数据	☐	☐
我同意在我的采访中录音。	☐	☐
我同意在撰写或发表本研究时使用引语。	☐	☐
采访者已向我揭示相关的保密程序。	☐	☐
我同意我匿名的数据可以被存储并与其他研究人员共享用于未来的研究项目。	☐	☐
我同意参加这项研究。	☐	☐

研究参与者手写体签名：
印刷体签名:
日期:

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (English Version)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study title

An Investigation into How Chinese Undergraduates' Learning Experiences Influence their Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs about EFL learning

Invitation Paragraph

Dear participant:

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand what this research is, what this research involves, how this research will be done and why this research is important. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information, please feel free to ask me. Please take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

Since the growing expectation and concern about the quality of English language education in China, a large number of studies conducted to conclude that students' attitudes, values, and beliefs about English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning determine the optimal conditions for them to learn English. (e.g. Peng, 2011; Chew, 2013; Zhong, 2015). However, learning experiences, including experiences in classes and outside classes, which have been identified as a main factor influence students' attitudes, values, and beliefs in some western countries (e.g., Amuzie and Winke; Kolb, 2014; 2009; Yang and Kim, 2011) are surprisingly fewer within the Chinese context. This study, therefore, aims to investigate how Chinese undergraduates' learning experiences influence their attitudes, values, and beliefs about EFL learning. This study starts from January 2018, and it is expected to be completed in 2022.

Why have I been invited to participate?

15 final-year undergraduates from three universities in mainland China will be involved in this study. The reason for selecting final-year university students is that they are the easiest to approach. Students in year one, who are new to university, do not have many experiences of learning in the university yet, while the most students in years two and three are busy with preparing for the College English Test-Band 4 (CET-4) test that is required for graduation, so they do not have sufficient time to participate in the research neither. The students like you who are in year four have already completed their credits and passed the CET-4 for graduation, so you might feel free to take part in this research with an abundance of learning experiences.

However, you might be busy with internships and looking for jobs, and you may not appear on campus as normal. Considering this, the first individual face-to-face interview will be arranged in advance. Moreover, there are four criteria used in selecting these participants:

1. All the students are all native Mandarin Chinese speakers and start learning English when they were from 6 to 8 years old.
2. No participants will report a residence history in English-speaking countries, except for traveling to an English-speaking country.
3. All these participants have passed the College English Test-Band 4 (CET-4).
4. Random selection. These participants will be selected by picking their names out of a hat randomly rather than choosing from an alphabetical list.

Do I have to take part?
As participation is entirely voluntary, it is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

There will be two interviews scheduled for each participant. The first interview will be held face-to-face, while the second one uses a face-to-face video software such as Skype or WeChat. The first interview will last around 45-60 minutes with each participant, and the second one is around 20-30 minutes. Both interviews can be conducted in Chinese, so both the participant and the researcher would express their thoughts clearly and effectively. To find out how participants' learning experiences influence their attitudes, beliefs, and values of EFL learning, participants are encouraged to story their experiences narratively within a timeline structure.

Are there any lifestyle restrictions?

There are not any lifestyle restrictions.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The procedures will not cause pain, distress, disruption or intrusion to the participant.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you will be given a voucher of Starbucks (extra-large size coffee) as my appreciation of taking time to participate.

What if something goes wrong?

If you feel you are harmed by taking part in this project, you can withdraw from this study as soon as you need to. Also, if you wish to complain about the experience of taking part in this

study, the person who can be contacted should be the Chair of the principal investigator's College Research Ethics Committee (refer to the information at the end of this section).

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which leaves the university will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be identified from it. However, if you want to withdraw from the study when you feel you are at risk of potential harm, the data collection process will pause, and the confidentiality cannot be upheld.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recording be used?

All the first interviews will be audio-recorded with a voice recording pen. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information on the consent form, too.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Students who take part in interviews will be sent findings individually by email. The results of this research will be used to write up my dissertation and they will be sorted securely on a Brunel server, password protected, and destroyed when no longer required.

Who is organising and funding the research?

Sichen Chen – Brunel University London

What are the indemnity arrangements?

Brunel University London provides appropriate insurance cover for research which has received ethical approval.

Who has reviewed the study?

The Research Ethics Committee in the Brunel University London

Research Integrity

Brunel University London is committed to compliance with *the Universities UK Research Integrity Concordat.* You are entitled to expect the highest level of integrity from the researchers during this research.

Contact for further information and complaints

Researcher name: Sichen Chen
sichen.chen@brunel.ac.uk

Supervisor name: Dr Deborah Jones
deborah.jones@brunel.ac.uk
Dr Emma Wainwright
emma.wainwright@brunel.ac.uk

For complaints, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee:
the Chair of the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee,
cbass-ethics@brunel.ac.uk

Please note: A copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form will be given to you to keep.
Thank you for taking part in this study!

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet (Chinese Version)

参与者信息表

研究课题

关于中国大学生过往的学习经历如何影响他们对英语学习的态度、价值观和信念的调查

邀请涵：

亲爱的参与者：

殷切希望您能参加这一项研究。 在您决定是否参与这个研究之前，非常有必要让您了解这项研究是什么、这项研究涉及什么、这项研究将如何进行以及为什么这项研究很重要等一系列问题。 如果您愿意，请花时间仔细阅读以下内容并与他人讨论。 如果有什么不清楚的地方或者您想了解更多信息，请随时与我联系。 您可以慢慢做决定是否愿意参加这项研究。

谢谢您阅读此篇。

这项研究的目的是什么？

由于人们对中国英语语言教学质量的关注度和期望值越来越高，大量研究着眼于提高英语教学质量。这些研究得出的结论是，学生对英语作为外语 (EFL) 学习的态度、价值观和信念决定了英语学习的成果（例如： Peng，2011；Chew，2013；Zhong，2015）。 然而，在一些西方国家的研究中，学习经历，包括课堂和课外的学习经历，已被发现是影响学生英语学习的态度、价值观和信仰的主要因素（例如，Yang 和 Kim，2011；Amuzie 和 Winke；Kolb，2014）。但是， 在中国这类型的研究几乎没有。 因此，本研究旨在调查中国大学生过往的学习经历如何影响他们英语学习的态度、价值观和信念。该研究从 2018 年 1 月开始，预计 2022 年完成。

为什么我被邀请参加？

来自中国大陆三所大学的 15 名本科毕业生将参与这项研究。选择大四学生（即将本科毕业生）的原因是他们最容易接近。刚上大学的一年级学生，在大学学习的经验还不是很多，而大二、大三年级学生都在忙着准备大学英语四级（CET-4）考试。通过这个考试是大学生毕业所必需的，所以大二、大三学生也没有足够的时间参与研究。像

你这样的大四学生已经完成学分，并通过了 CET-4 考试。相比较于大一、大二、大三的学生，您可以有更多的时间参与这项研究，并获得丰富的学习经验。但是，您也可能正忙于实习和找工作，您可能不会像往常一样出现在校园里。考虑到这一点，我将提前和您预约、安排面对面的采访。此外，以下四个标准用于选择这个研究的参与者：

1. 所有学生的母语是中文， 并于 6-8 岁开始学习英语。
2. 参加者没有在英语国家的居住史（可以有英语国家旅游经历）。
3. 所有这些参与者都通过了大学英语四级考试（CET-4）。
4.随机选择。这些参与者将通过随机挑选他们的名字来选择，而不是从字母列表中选择。

我是否必须参加？

由于参与完全是自愿的，您可以决定是否参与。如果您决定参加，您将获得此信息表以供保存并被要求签署同意书。如果您决定参加，您仍然可以随时退出，无需说明理由。

如果我参加这次研究，需要做什么？

每个参与者将安排两次面试。第一次面试会是面对面的，而第二次则使用 Skype 或微信等面对面的视频软件。每位参与者的第一次采访将持续约 45-60 分钟，第二次约需 20-30 分钟。所有采访都可以用中文进行，因此参与者和研究人员都可以清楚有效地表达自己的想法。为了了解参与者的学习经历如何影响他们对英语 学习的态度、信念和价值观，我们鼓励参与者叙述性地讲述他们的经历。

有什么生活方式限制（影响）吗？

没有任何生活方式上的影响。

参加这次研究可能存在的风险是什么？

这项研究的内容和过程都不会对参与者造成痛苦、痛苦、干扰或干扰。

参与这项研究可能有哪些好处？

参与完全是自愿的。如若参与，您将获得一张星巴克（特大杯咖啡）的代金券，以表达我对您抽出时间参与这项研究的感谢。

参与过程中如果出现问题怎么办？

如果您觉得参与本项目对您造成伤害，您可以在需要时退出本研究。 此外，如果您想投诉这项研究的研究人员或研究内容，您可以联系大学研究伦理委员会主席（请参阅本文末尾的信息）。

我参与这项研究会保密吗？

在研究期间，从您那里收集的所有信息都将严格保密。这项研究结束后，任何有关您的信息都将删除，从而保护您的身份。但是，如果您在感到有潜在伤害的风险时想退出这项研究，数据收集过程也将暂停，已经收集的关于您的信息也将删除。

我们的采访过程会被录音吗，录音将如何使用？

所有的第一次采访都会用录音笔录音。如果您决定参加，您也将在同意书上获得此信息。

研究结果会怎样？

参加面试的学生将通过电子邮件单独收到调查结果。这项研究的结果将用于撰写我的论文，它们将在布鲁内尔服务器上安全分类，受密码保护，并在不再需要时销毁。

谁在组织和资助这项研究？

陈巳宸– 就读于伦敦布鲁内尔大学

赔偿安排是什么？

伦敦布鲁内尔大学为这项研究提供适当的保险。

谁审查了这项研究？

伦敦布鲁内尔大学研究伦理委员会

科研诚信

伦敦布鲁内尔大学致力于遵守英国大学研究诚信协议。 在本研究期间，您有权期望研究人员提供最高水平的诚信。

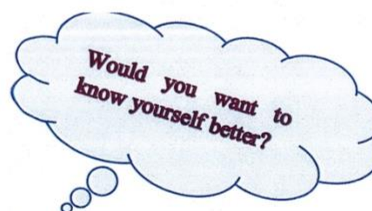
联系方式（用于获得更多信息或用于投诉）

研究人员: 陈巳宸
sichen.chen@brunel.ac.uk
导师团队: Dr Deborah Jones
deborah.jones@brunel.ac.uk
Dr Emma Wainwright
emma.wainwright@brunel.ac.uk

对于投诉，研究伦理委员会主席（联系方式）：
商学院，艺术和社会科学研究伦理委员会主席，
cbass-ethics@brunel.ac.uk

请注意：我们会向您提供此信息表副本和一份签署的同意书。感谢您参与本次研究！

Appendix 5: The Advertisement of Interview (English Version)



Interview Plan

FIRST Interview:

Topic: Your Journey of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning

Aims:
1. Explore students' attitudes, values, and beliefs about EFL learning
2. Engage students in recalling their previous memories of learning experiences since they were in primary schools.

Participants: Final year university students

During this interview:
1. Each participant will be encouraged to make a sentence in their own words starting with "I think English is…so I……"
2. The researcher will guide each participant to draw a picture about their journey of English learning. According to their pictures, a discussion will be made between the participant and the researcher.
3. This interview is a 1 to 1 and face to face semi-structured interview that will take 45-60 minutes in participant's spare time.

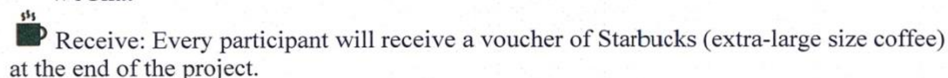
SECOND Interview:

Topic: Your Thoughts

Aims
1. To clarify and confirm the accuracy of data collected from first interview.
2. To explore participant's feedback of other related opinions.

Participants: Same participants who take part in the first interview

During this interview:



1. confirm and clarify those data collected from last interview with the interviewee.
2. Researcher will also probe an idea expressed by other anonymous interviewees and inspire the participant who is being interviewed to give some feedback and comments.
3. This interview is a 1 to 1 interview through a face to face software such as Skype or WeChat

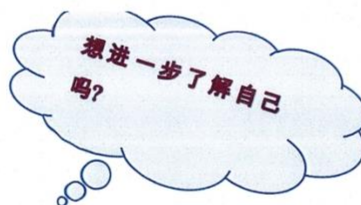
Receive: Every participant will receive a voucher of Starbucks (extra-large size coffee) at the end of the project.

If you would like to join the project, please contact Sichen on:

Email: Sichen.chen@brunel.ac.uk
Phone: +44 07513751009
Wechat: niuniu768983

Thank You!!!

Appendix 6: The Advertisement of Interview (Chinese Version)



第一次访问:

题目: 您的英语学习之路

目的:

1. 探讨您对英语学习的态度、价值观和理念
2. 请回忆您的学习经历（小学/初中/高中）

参与者: 大学四年级学生

采访过程中:

4. 每位参与者将被鼓励用自己的话造一个句子，以“我认为英语是……所以我……”作为开头。
5. 研究人员将引导每位参与者描绘他们学习英语的历程。根据他们描绘出的图表，参与者和研究人员将进行更深一步讨论。
6. 这次面试是一对一的，面对面的半结构化面试，在参与者的空余时间里进行45-60 分钟。

第二次访问

题目: 您的看法

目的:

3. 确认首次采访所收集资料的准确性。
4. 探讨参与者对其他相关意见的反馈。

参与者: 与第一次采访相同的参与者

采访过程中:

1. 确认上次访谈中收集到的数据。
2. 研究人员还将调查其他匿名受访者表达的观点，并争取被访谈的参与者给出一些反馈和意见。
3. 这次采访通过 Skype 或微信等视讯平台进行的。

附：每位参与者将获得星巴克特大杯咖啡代金券一张。

如果您有意参与此次访问，请按一下联系方式与我取得联系

Email: Sichen.chen@brunel.ac.uk
Phone: +44 07513751009
Wechat: niuniu768983

万分感谢!!!

Appendix 7: The Semi-Structured Face-to-Face Interview Protocol (English version)

Part I: First Interview Topic Guide
(Face-to-Face)

A: Introduction

Could you please introduce yourself to me?

Prompts
- name, age, major, first year to learn English, years of English study, etc.

B: Background of English Language in China

How important or otherwise do you think the English language is in China?

Prompts
- the use of English language, English education curriculum, English education market

C: Learning Experiences

Can you remember when you first started learning English? If so, what are your experiences of learning English?

Prompts
- Timeline: Preschool, Elementary, Junior, Senior, University
- Type: Formal learning experiences, Informal learning experiences

D: Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs about English learning

1. **What are your general feelings about learning English?**
2. **Have your feelings changed during over the years that you have been learning English? If so how?**
3. **Is it important to you to continue learning English? Why or why not?**

E: Conclusion

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me which you think may be relevant?

F: Drawing Exercise

Can you draw a picture about your journey of English learning?

- PROBE for critical moments in their English learning journeys

Appendix 8: The Semi-Structured Face-to-Face Interview Protocol (Chinese version)

第一部分：第一次采访
（面对面采访）

A. 个人简介

你能否做个自我介绍？
- 名字，年龄，几岁开始学习英语，学习英语年数，等等

B. 背景

你认为英语在中国的作用是什么？
- 英语的使用，英语教育课程，英语教育市场，等等

C. 过往的学习经历

你还能记得你什么时候开始学习英语吗？能描述一些你过去的学习经历吗？
- 时间线：学前，小学，初中，高中，大学
- 学习经历的种类：常规（正式）的学习经历，非常规（非正式）的学习经历

D. 英语学习的态度、价值观、信念

1. 你对英语学习的总体感受是什么？
2. 这些年来，你对英语学习的感受是否产生过变化？如果有，是如何变化的？
3. 对于你来说，在大学毕业后，你会继续学习英语吗？为什么

E. 补充

你在英语学习过程中有什么其他经验想和我分享的吗？

F. 画画

你可以画一幅趋势图来描述这些年你对英语学习的感受吗？

Appendix 9: The Semi-Structured Video Interview Protocol (English Version)

Part II: Second Interview Topic Guide
(Skype/WeChat Video Conferencing)

A. ***In-depth discussion about their learning journey pictures:***

How do you find putting this picture together with your learning experiences in the first interview? Can you talk through it?

B. ***Reflections on other students' views about English learning approaches***

e.g. Some students believe that watching English movies or dramas could contribute to English learning. How do you think?

Prompts

- Formal: Good/Poor Relationship with formal teachers, Different learning locations, Class Activities
- Non-Formal: Technology used in classes, English Language Training Courses
- Informal: Social Media, Afterschool Activities, Travelling, Good/Poor Relationship with other persons than formal teachers

C. ***Further questions:***

(Any further questions will encourage participants to reflect on their first interview, and perhaps to reflect on general themes that emerge from all interviews).

Appendix 10: The Semi-Structured Video Interview Protocol (Chinese Version)

第二部分：第二次采访
（视频采访）

A. 深入讨论：

你能谈谈这张图和你过往学习经历的关系吗？

B. 关于其他参与者对英语学习看法的反思

例如：有些同学认为看英语的电影或电视有助于英语学习。您能谈谈您的看法吗？

- 与学校老师关系的好坏，不同学习地点，课堂活动
- 科技运用于教学课堂，校外英语培训课程
- 社交媒体运用于英语学习，课外活动，旅行，与其他人关系的好坏

C. 进一步问题：

所有进一步的问题都会鼓励参与者思考他们第一面试时提到的话题。

Appendix 11: Sample of Coded Transcripts (Extracts)

1st Interview

Student M (Muhan)

Interviewer:

Could you please introduce yourself?

Student M:

My name is Student M: Zhou. I am 24 years old. It has been 18 years for studing English, since I was 6.

Interviewer:

That's quite a long time. During the past 18 years, how do you think the importance of English learning in China? Could you please share your opinions?

Student M:

Hmm... (Nod his head) For me, learning English is a general trending. China was used to be a long-term closed government. We want our country to be open to the world. In order to be accepted by other countries, the only way to "go outside" would be learning and using a world language. As you know the Chinese current national system is hardly to be reformed, so learning English, the world language would be the best way to communicate with the world. Teaching and learning English can let Chinese go outside, and encourage English speakers come in. Because if the country doesn't have any advantages, and it also doesn't have any advantages in language development, the country couldn't develop. Therefore, it is necessary to promote English language teaching and learning. I think this will not be interrupted in a short term, but we still need to promote English education vigorously. As long as we open to the world, developing English education must be implemented.

Interviewer:

Are you learning English all the time? By yourself or in the classroom?

Student M:

I started to learn English in a bilingual kindergarten, and I kept learning English in the primary and middle schools which were both private schools. The English learning environment in kindergarten, primary and junior schools was very good. Teachers in the kindergarten and private schools were all English speakers. In order to take university entrance exams, I went to a public high school. In the high school, I was still learning English. But the language learning environment there was not good as the kindergarten and the private schools. Learning English in high school could be regarded as semi-autonomous learning style.

Interviewer:

What does the semi-autonomous learning style mean?

Student M:

It means that English was not widely used in school, I had to learn and practice it by myself. I have to take the Chinese national university entrance examination, so I have to learn English for tests. English was like a subject I have to pass, but not as a practical language for using.

Interviewer:

From what you said, could you please talk more about your overall feelings about English learning? You are positive to learn this language, or you are forced to learn it. Could you please say something about your attitudes, your beliefs about learning English?

Student M:

For me, English is definitely useful. As you know, there are more and more foreigners around you, English can be a tool for you and me to communicate with others. It is like a bridge connecting myself with the society. You must connect to the society closely, because that might make you a better future. You can feel that English is very helpful to you in the future. If you are living in the developed cities, especially the cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, you will feel speaking English is very very

very useful. On the other side, if you can speak English, you can travel all over the world. I am not afraid of traveling around the world at all, because I know I can speak English. I can go anywhere I want. Indeed, English is much more useful than Chinese when you travel around the world. When you realize the practicality of English, this language, you will realize that it is helpful to your life. Actually, English helps you jump out your comfort world. If a person just lives in his own world, without contacting with the outside world, then you can't improve yourself at all. In my opinion, if something is useful to me, whether I like it or dislike it, I will ask myself to learn. Just like someone said, although you don't like swimming. you know this thing can save your life; you still will learn how to swim.

Interviewer:

So you are positive about learning English. You don't think it is a difficult thing?

Student M:

Because I know it works for me. I think people who don't like English because they think it is useless. They believe they can live without it. But for me, although I can live without English, I can't live very well without it. Without English, I feel I will live in a 'closed' life. Instead of having a 'lonely' future, it's better to learn English now, so I can go outside and make more friends. To be honest, I don't think it is necessary to be very professional in speaking English. If I can use it well when I need to, that is enough for me. I don't need to be at a professional level.

Interviewer:

So, you think learning English is important because of its high practicability?

Student M:

Well, I don't have a lot of chances talking to foreigners, I use English when I am travelling. I have to say that my English words, sentences are very simple, and with quite a lot of stubborn English grammars. You know, I have to pass English tests in schools, so I have to learn English which is suitable for exams in China. In those private schools, I

don't have any separate English classes, but I have grammar classes. My teachers there are half Chinese and half English, all of them use English to teach. And I had chances to talk with my foreign teachers like practicing speaking English. So during those years in private schools, English was just like Chinese to me. If you don't understand English, you definitely can't take classes. But in my high school and in the university, English was more like a subject like math, history and science. I learn English for tests only. I prefer the learning style in those private schools.

Interviewer:

Actually, I am quite interested in your learning experiences during your past 18 years. Could you please talk more in details about your experiences? We can talk about your salient experiences in kindergarten, primary school, junior school, high school, and then in your university.

Student M:

Ok, sure.

Interviewer:

You mentioned that you started to learn English when you were in a bilingual kindergarten. Do you remember what you learned there, and how you learned English when you were just five years old? Anything that impressed you.

Student M:

To be honest, I don't think I was actually learning English when I was five years old.

Interviewer:

What does it mean?

Student M:

Well, in the kindergarten, we don't know what 'learn' means. But talking with teachers, classmates every day is learning, fighting with classmates is learning, and imitating teachers and classmates' body movements is also learning.

Interviewer:

That's interesting. Do you have any examples?

Student M:

I know that I was one of the naughtiest boys in the class. Because my mom told me that the teacher was always angry with me. I couldn't remember exactly what I had done there, but I knew I liked to grab toys from my classmates without asking. Sometimes I made them cry. Then my teacher would say "don't do that, that's not nice" with an angry face. Although I didn't understand what it means, I could see the 'angry face' with 'don't do that'. So I knew it means not good when the teacher said 'don't'. Take another example, when the teacher was happy with me, she would say "good boy", and smiled. I didn't know what "good" means. But at least I knew the teacher was smiling, so 'good boy' could be a praise. I think that's how I learned English in kindergarten, and all the others did so. Just like when we first learned Chinese. Who knew what this sentence meant in the beginning？ We didn't know. We could only learn through some expressions and actions. In fact, children learn faster than adults throughout this way, so we didn't have specific classes in the kindergarten. We learned from daily experiences. Many teachers just talked a lot, and children understood what they mean from their repeated expressions and actions. Take another example, just like the teacher said, "close your mouth please." Usually, the teacher said this ("close your mouth please") with a gesture. So, the child naturally knows what it means. After repeating several times, the child would know how and when to close mouth. Children learn quickly. Children usually play all the time when they were in the kindergarten. For them, physical movement is an important way of expressing themselves. It (physical movement) is also the best way of learning. Different to the adults, maybe when the teacher is teaching, cooperating with the physical movements will be much more effective than having a regular class in the classroom for little children. Of course, the regular teaching method, a way of enhancing basic

education, is also very important to children. But to develop children's interests in learning a language, I think a more relaxed and a primitive teaching and learning way is better and more critical than the regular method.

Interviewer:

Could you please explain why you said you like the learning approach in kindergarten? Could you give me an example?

Student M:

I like my teacher there. She treated me as her grandson even though I was naughty. She made me feel happy and free to stay in her class... I feel learning English in that way (relaxed and informal learning method in kindergarten) is much more effective. English learning shouldn't be stressful or boring.

Interviewer:

You just talked about you liked the relaxed and imprimitive learning method in kindergarten. Is that possible because of the English-speaking environment in your kindergarten? According to the mentioned experiences in the kindergarten, such as the communication between the teacher and you, between your classmates and you, it made me feel that you like English because you like the English language atmosphere there.

Student M:

Yeah. You can understand like this. But when I was in the kindergarten, I didn't know whether I like English or not. I just got used to the language environment when I was little. And I like my teacher there. She treated me as her grandson even I was naughty. She made me feel happy and free to stay in her class. Now I think I like the teaching and learning way because I compare that learning way (relaxed and imprimitive learning method in kindergarten) with how I learn English in primary school, in junior and high school. I feel learning English in that way (relaxed and imprimitive learning method in kindergarten) is much more effective. English learning shouldn't be stressful or boring.

Interviewer:

I remember you said you are in a private primary school. The English language environment changed? Or what else make your attitude or belief in English learning changed?

Student M:

It was in the early 90s'when I was in the kindergarten. It (education in kindergarten in the early 90's) was totally different now. At that time, we didn't have so many classes or any so-called training courses like now. We just played games. And we learned while we were playing. If I couldn't understand what others (teachers) said, but I would know from their facial expressions and body language. I would learn the English word from their repeating physical language. But in primary school, even in a private school where the teacher mainly speaks English in the class, I have officially in the 9-year compulsory education system. I can no longer rely on some physical movements to express my emotions or just play around. We started to learn the rules, the rules in the class and outside the class. For example, our hands were only allowed to place on the table when we were having classes. We were not allowed to run in the classes. We need to follow the rules and express our emotions through a language. So I need to learn speaking English in the classroom where a lot of rules there. I knew I had to learn English in an academic and professional way. So when I was in primary school, I felt learning English tended to be a serious thing, not like playing. You know, when you (Student M:) realized it was not a funny thing, then you (Student M:) might have negative reactions.

Interviewer:

Actually, are you talking about a learning method, right? The different learning method makes your attitudes towards English learning changed.

Student M:

Yes. I think so (nodding his head)

Interviewer:

So you had a more positive attitude about English learning in kindergarten, but it went down a little bit after you entered in a primary school.

Student M:

Yes. You can say like this (a more positive attitude about English learning in kindergarten, but it went down a little bit after you entered in a primary school). A slight interest in English in primary school.

Interviewer:

So you have talked about the changes in the classes. Do you have any other experiences inside or outside the class that changed your attitudes about learning English?

Student M:

In the kindergarten, there is no heavy study stress. To be honest, I admit that I did not have any study pressure at the beginning of the elementary school years. I could not remember very clearly. But I know we learned while we were playing. It was full of fun. Especially in the first three years. But I was under pressure in few years later, like from grade 3 to grade 6. Especially in grade 6, I had to prepare for entering junior school. People are different. For some people, they have a strong ability to resist pressure. They have the tenacity. If someone said you can't do it, he/she will try the best to approve he/she can do it. He/she doesn't care much about whether he/she is happy or not. He/she wants to get that kind of pleasure when he/she reaches the goal. On the other hand, there is another kind of people who prefer to reach a goal when he/she is interested in it. If he/she is not interested in it, he/she won't do it. That is to say if doing this thing doesn't bring him/her a sense of satisfaction, he/she will be relatively repulsive to do this thing. For me, what can give me a sense of satisfaction? It is happiness. When someone criticizes me because my English test result is bad or my work is not good, I would lose the motivation to learn English. As a result, my interest and enthusiasm of learning English will be reduced. Then I feel it is not worth to learn English. In other words, if I was criticized by others, I would not be happy, then I would not to learn English.

Interviewer:

The others you mentioned are your classmates or your family?

Student M:

Not my classmates. I don't care much about them. We are all in the same generation.

Interviewer:

So family?

Student M:

Hmm… (looking at the ceiling) the teachers. It (stress) mainly comes from teachers.

Interviewer:

Does the academic stress also come from after class?

Student M:

After class, it was OK. We were just studying in a primary school and we were little children. What kind of stress we would have after class? It (stress) mainly came from teachers in the class. They didn't have many interesting teaching methods. Actually, the tears in primary were much better than teachers in my junior school. I was not sure about others. But for me, I was that little, I didn't like how they (teachers in junior school) teach me English. The way they taught and asked me to learn English is as same as the way of teaching a student who was going to have the high school entrance examination or the college entrance examination. That's (traditional teaching method) quite stressful and boring. They (teachers in junior school) might be short of teaching methods.

Interviewer:

Could you please give me an example how teachers taught English in your junior school? Or how you learned English there?

Student M:

I could remember that I had to wake up early in the morning, because we had a reading session around 7:30. It meant that I had to be there before 7:15. Otherwise, I would get a report saying that I was bad at attendance. You know the reading session, right? Do you think it worked for us? (Student M: didn't wait for me to answer. He continued to talk) We read a Chinese book one day and read an English book on the next day. Could reading a passage, a book good for our language development? I didn't know when I was that little, but I knew I was not happy. Getting up so early and staring a day with reading was not fun at all. So I read Chinese or English passages with a bad mood. I even didn't pay much attention on what I was reading. Sometimes the teacher would ask us try to recite the English passages during the reading session. That was quite stressful.

Interviewer:

Are your attitude, value, and belief about English learning toward English changed from primary school to junior school?

Student M:

I didn't practice or speak English a lot when I was in the primary school. But in the junior school, it (practicing speaking English) was even worse. The biggest change was that I didn't use English as much as I was in the primary school. Although, I had a foreign tutor, we didn't have a lot of time spending on speaking English. My oral English was fine, because I could talk to the foreigner teacher smoothly. But my English test results showed that my English grammar was a little bit worse (than oral English) (with an unhappy face). The first year in the junior school was okay, but the second and third year was …(thinking) annoying. Every day, every day, the teacher was repeating the importance of the high school entrance examination. All of us were asked to prepare for the test. It was so annoying. English was not my strong part, nether my weak part. I just had a good sense of speaking English. I loved to say in English. Relying on my good sense (of speaking English) cultivated as a child, I could get points on listening test. But I was not good at others (other parts in the English test such as reading or writing). If you

Appendix 12: From Codes to Themes (Extracts)

1st Round: Codes to Themes

Codes and Themes from the First-Round Coding:

Clarified issues	Themes	Codes
Why learners are into English learning? Factors leading learners to learn English	Drives/Needs (D/N)	1. to gain knowledge in western culture 2. to seek knowledge 3. to upgrade oneself 4. to improve English skills 5. to improve communication skills 6. self-satisfaction 7. to be competitive 8. compulsory requirements 9. personal interests 10. career enhancement 11. better for future 12. personal development 13. parents' pressure 14. other personal reasons
All the good Learning experiences with teachers	Positives Formal Learning Experiences (PF) a. teachers	15. glad to learn from foreign teachers 16. glad to speak with teachers in English 17. glad to do learning activities in classroom 18. provide good feedback 19. provide clear explanation 20. supportive and helpful
All the good experiences with fellow learners	b. fellow learners	21. supportive and helpful 22. active in discussion 23. active participation 24. supportive and helpful 25. Prompt responses 26. Useful and helpful
All the good Learning experiences with other facilitators in the class	c. other facilitators	Not mentioned

All the good qualities of the text/references used in the class	d. text/references	27. Exercises in class helpful
All good learning experiences about activities/ assignments/ tasks given in the class	e. activities/assignments/task	28. helpful and supportive
All the good Learning experiences regarding technology in classes	f. technology	29. helpful and interesting 30. motivating
All the good experiences of taking English courses in other educational institutions (Study for IELTS and TOFEL tests)	g. other English courses	31. glad to speak with classmates in classes 32. courses very convenient and flexible 33. English teachers making jokes 34. Less but interesting homework/activities after class
	Positives Non-formal Learning experiences (PNF)	
All good experiences during academic travel	h. Academic travel	35. Having activities with classmates in other countries 36. Studying, playing and living with classmates in another country 37. Self-satisfaction 38. Personal development
All the good qualities of the online English learning	i. Online learning	39. Online topic discussions interesting 40. Web links for references helpful 41. Flexible and more relaxed
	Positives Informal learning experiences (PIF)	
All the undesirable learning experiences in other places (home, cafe store or library)	j. Good learning conditions	42. More relaxed learning environment 43. Quiet learning environment
Learning with English speakers	k. Communication	44. Practice in speaking English 45. Improve communication skills
Watching English movies/ listening English		

songs/ playing games	I. Entertainment	46. More active participation 47. Motivating/interesting 48. Good at remembering and understanding new words 49. Very relaxing
	Negatives Formal Learning Experiences (NF)	
All the undesirable Learning experiences with teachers	A. teachers	50. uninteresting teaching method 51. lack of personal practice time 52. too much pressure 53. lack of questioning time 54. course structure too simple 55. insufficient guidance provided during the class 56. lack of motivating
All the undesirable Learning experiences with fellow learners	B. fellow learners	not mentioned
All the good Learning experiences with other facilitators	C. Other facilitators	not mentioned
All the undesirable qualities of the text/references used	D. text/references	57. limited guidance 58. self-check answers provided 59. limited support provided
All the undesirable experiences about activities/ assignments/ tasks given in the class	E. activities/assignments/tasks	60. too many assignments 61. too much work, too little time 62. activities only based on course 63. insufficient practice of activities from other sources
All the undesirable Learning experiences regarding technology used in classes	F. technology	64. log-in problems 65. frequent technical problems 66. irrelevant sites (chat room, websites, games)
All the undesirable experiences of taking English courses in other educational institutions (Study for IELTS and TOFEL tests)	G. other English courses	67. expensive 68. time consuming 69. not closely related to English courses in the school

2nd

2nd Round: Codes to Themes

Major Codes	Minor Codes	Sub-Themes Identified	Key Themes
• Painful Experiences: - Pressure - Anxiety - Repeated Citation • Teacher-Centred: - Repeated Teaching Method - Impacts of Unprofessional English - Pressuring teachers • Pressuring of learning • Impact of Punishment	• Positive Belief (PB) • Positive Attitude (PA) • High Practical Value (HPV) • Positive Outcomes (PO) • Gateway to better life	*(Impacts of)* Rote Learning	
• Changes in Attitudes, Values and Beliefs (CAVB) • Changes in Behaviours (CB) • Oral vs Written English (OvW)	• Understandable Reasons	Speaking English Practice in Classes	***(Impacts of)* The Traditional Learning Method**
• Negative Attitude (NA) • Negative Belief (NB) • Low Practical Value (LPV) • Repeated tests • Loosing learning motivation • Impact of testing	• Useful	*(Impacts of)* Examination-Oriented	
• Strong Belief • School curriculum	• Political Impact (PI)	*(Impacts of)* the Confusion Culture	

1

Major Codes	Minor Codes	Sub-Themes Identified	Key Themes
• Impact of Student-Teacher Relationship • Teacher Pressuring • Teacher-Dependent • Impacts by the Traditional Confusion Culture • Limited Support Provided in formal learning approach • Different relationships in different academic level schools • Impact of English learning achievement	• Impacted by the Chinese Educational System • Impacted by teachers' proficiency • Impact of punishment	Teacher-Student Relationship	***(Impact of English on)*** **Key Relationships**
• Cooperative and Supportive • Active Discussion • Competitive • Facial Expression/Gesture • Impact on English learning achievement	• Impacts by tests' scores • Fighting • Imitating	Classmates Relationship	

Major Codes	Minor Codes	Sub-Themes Identified	Key Themes
• Provide Quiet Learning Environment • Concentration • Positive Attitude (PA) • Easy to receive feedback and support	• Teacher-Directed	Positive about formal learning locations	
• Negative Attitude (NA) • Physical Stress from formal learning locations (PS) • Stress form teachers	• Non-free • Stress from Class/School rules	Negative about formal learning locations	**Formal Learning Locations**
• Links between Perceptions and Locations (PL) • teacher/school's requirements	• parents' requirements	Impacts of formal learning locations	
• Teacher-Directed • Passive Participation • Relate to Course Requirements • In Formal Learning locations	• Problem-Solving • Formal activities differ between developed and developing cities • Same as Homework		**Formal Activities**

Major Codes	Minor Codes	Sub-Themes Identified	Key Themes
• Skilful in Language Teaching • Interesting and Fun-Filled • Useful and Supportive	• Lack of Support • Lack of Communication	Teacher-Student *(Language Training School)* Relationship	***(Impact of English on)*** **Other Personal Relationship** *(Teachers in institutions/tutors/families/friends)*
• Full of Support • Seeking Help • Positive Attitude (PA)	• Close Relationship • Skilful in language • Changes in behaviour • Changes in Value • High Practical Value (HPV)	Tutor-Student Relationship	
• Seeking Help • Full of Support • Encouragement	• Pressure • Lack of Assistance	Parent-Child/Family Members Relationship	
• Good Communication • Help/Assistance	• Impacts of Trustiness	Couples/Friends Relationship	

Appendix 13: Letter of Ethical Approval from Brunel University London

College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Brunel University London
Kingston Lane
Uxbridge
UB8 3PH
United Kingdom

www.brunel.ac.uk

22 July 2019

LETTER OF APPROVAL

Applicant: Ms Sichen Chen

Project Title: An investigation into how Chinese undergraduates' learning experiences influence their attitudes, values, and beliefs about EFL learning

Reference: 13947-LR-Jul/2019- 19915-2

Dear Ms Sichen Chen

The Research Ethics Committee has considered the above application recently submitted by you.

The Chair, acting under delegated authority has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. Approval is given on the understanding that the conditions of approval set out below are followed:

- The agreed protocol must be followed. Any changes to the protocol will require prior approval from the Committee by way of an application for an amendment.

Please note that:

- Research Participant Information Sheets and (where relevant) flyers, posters, and consent forms should include a clear statement that research ethics approval has been obtained from the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- The Research Participant Information Sheets should include a clear statement that queries should be directed, in the first instance, to the Supervisor (where relevant), or the researcher. Complaints, on the other hand, should be directed, in the first instance, to the Chair of the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- Approval to proceed with the study is granted subject to receipt by the Committee of satisfactory responses to any conditions that may appear above, in addition to any subsequent changes to the protocol.
- The Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to sample and review documentation, including raw data, relevant to the study.
- You may not undertake any research activity if you are not a registered student of Brunel University or if you cease to become registered, including abeyance or temporary withdrawal. As a deregistered student you would not be insured to undertake research activity. Research activity includes the recruitment of participants, undertaking consent procedures and collection of data. Breach of this requirement constitutes research misconduct and is a disciplinary offence.

Professor David Gallear

Chair of the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Brunel University London

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Appendix 14: Letter of Approval from the School-Keeper of the University A

08/05/2019, 10:22

Re: Sichen Chen (Seek a permission to collect data with [redacted] University)

[redacted]

Mon 22/04/2019 03:35

To: Sichen Chen <Sichen.Chen@brunel.ac.uk>

Dear Miss Sichen Chen,

I would like to help you on your investigation. I will send you the information of the volunteer students later. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Best,

[redacted]

-----原始邮件-----

发件人:"Sichen Chen" <Sichen.Chen@brunel.ac.uk>

发送时间:2019-04-21 22:30:43 (星期日)

收件人: "gu[redacted]u.cn>

抄送:

主题: Sichen Chen (Seek a permission to collect [redacted]

Dear Miss. Yimeng Guo,

I hope this email finds you well.

I am a second-year PhD student from Brunel University conducting my dissertation titled: *An Investigation into how Chinese university students learning experiences influence their attitudes, values, and beliefs about English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning,*under the direction of my supervisor-team chaired by Dr. Deborah Jones and a secondary supervisor, Dr. Emma Wainwright.

I would like your permission to collect data from interviewing with 10 final-year undergraduates in your university. These students will be randomly selected under four conditions that will be explained in the attachment.Also, there are five ethical considerations are under as follows:

1. Participants should take part involuntary, and free from any concerns.
2. To maximise the benefits of the research and minimise the potential risks to both participants and me.
3. The participants will be given the appropriate information about the research, such as the research purpose, data collection and analysis methods.
4. Participants' rights, dignity, autonomy, personal differences, and personal data as well as the university information will be respected and appropriately protected.
5. This research will be designed, reviewed, and undertaken to ensure the quality and transparency.

The attachment is my research design, with research purpose, research questions, sampling

about:blank

Page 1 of 2

selection, and interview plan. If there are acceptable terms and conditions, please indicate so by replying to me. I look forward to hearing back from you. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Sichen Chen

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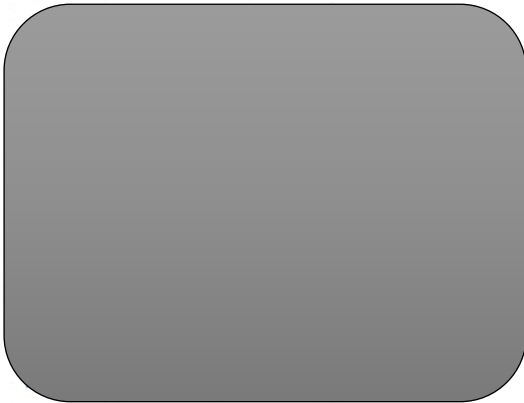

Appendix 15: Letter of Approval from the School-Keeper of the University B

Re: Sichen Chen (Seek a permission from you to collect data with

Mon 06/05/2019 06:24

To: Sichen Chen (Student) <Sichen.Chen@brunel.ac.uk>

Dear Chen,

I've received your e-mail and I'm glad to help you with the investigation. The reasearch is ongoing. Please wait for my feedback.
Sincerely,

Prof. Guo

-----原始邮件-----
发件人:"Sichen Chen" <Sichen.Chen@brunel.ac.uk>
发送时间:2019-04-21 21:53:10 (星期日)
收件人: ".cn>
抄送:
主题: Sichen Chen (Seek a permission from you t
University students)

Dear Prof. Guo,

I hope this email finds you well.

I am a second-year PhD student from Brunel University conducting my dissertation titled: *An Investigation into how Chinese university students learning experiences influence their attitudes, values, and beliefs about English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning,*under the direction of my supervisor-team chaired by Dr. Deborah Jones and a secondary supervisor, Dr. Emma Wainwright.

I would like your permission to collect data from interviewing with 10 final-year undergraduates in your university. These students will be randomly selected under four conditions that will be explained in the attachment.Also, there are five ethical considerations are under as follows:

1. Participants should take part involuntary, and free from any concerns.
2. To maximise the benefits of the research and minimise the potential risks to both participants and me.
3. The participants will be given the appropriate information about the research, such as the

research purpose, data collection and analysis methods.

4. Participants' rights, dignity, autonomy, personal differences, and personal data as well as the university information will be respected and appropriately protected.
5. This research will be designed, reviewed, and undertaken to ensure the quality and transparency.

The attachment is my research design, with research purpose, research questions, sampling selection, and interview plan. If there are acceptable terms and conditions, please indicate so by replying to me. I look forward to hearing back from you. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Sichen Chen

Appendix 16: Letter of Approval from the School-Keeper of the University C

08/05/2019, 10:22

Re: Sichen Chen (Seek a permission to collect data with University students)

Fri 26/04/2019 00:10

To: Sichen Chen <Sichen.Chen@brunel.ac.uk>

Dear Sichen,

as your teacher during the undergraduate education, I am proud of your current academic achievement, and will be ready to provide any assistance you need and no problem with the student data you mentioned.

May you all the best.

Faculty

ng Province, China

Ronglan

Signature is customized by Netease Mail Master

On 04/22/2019 16:24, Sichen Chen wrote:

Dear Ms.

I hope this email finds you well.

I am a second-year PhD student from Brunel University conducting my dissertation titled: *An Investigation into how Chinese university students learning experiences influence their attitudes, values, and beliefs about English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning*,under the direction of my supervisor-team chaired by Dr. Deborah Jones and a secondary supervisor, Dr. Emma Wainwright.

about:blank

Page 1 of 2

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1. Participants should take part involuntary, and free from any concerns.
2. To maximise the benefits of the research and minimise the potential risks to both participants and me.
3. The participants will be given the appropriate information about the research, such as the research purpose, data collection and analysis methods.
4. Participants' rights, dignity, autonomy, personal differences, and personal data as well as the university information will be respected and appropriately protected.
5. This research will be designed, reviewed, and undertaken to ensure the quality and transparency.

The attachment is my research design, with research purpose, research questions, sampling selection, and interview plan. If there are acceptable terms and conditions, please indicate so by replying to me. I look forward to hearing back from you. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Sichen Chen

Appendix 17: The National College English Test Band 4 & 6 (CET-4 & 6)

CET4 Written Test

AREA	CONTENT	FORMAT	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS	PROPORTION	TIME
Writing	Composition	Short essay	1	15%	30 minutes
Translation	Chinese to English	Paragraph translation	1	15%	30 minutes
Listening Comprehension	Short News	Multiple choice	7	7%	25 minutes
	Long Conversations	Multiple choice	8	8%	
	Essays	Multiple choice	10	20%	
Reading Comprehension	Vocabulary Comprehension	Fill-in-the-blanks with appropriate words	10	5%	40 minutes
	Long-form Reading	Match the given information with relevant paragraph	10	10%	
	Close Reading	Multiple choice	10	20%	
Total			57	100%	125 minutes

CET-SET4 Spoken Test

SECTIONS	TASKS	PROCESS	TIME
Part 1	Self-introduction	Self-introduction	20 seconds
Part 2	Short Essay Reading	Short essay with about 120 words	1 minute + 45 seconds preparation
Part 3	Short Answer	Two questions related to the short essay	40 seconds
Part 4	Personal Statement	Personal statement	1 minute + 45 seconds preparation
Part 5	Interaction With Another student	Converse according to given prompts	3 minutes + 1 minute preparation

CET6 Written Test

AREA	CONTENT	FORMAT	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS	PROPORTION	TIME
Writing	Composition	Short essay	1	15%	30 minutes
Translation	Chinese to English	Paragraph translation	1	15%	30 minutes
Listening Comprehension	Short News	Multiple choice	8	8%	30 minutes
	Long Conversations	Multiple choice	7	7%	
	Essays	Multiple choice	10	20%	
Reading Comprehension	Vocabulary Comprehension	Fill-in-the-blanks with appropriate words	10	5%	40 minutes
	Long-form Reading	Match the given information with relevant paragraph	10	10%	
	Close Reading	Multiple choice	10	20%	
Total			57	100%	130 minutes

CET-SET6 Spoken Test

SECTIONS	TASKS	PROCESS	TIME
Part 1	Self-introduction and answers	Self-introduction, followed by questions from examiners	- 20 seconds - 30 seconds
Part 2	Personal statement and discussion	Personal statement, followed by discussion on given topic with another student	- Personal statement 90 seconds each - Discussion 3 minutes
Part 3	Question and answer	Provide answers to the question by the examiner	- 45 seconds

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Appendix 18: The Years of Schooling in China