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**Exploring internationalisation of higher education:
Chinese postgraduate students' oral participation in
English during their experience at a UK university**

Jing (Alice) SHAN



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of Doctor of Philosophy

To

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Abstract

The increasing complexity and widening scope of internationalisation of higher education call for empirical studies on international students in order to enhance the quality of student experience and educational services, which in return improves institutions' and nations' competitiveness in the global higher education market. Despite the growing volume of literature on international student experience, particularly on Chinese students studying in Western countries, there seems to be a lack of focus on research regarding international students' English oral participation (OP) needs both in the academic and socio-personal contexts. Furthermore, recent studies have revealed a growing diversity within the Chinese student cohort, which is traditionally viewed as a homogenous group. However, individual differences and their relations to students' adjustment and adaptation are insufficiently studied.

This study took place in an internationally renowned research-focused university in the UK. It aimed to explore Chinese postgraduate students' living and learning experiences in the UK, with a particular focus on students' English OP needs. Drawing from theories and research in the fields of internationalisation of higher education and English language education, especially regarding international student experience, English for specific purposes, willingness to communicate, and needs analysis, this study adopted a qualitative approach to the inquiry. Data were collected primarily from interviews with 20 Chinese postgraduate (Masters and PhD) students across 10 different schools in the case university, followed by two focus groups with the interview participants.

This study showed that although OP did not seem to influence some Chinese postgraduate students' academic outcomes directly and it was not essential in many students' everyday life, OP played an important role in students' satisfaction with their overall study abroad experience. More meaningful intercultural communication in both academic and socio-personal domains was desired since most Chinese students' current English OP experience was irregular, insufficient, or superficial. Several mismatches between Chinese students' expectations of English communication in the UK and the reality were revealed. While many similarities

were observed between these students' English OP needs, their OP also differed vastly in the academic and socio-personal settings, particularly between students from different disciplines, levels of study, and social communities of practice. Therefore, a rounded view is suggested when interpreting Chinese international students' experiences and needs. An iceberg model of OP is put forward to illustrate the complexity and fluidity of linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and social-contextual factors identified to contribute to Chinese students' willingness for OP.

A range of suggestions for implementation and pedagogical implications are put forward, central to which is a guided autonomous approach, highlighting the important role of institutes in supporting international students at different stages of their journeys abroad and students' responsibility for individual development. More high-quality opportunities for meaningful intercultural engagement are highly recommended, including more diversity of opportunities, more transferable skills-based activities, creating a balanced host community, and better spatial arrangement on campus. In addition, international students are advised to enhance reflexivity and learner autonomy, and specific suggestions are provided to help develop local students' intercultural competence and university staff's professionalisation. This thesis also makes an original contribution by proposing two *International Student Experience Prior-During-Finish Frameworks* to illustrate students' potential English communication encounters and provide a framework for multi-directional action plans. With the collaboration between different stakeholders, the successful implementation of these suggestions can have a meaningful and positive impact on facilitating the internationalisation of higher education in intercultural UK universities.

Key words: Internationalisation of higher education; International student experience; Intercultural communication; Intercultural experience; Intercultural communicative competence; Chinese learners; Chinese postgraduate students; Oral participation; Willingness to communicate; English language education; English language teaching and learning; Needs analysis

Lay Summary

As there is an increasing number of international students coming to study in UK universities, it is important to understand their experience to better support them in their overseas journeys. This study took a specific interest in Chinese students' English oral communication experience. As the largest population of international students in the UK, Chinese students are often seen as quiet and poor in spoken English, misunderstood with oversimplified images, and their English communication needs are under-researched. This study took place at a top UK university. It aimed to explore Chinese postgraduate students' living and learning experiences, with a particular focus on their needs in English oral communication. Data were collected from interviews with 20 Chinese postgraduate students, followed by two focus groups with the interview participants.

This study found a general desire for Chinese students to have more meaningful engagement in intercultural communication during their studies in the UK, even though English oral participation was not essential to many students' academic work or daily lives. There were mismatches between some students' expectations regarding English communication in the UK and the reality. While Chinese students shared some similar English communication experiences and oral participation needs in their academic and socio-personal lives, their needs also varied drastically based on their differences in disciplines, lifestyles and networks, and personal surroundings. A variety of factors were found to influence their willingness to participate in English communication, including how well they could speak English, what they knew and how they felt about specific topics, their personalities and previous experiences, their relations with other speakers, and the communication environment. Many suggestions for different university departments, local and international students, and university staff were put forward to address Chinese students' oral participation needs and enhance their intercultural communication experience at UK universities.

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on this thesis

As a direct impact of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it took a longer time than expected for me to finish writing up this thesis. Due to the surge of covid cases, certain travel restrictions and health circumstances of my family members, I had to alter my original plan and extend my maternity leave for full-time childcare with limited support.

Fortunately, all data were collected and analysed prior to the pandemic and the start of my maternity leave. Hence, the trustworthiness of this study remains intact.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Communicative competence	CC
Communities of practice	CoPs
Edinburgh University Students' Association	EUSA
English as a foreign language	EFL
English as a lingua franca	ELF
English as a medium of instruction	EMI
English for academic purposes	EAP
English for learning and living purposes	ELLP
English for specific purposes	ESP
English language education	ELE
English Language Education/Centre for Open Learning	ELE/COL
English language teaching	ELT
Individual networks of practice	INoP
Institute for Academic Development	IAD
Intercultural communicative competence	ICC
Intercultural competence	IC
International English Language Testing System	IELTS
International student experience	ISE
Internationalisation of higher education	IHE
Native English speaker	NES
Needs analysis	NA
Non-native English speaker	NNES

Oral participation	OP
Postgraduate research	PGR
Postgraduate taught	PGT
Principal's Teaching Award Scheme	PTAS
Research question	RQ
Second language	L2
Second language acquisition	SLA
The University of Edinburgh	UoE
Willingness for oral participation	WFOP
Willingness to communicate	WTC

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Context and background

The increasing global mobility of groups and individuals over the past several decades has brought about dramatic changes in the landscape of higher education worldwide at an unprecedented speed and remarkable scale (Marginson, 2014). Due to the intensified impact of globalisation and internationalisation in the higher education sector, higher education as we know it has become “increasingly important, complex, and confusing” (Knight, 2004, p. 5). As a result, the higher education sector has become a research topic as well as a research context, which calls for much exploration (Henze & Zhu, 2012). The past 30 years have witnessed the rise of a multi-faceted body of research regarding Internationalisation of Higher Education (IHE) by academics all over the globe, which involves pedagogical, academic, economic, political, cultural, and many other social issues (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). Major themes in IHE research have emerged and been summarised by scholars, such as Bedenlier, Kondakci, and Zawacki-Richter (2018), in the attempt to provide a holistic view of the development in this dynamic field. This thesis draws on several themes with a particular focus on International Student Experience (ISE), English Language Education (ELE), and Willingness to Communicate (WTC).

The increasing number of students pursuing education abroad, especially in developed English-speaking countries, is probably the most direct and obvious manifestation of IHE (Tight, 2022). As the second-largest economy in the world, China is not only playing an increasingly important role in the global market but is also an active participant in the IHE both domestically and abroad (Tian & Liu, 2021). The number of Chinese students pursuing further education overseas continues to increase steadily. To put matters into perspective, 662,100 Chinese went abroad in 2018, an 8.8% increase over the year before (China’s Ministry of Education, 2019). Ministry figures also indicate that Chinese students are returning to China to pursue their careers in higher numbers than before, with 519,400 returnees in 2018, an increase of 8% compared to 2017.

Facing the growing population of international students flooding into the UK aspiring to receive excellent learning experience, especially on the postgraduate level, administrators and academics in different institutions are searching for ways to enhance and accelerate the international students' successful adjustment and adaptation to the UK environment, both academically and socially (Elliot, Baumfield, & Reid, 2016; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Ploner, 2018; Ramachandran, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the students' experience, particularly from their accounts. In the meantime, English as a dominant language in global higher education has facilitated the process of IHE while being reinforced alongside this very phenomenon. To keep up with the complex changes and challenges brought by the seemingly unstoppable movement, it is important to critically review the current education system, acknowledge and address the issues concerning students, teachers, intuitions, parents, government, industry, and other stakeholders. Students, being the centre of education, their needs undoubtedly need to be the centre of consideration and, therefore, the centre of this particular study.

In light of the trend of Sino-UK collaboration in the higher education sector, it is timely to research to understand Chinese students' experiences during their studies in the UK. The current study took an emic approach and looked at the learning and living experiences of a group of Chinese postgraduate students in a renowned research-intensive university in the UK, particularly regarding their experience of oral participation (OP) in English communication and how the English language acted as a factor in influencing their communication experience. Rather than viewing these Chinese students altogether as a homogenous group, which is often the case in the existing cross-border education literature on international student mobility discourse, as pointed out by Gargano (2009) and Zhu (2016), this study is grounded on the acknowledgement of the diversities within the cohort as well as similarities between participants given the cultural and linguistic common ground. It intends to reflect participants' perceptions and experiences with their own accounts and find out what can be done to optimise their experience. In doing so, this study aims to provide fresh insights into the exploration of Chinese students' ISE in the UK and offer suggestions on enhancing intercultural communication experience in the hope of shedding light on the broader discourse regarding IHE.

1.2 Rationales and significance

This section addresses the key gaps and demands in the existing body of literature as well as the researcher's intrinsic motivation, which will provide solid reasons and justifications for the current study.

First, there is a growing demand for up-to-date research on IHE as rapid changes occur in many higher education institutions around the globe. Although much research has been done concerning contemporary higher education, there is a need for more research to offer new approaches, tools, frameworks, and fresh insights into the contingent community of practice (Robson & Wihlborg, 2019). As Knight (2004) reminded us, we must revisit and revise our understanding of internationalisation, taking into account recent changes and challenges. This study proposes language-related and pedagogical implications to facilitate student experience in the target context, which ultimately contributes to the success of ISE and the development of IHE.

Second, a gap in the current ISE research is the lack of investigation into students' expectations, needs, and aspirations with their own words rather than other stakeholders making the assumptions about and decisions for them, as pointed out by Arambewela (2013). IHE research calls for empirical studies on international students to enhance the quality of student experience and educational service, ensuring or improving the attractiveness and competitiveness of a particular higher education institution or a country in the global higher education market (Coles & Swami, 2012). As a result, addressing international students' specific needs has been suggested to be crucial and effective (Bamford, 2008). It is also suggested that empirical research has focused much more on what takes place in academic settings, with much less interest in exploring student life in general (Ainley, 2008; Newsome & Cooper, 2016). Therefore, students' socio-personal experience is considered equally important in this study to help provide a comprehensive picture of the ISE.

Third, along with the increasing literature on ISE is the growing research interest in the English language in higher education institutes. However, few studies have brought these two issues together. Although English seems to be a frequently

mentioned element in studies concerning ISE and is acknowledged as a key component of the student experience (Baumgarten & House, 2009; Li, 2007; Ljosland, 2011; Morita, 2013; Pan & Block, 2011; Thompson & Lee, 2014; White, 2014), little research has looked into how the English language is interwoven with other factors in influencing students' complex and changing experiences. Moreover, the current English for specific purposes (ESP) literature in higher educational contexts tends to focus on the academic aspect while neglecting the non-academic aspect of the student experience. Literature suggests that support and learning in less formal settings are also important to understanding student experience (Arambewela, 2013; Ertl et al., 2008). Therefore, this study aims to conduct an in-depth investigation of Chinese students' experiences in the UK with a focus on English language communication.

There are several reasons to take a particular interest in Chinese students. First, the increasing interest in ISE and the high profile of Chinese students in the UK call for research on Chinese students in UK universities, especially regarding their learning and adjustment trajectory (Cortazzi & Jin, 2011; McMahon, 2011). With the large population of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners and the upcoming trend of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in China, there is more cause for a Chinese-centric investigation. Second, some researchers, such as McMahon (2011), question the extent to which UK universities understand the large group of Chinese students, despite the long history of them coming to study in the UK. Recent ISE research shows an evident diversity within the Chinese student cohort (Tian & Lowe, 2013a; Zhao & Bourne, 2011), and suggests there may be some misunderstandings and oversimplistic views regarding the Chinese students, potentially stereotyping them as a homogenous group (Zhao, 2014). Thirdly, by holding the in-group identity with the Chinese students, the researcher (I) minimises the language and cultural barrier in conducting the study, which enables me to understand the participants' perspectives insightfully, facilitate the smoothness of the data collection process, and decode and capture communication beyond words. Moreover, focusing on postgraduate students is because most Chinese students in the UK are studying at this level. In general, research in higher education focuses more on undergraduate students, and the ones that mention Chinese students tend to focus

on the postgraduate taught (PGT) level only. This study explores the overlooked population of Chinese postgraduate research (PGR) students as well, whose lives can be very different from those who are only spending one or two years in the PGT programmes, to provide a more holistic picture of the Chinese postgraduate student experience.

Furthermore, the reasons for focusing on Chinese students' OP are as follows. Chinese students have been criticised for poor oral English proficiency and lacking willingness to communicate (WTC) in previous literature, e.g., Fang (2010) and McMahon (2011), hence their connection to phrases such as "Dumb English" (learners cannot express themselves) or "Deaf English" (learners cannot make themselves understood). Improving speaking ability and communicative competence (CC) has been a goal of the English Language Teaching (ELT) reform in China (Fang, 2010). OP regards speaking skills from the socio-cultural and pragmatic perspective rather than only a grammatical perspective, which carries more meaning in the target context. Additionally, there seems to be a gap in the ESP and English for academic purposes (EAP) literature which suggests that compared to writing skills, speaking or verbal interaction is less explored, especially in the overseas study context (de Chazal, 2014).

Finally, the researcher's (my) own overseas study experience and English learning and teaching experience have inspired me to explore deeper and broader into other Chinese students' experiences in the UK and the role of the English language in their journeys. Having studied in both Chinese and UK universities and taught English in China, issues involved in the study are very close to my heart, and they can be of much value for my academic and professional development. By conducting this research project, I believe I can help bridge the gap between China's and UK's understandings regarding intercultural communication and education-related issues, and help myself better understand my own learning and living experience as an international sojourner.

1.3 Aims and research questions

This study took place in a Russell Group university, one of the largest recruiters of international students in the UK (HESA, 2022). Overall, this study aimed to investigate Chinese postgraduate students' experiences in the UK with a focus on English OP through the lens of student experience at one UK university. Three specific research questions (RQs) were raised as follows:

1. *What are Chinese postgraduate students' English oral participation needs while studying at a UK university?*

The first question aims to explore the various types of students' verbal engagement in English communication in the target context, including the similarities and differences among the Chinese postgraduate student cohort.

2. *What factors influence their English oral participation?*

The second inquiry intends to identify specific factors that influence Chinese postgraduate students' experiences and perspectives of English OP and English language learning during their academic and social life in the UK. It also aims to investigate the development and shift of needs during their experience.

3. *How do students think their oral participation needs can be addressed and met?*

The third question seeks to find out students' evaluation of the support provided for them to meet their English OP needs. It also raises the question of what students believe other stakeholders could do to address their OP needs, help them meet their OP needs, and enhance their intercultural communication experience.

Overall, this study brings together several independent yet interwoven themes in the fields of IHE (particularly ISE), ELE, WTC, and applied linguistics. It provides empirical evidence and insights into Chinese postgraduate students' English language needs in relation to their journeys in the UK. It aims to offer pedagogical suggestions on enhancing the quality of international education and intercultural communication, which could interest various stakeholders in IHE and benefit other research on relevant topics in different international educational contexts.

1.4 Positionality statement

Given the closeness between the researcher and the research topic and context, it is helpful to state my positionality as the researcher before preceding further to make clear my awareness and understanding of my identity, the stance I take concerning the project, as well as any potential biases (Merriam et al., 2001).

As a former Masters student and current PhD student at the University of Edinburgh (UoE), I have first-hand experience as an international student and non-native English speaker (NNES) in the UK. Moreover, my roles as an English teacher and overseas study consultant in China have granted me valuable insights into the inquiries and English language needs of Chinese students, particularly before they embark on their journeys abroad. For example, when I taught International English Language Testing System (IELTS) lessons to those who aspiring to study abroad, I often received questions regarding the authentic communicative tasks in UK universities, prompted by concerns regarding their oral English proficiency and expectations of life in the UK. In my position as an overseas study consultant, I had to immerse myself in various sources of information regarding students' study experiences abroad and stay updated on universities' specific criteria for applicants. My study and work experience have prompted profound reflections on my personal journey, deepened my understanding of Chinese students' experience in the UK, and inspired me to investigate the role of the English language in their adjustment and adaptation. Furthermore, it has kindled my curiosity about how they perceive and express their English language needs throughout their sojourns. Furthermore, my active role in the Chinese student community has granted me access to participants with openness and trust, enabling me to enter and explore different Chinese students' individual worlds. My unique position of sharing cultural and linguistic backgrounds with the research participants allowed me to create a sense of solidarity and build a healthy rapport with them, leading to more open and candid conversations. Participants felt more comfortable expressing themselves in Chinese and discussing cultural nuances that they might not feel comfortable sharing with cultural outsiders. The removal of language barriers has also allowed me to better interpret their responses, which often carried certain cultural connotations.

However, while I was aware of the similarities between the other Chinese postgraduate students and myself, I also reminded myself to avoid bringing my own biases and assumptions about the participants' experiences based on my own. I tried to stay objective by not relying too much on my previous experience, staying true to the research data, keeping an open mind regarding the data, and welcoming responses that were different from my expectations. I understood that despite the close social proximity, the study might reveal divisions within the community or communities, a paradox for "insider" researchers, as suggested by Ganga and Scott (2006). This required my awareness and open-mindedness at all times during the research process.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 lays out the overview of the thesis by providing background information and rationale of the research project, explaining the context of the study, RQs and aims of the study, the researcher's position, and giving an outline of the thesis. Chapter 2 draws a link between the theoretical background and empirical studies with the present study. It provides a critical review of relevant theories and empirical research regarding ISE, particularly Chinese students' experiences in English-speaking countries, the English language in international universities, and Chinese students' OP in the study abroad context. Chapter 3 explains the qualitative approach adopted in the current study, illustrates the methods for data collection and analysis, evaluates the study's design and trustworthiness, and addresses the limitations of the study. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 present the interview and focus group results in a thematic manner with detailed support from research data. Chapter 6 moves beyond the current study and connects findings from this study with a broader scope of literature and discourse on relevant issues. The final chapter revisits the research aims and questions, summarises the study design and findings, explains research contributions and limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter presents a critical review of the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the current study. It begins with an overview of the international student experience (ISE) in universities, followed by an analysis of literature on Chinese students' experiences overseas, particularly in the UK. The second section looks at the role of the English language in international universities as well as its relationship with international students, especially with Chinese students in particular. Finally, the third section focuses on research on Chinese students' willingness to communicate (WTC) and oral participation (OP) in the study abroad context, especially in UK universities.

2.1 Chinese students' experiences in universities abroad

2.1.1 Overview of international student experience

Globalisation and internationalisation of higher education (IHE) have both given rise to a burgeoning field of enquiry regarding student experience, quality assurance in universities, and implications for policy and decision-making in higher education institutions (Knight, 2004; Stensaker, Frølich, Gornitzka, & Maassen, 2008). The unique nature of student experience is partly due to the differences among students, such as academic abilities, motivations and expectations, educational backgrounds, English language proficiency, socio-economic status, intercultural competence (IC), social support, and social contact (Biggs, 2003; Ryan, 2005; Young, Sercombe, Sachdev, Naeb, & Schartner, 2013). In the midst of literature on the experience of students in universities, the concept of "student experience" in higher education can be seen as an umbrella term referring to very different things for various purposes, covering a wide range of learners' encounters (Temple, Calendar, Grove, & Kersh, 2014). Student experience, at its core, deals with how students perceive their learning and living experience in an institution, and it reflects students' views on the academic and non-academic services provided by the institution in order to create an enjoyable environment and successful experience for learners (Arambewela, 2010). In this sense, one may argue that successful student

experience should include success in the adjustment and progression in various aspects both in their academic life and in the socio-personal domain. However, the final academic outcome is often the primary aspect being measured and reported in research.

One part of the student experience literature is the ISE, which as Forbes (2009) suggested, is associated with two different interpretations. The first type of understating is based on a narrow definition which refers to students' academic experience and the overall university life. However, others argue that ISE is students' entire engagement with the university, starting from the early contact and application, arrival, actual academic and social experience on campus, extending to graduation, early career development, and being alumni. Additionally, the second type of interpretation also takes into consideration of students' accommodation experience, safety and security, part-time jobs, and other aspects of life which they engage in as students while studying abroad. In support of the latter interpretation, some researchers such as Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, and McCune (2008), Newsome and Cooper (2016), Palmer, O'Kane, and Owens (2009), and Zheng (2017) stress the emotional and developmental facets of student life besides academic studies. The researcher of the current study supports the second interpretation of ISE, believing that it approaches ISE from a more holistic and ecological perspective.

An overall understanding of ISE is essential before proceeding to focus on Chinese students' experiences. The increasing pattern of students pursuing international study on a global scale in recent decades can be explained by a combination of various factors, including discovering different cultures, understanding how others think and behave, creating new networks, and enhancing their knowledge of different cultures (Andrade, 2006b). Some potential benefits of overseas study have been pointed out, including transforming students' outlooks, improving their self-confidence, and developing their independence as they mature and gain valuable experience in a different cultural context, which could drive students to study abroad (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). These motivators are considered as "push and pull" factors, with the "pushing" factors originating from the sending countries and triggering a student's decision to study in a particular

destination, and the "pulling" factors operating within the host countries to attract more international students (Gong & Huybers, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). In short, research shows that embarking on a journey to study abroad usually is not a rushed decision but a carefully planned process, consisting of various and constant evaluation.

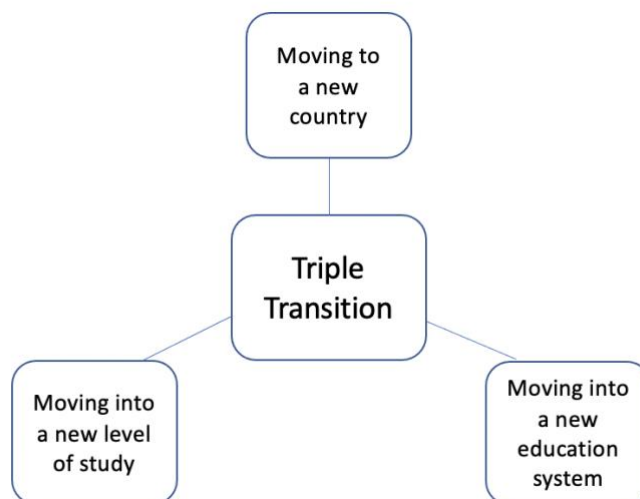
Systematic research on student sojourners emerged in the 1950s with growing attention on their social and psychological situations in the host culture (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Both rewarding experience and disappointment during students' sojourns have been revealed in previous studies (Li & Campbell, 2008; Mcleod & Wainwright, 2009; Mikuláš & Jitka, 2019; Tolman, 2017; Wang, Taplin, & Brown, 2011). Research on ISE at the tertiary level mainly focuses on the notion of "adjustment", resulting in the extensive "sojourner adjustment" literature (Spurling, 2006). But it should be noted that the term "adjustment" is used very inconsistently in the field, often interchangeable with other terms such as adaptation, acculturation, and accommodation (Henze & Zhu, 2012). A clear distinction between adjustment and adaption is adopted by Schartner and Young (2020), which suggests that "adjustment" is the dynamic and interactive process which students go through in order to function well in the host environment, while "adaptation" refers to the measurable outcomes of adjustment in various domains.

Although it is important to note that international students are anything but a homogenous group, just like the home students, they do share something distinctive from the latter, such as the potential challenges in the following aspects: learning and living in a new culture, studying in a foreign university context, learning while improving proficiency in English or other required languages, and familiarising with the academic disciplinary discourse (Arkoudis, 2006; Newsome & Cooper, 2016). International postgraduate students, in particular, experience what Jindal-Snape and Ingram (2013) described as a "triple transition", in that these students move to a different country, and they need to adjust to a new educational system with different academic conventions and expectations. Based on Schartner's (2014) visual presentation of Jindal-Snape and Ingram's (2013) triple transition of international doctoral students, Schartner and Young (2020) presented the figure below. It is also

worth mentioning that many international students also face the challenge of studying in a second language (L2), therefore, experiencing an additional challenge.

Figure 2.1

The “Triple Transition” of International Postgraduate Students (Schartner & Young, 2020, p. 10)



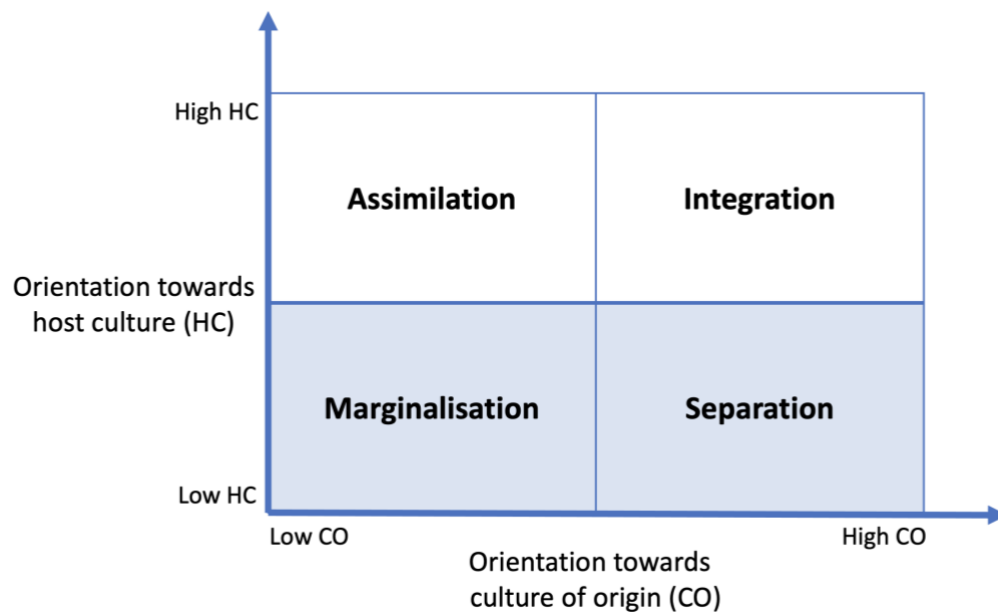
Moreover, despite the fact that ISE can be massively different between students and essentially unique to individuals, they also go through certain similar stages chronologically. A stage-by-stage categorisation such as “getting in”, “being there”, and “moving on” (Haselgrove, 1994) is commonly adopted by researchers with some modifications. For instance, Amaechi et al.’s (2013) study analysed international students’ journey based on the “prior to departure – on arrival – studying within the UK” stages. These categorisations provide a chronological framework of ISE, highlighting the critical phases during the journey while allowing research to fill in the gaps. Some researchers, such as Morgan (2012), divided the process into even smaller sections: 1) first contact and admissions, 2) pre-arrival, 3) arrival and orientation, 4) induction, 5) reorientation and reintroduction to study (for continuing students), 6) outduction – preparing to leave, graduation and beyond. Each stage carries its own significance of certain time period where important events or actions take place, suggesting better preparation to smoothen their progression. Alternatively, Temple et al. (2014) investigated student experience from an institutional management perspective and summarised four critical aspects: the

application experience, the academic experience, the campus experience, and the graduate experience. Not only does this categorisation point out a timeline of development, but it also highlights the academic and non-academic aspects of student experience. Quan, He and Sloan (2016) proposed a 4-stage-process model based on their investigation into Chinese students' experiences in UK universities, including 1) overconfidence at pre-arrival stage, 2) stress of academic conventions, 3) engagement and adaptation, and 4) gaining academic confidence. Their model emphasised the importance of the pre-departure stage and suggested that recruitment agents play an active role in engaging students' preparation prior to their departure, which is particularly relevant to the Chinese context.

Furthermore, various models have been proposed and developed to help investigate and illustrate the sociocultural trajectory of international sojourners, such as "the U-shaped model" (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960) and its extension "the W-curve model" (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963), and the acculturation model (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). Figure 2.2 shows the influential model proposed by Berry (1997) regarding the acculturation strategies of immigrants. This model analysed the possibilities of one's adaptative results, namely assimilation, marginalisation, integration, and separation, regarding one's relation to the host culture and their maintenance of the relation with the home culture. It should be pointed out that conventionally, assimilation and integration, which indicate a relatively higher level of orientation towards the host culture, are considered to be more desired than marginalisation and separation.

Figure 2.2

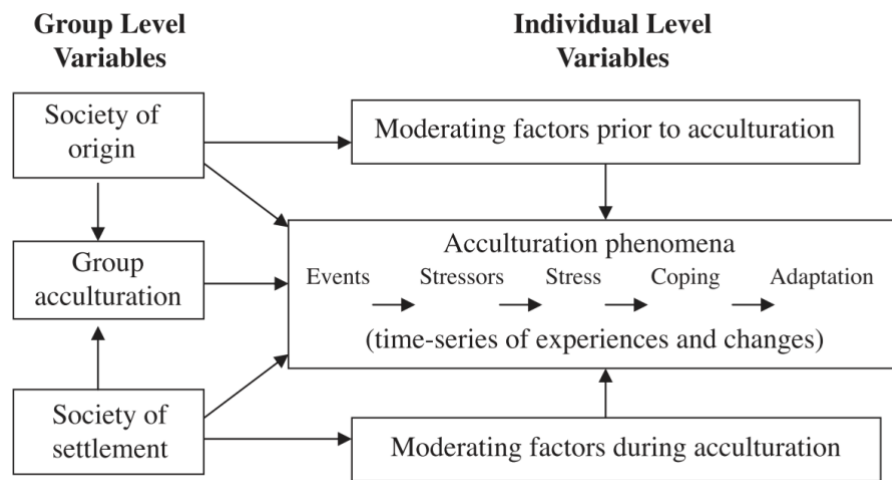
Model of Acculturation Strategies (adapted from Berry, 1997)



In Tian and Lowe's (2013a) research on Chinese students' intercultural experience in the UK, they advanced Berry's (1997) theory by proposing that it is more sensible to view these categories of acculturation strategies as domains on a continuum, with the two ends being "cultural isolation" and "cultural assimilation" (p. 293). The obvious advantage of this argument is acknowledging the contingent and dynamic nature of ISE as a response to specific personal experiences. Tian and Lowe (2013a) suggested that the ideal outcome of ISE is neither end of the continuum, even though some would assume cultural assimilation is the ultimate goal of exposure to another culture. Furthermore, they proposed a theory of considering intercultural interaction as a safe space for both distinctive cultural identities to retain and develop simultaneously, and that international universities should be seen as such fertile ground to allow and foster international students' development in their dual cultural identities. Moreover, Tian and Lowe (2013b) also advanced Berry's (1997) framework of the acculturation process by putting forward the framework below (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3

A Framework for Acculturation Research (Tian & Lowe, 2013b, p. 583)

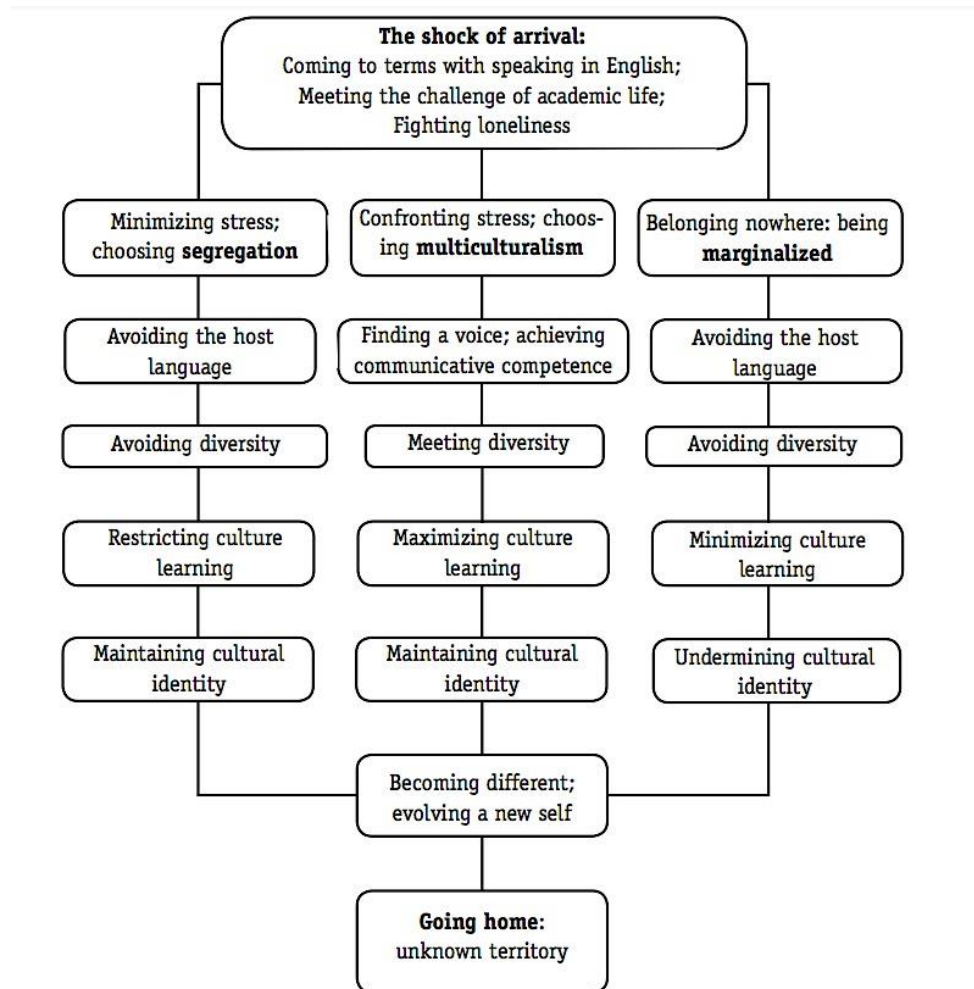


Not only does this model highlights the individual and contextual variables that play a part in students' adjustment and adaptation process, but it also advocates an inductive approach to research the acculturation process rather than going for a pre-specified list of factors. Central to the model is the process of individuals' going through a series of experiences and changes, which reflects the complexity, changeability, and individuality of ISE.

Brown and Holloway' (2008) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study on the adjustment of international students (including Chinese students) at the Masters level in a UK university. This study pointed out the dynamic nature of students' transitional and adaptive experience as an outcome of the interplay between individual, cultural, and external factors. Results from the interviews and observations suggested that the English language is a major stressor for international students, especially at the initial stage of their journeys when some are confronted with emotional issues. Other key stressors of international students studying in the UK identified in the study include cultural distance, language problems, academic demands, loneliness, and homesickness. Three adaptive strategies to cope with stress were concluded: segregation, multiculturalism, and marginalisation, which lead to students' forming different cultural and self-identities (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4

Brown and Holloway's Model of Adjustment (2008, p. 245)

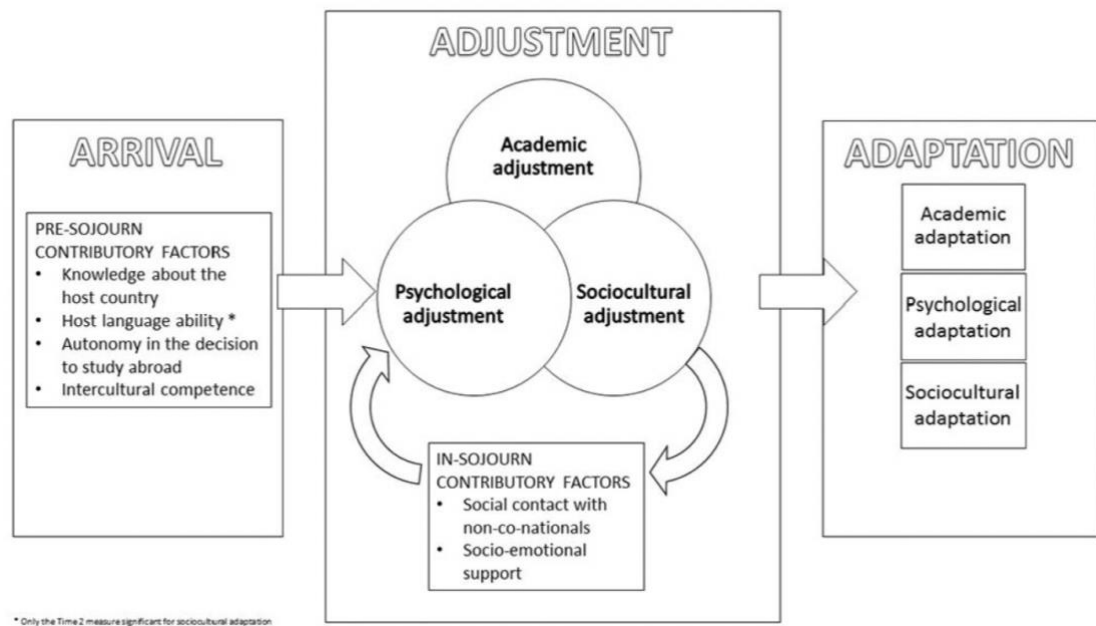


Brown and Holloway's (2008) study and their proposed model of the adjustment process seem to point out the importance of the English language in ISE by putting "avoiding the host language" and "finding a voice; achieving communicative competence" as two possible status of students. However, there is a lack of investigation into the impact of these language problems on students' psychological status and academic performance.

Based on previous conceptual work and empirical research, Schartner and Young (2020) synthesised three intertwined aspects of ISE, namely academic, psychological, and sociocultural adjustment and adaptation, and they proposed an integrated model of international student adjustment and adaptation (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5

An Integrated Model of International Student Adjustment and Adaptation (Schartner & Young, 2020, p. 170)



Similar to the models mentioned above, Schartner and Young's (2020) model also includes the pre-sojourn phase as part of the ISE, where knowledge about the host country, host language ability, autonomy in the decision to study abroad, and IC are the main contributory factors. Social contact with non-co-nationals and socio-emotional support are identified as the in-sojourn factors that influence students' adjustment. However, it seems that host language ability is not viewed as a major factor in students' in-sojourn adjustment in this particular model, although it was identified as an important contributory factor in Schartner's (2014) previous research and model of student sojourner adjustment and adaptation (p. 261). According to Young et al. (2013), language proficiency plays an essential role in successful ISE for its strong association with the various outcomes of ISE, such as academic success (overall, taught and research) and psychological wellbeing. Issues concerning the role of English in ISE will be analysed in-depth in Section 2.2. Schartner and Young's (2020) heuristic integrated model serves multiple purposes. This newly proposed model provides an organised and holistic framework for empirical ISE research regarding adjustment and adaptation as well as functioning as a template for researchers to design studies of similar interests. It clarifies and distinguishes the

concept of adjustment from adaptation. Moreover, the model provides stakeholders such as international students, home students, and practitioners in international universities with ideas and lenses to improve their experience and work.

Upon examining successful and dissatisfactory sojourns of international students, a wide range of factors are shown in research to have a collective influence on ISE, such as language proficiency (Beaven & Spencer-Oatey, 2017; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), motivation for language acquisition (Li, 2006; Yu & Downing, 2012), IC (Gu & Maley, 2008; Gu, 2009), psychological states (Li, Wang, & Xiao, 2014; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), academic success (Telbis, Helgeson, & Kingsbury, 2014), challenges and difficulties (Talebloo & Bin Baki, 2013), cultural shock (Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Zhou et al., 2008), social network and support (Schartner & Young, 2020; Vivian, Barnes, Geer, & Wood, 2014), communication with the citizens in the new environment (Schartner & Young, 2020; Yu, 2017; Yu & Moskal, 2019), and strategies for adjusting to the new environment (Aydinol, 2013). Russell, Rosenthal, and Thomson (2010) summarised two areas of international students' needs: 1) academic needs, where English language proficiency and students' expectation of academic practice in the local universities are highlighted, and 2) physical and psychosocial health needs, which are often overlooked by institutions. Amid the different models of intercultural experience in ISE research, it is clear that ISE is fluid and evolving, covering a broad range of encounters. To concur with Arambewela (2010), it is therefore important to understand students' sociocultural background, prior linguistic and educational background, expectations, and desires from their own accounts, rather than making false assumptions about their capabilities and behaviours based on generalisations or stereotypes.

Some researchers advocate viewing academic acculturation from an ecological perspective (Cao, 2011; Peng, 2012; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013), with ecology referring to the "study of the relationships between all the various organisms and their physical environment" (van Lier, 2002, p. 144). The ecological perspective here stems from Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) ecological systems theory on human development, which stresses the dynamic interaction between individuals and their surrounding environment on their personal development. Such environment includes

multiple levels or systems, from the immediate family, peers and school settings to the broader communities and context such as cultural values and costumes. This thesis advocates an ecological perspective to understand ISE, which entails a comprehensive approach to the ISE, including how different stages and aspects of ISE are connected.

The following sections turn the focus from international students in general to Chinese students studying abroad.

2.1.2 The Chinese intellectual diaspora

One approach to IHE research is investigating through the lens of a group of students from a similar cultural background, and the rising population of Chinese students abroad has received much attention in recent research. It has been reported that between China's open-door policy that opened up to international study in 1978 and the end of 2019, approximately 6.56 million Chinese have pursued education abroad (China's Ministry of Education, 2020). The same report also shows that approximately 703,500 Chinese students went abroad in 2019, an increase of 41,400 students (increase rate of 6.25%) compared to the previous year. Although there has been a slight shift of interest from studying in the US to the UK, it is reported that the US, the UK, Australia, and Canada continue to be the top four overseas study destinations for Chinese students in 2019 (ICEF Monitor, 2019b). In the meantime, China has slowly become the fifth most popular outbound study destination (ICEF Monitor, 2019a).

Historically, China has a long tradition of sending students abroad to pursue education. Guo (1998, 2003) categorised the Chinese learners who have studied abroad into five generations, primarily based on the historical significance. This thesis focuses on the current Chinese students educated abroad, i.e., the fifth generation (since 1978). According to Guo (2003), this group has five distinctive features: 1) vast scale and scope, 2) advanced educational level, 3) increase in the number and diversity of communities with growing influence, 4) contribution to spreading the Chinese culture, and 5) the social problem of "brain drain".

Additionally, Jin and Cortazzi (2011) expounded that the Chinese culture has a long tradition of having great respect for education, in that parents and students have a strong willingness to invest time and finance in secondary and tertiary education, and there is a society-wide belief in that hard work will lead to success and prosperity. Another characteristic of the Chinese international students studying abroad in recent years lies in the high percentage of self-funded students, e.g., over 95% of them were self-funded in 2015 (ICEF Monitor, 2016). Moreover, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Chinese students returning to China after graduation. Between 1978 and 2014, the total return rate of Chinese graduates is 74.5% (ICEF Monitor, 2015). It has also witnessed a significant increase in students who returned home soon after graduation, from approximately 5% in the 1980s to 80% in 2018 (ICEF Monitor, 2019b).

There are many contributory factors to Chinese students' decision to study abroad at the tertiary level (Wang & Crawford, 2020). Besides some of the commonly cited "push factors", as mentioned in Section 2.1.1 (Andrade, 2006b), some Chinese students wish to pursue what is valued as a degree obtained in a developed Western country to gain human capital and set themselves apart as more worldly in the globalised job market (Fong, 2011), while some try to escape from the Chinese higher education system which is becoming increasingly competitive year by year, causing much anxiety among the Chinese youth (Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015). Moreover, there has been a rapid increase in the number of middle-class families due to the fast economic growth in China over the past few decades. This phenomenon, coupled with the one-child policy and brain gain educational policy, and the growing peer pressure and social pressure, led to more Chinese families who are not only able to but also willing to send their children abroad to experience life in the developed world, aspiring for life change and exploring potentials for migration, something that their parents' generation could not dream of (Cebolla-Boado, Hu, & Soysal, 2018; Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015; Fong, 2002, 2011; Yan, 2013).

On the other side of the recruitment process, there are more options for students and more universities are expanding and employing a variety of marketing strategies for international student recruitment, such as open days, international

recruitment affairs, online and in-person contact with prospective students, and websites and brochures designed for such purposes (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2018; Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018). The increasing number of middle-class Chinese families able to afford to study overseas, students having the motivation and means to study abroad, together with the growing number of universities and programmes accepting international students, have resulted in the increasing diversity within this particular sojourner group, regarding language proficiency, socio-economic status, academic competence, levels of education, employability, and so on (Cortazzi & Jin, 2011).

The identity of Chinese international students is multi-faceted in the eyes of institutions and researchers. Henze and Zhu (2012) provided the first overview of the constructed role of Chinese students studying abroad, and five categories have been put forward. First, Chinese students are seen by universities as customers and sources of income, particularly in countries like the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which are the top choices of Chinese students' overseas study destinations (Gong & Huybers, 2015). Secondly, Chinese students seem to be considered a source of "irritation" or even "fear", causing changes to the host context, most likely regarding the teaching and learning process (Eaves, 2011; McGowan & Potter, 2008). The third view is to see them as someone who brings challenges and options for intercultural communication, building relevant theories and developing practice (Tan, McNerney, Liem, & Tan, 2008; Zhou, 2007). Another group identity of the Chinese students lies in their prominent academic potential, who are believed to become very competitive on the world stage, given their significant and growing share of the international student body (Huang, 2002; Pan, 2011; Zeithammer & Kellogg, 2013). Last but not least, the Chinese students have been frequently studied and referred to in international education, particularly regarding cultural adjustment, adaptation, and other behavioural and psychological issues (Pritchard, 2011).

As pointed out by Cortazzi and Jin (2011), terms such as "Chinese learners" and "Chinese students" switch between generalisation and diversity, which sometimes refer to the cohort as a whole and sometimes refer to various individuals that carry this identity. There is some value in generalising people who are identified in the same linguistic, ethnic, and cultural background in international education

research and intercultural research. Nevertheless, diversity between individuals and communities of practice (CoPs) should also be acknowledged and considered, as some researchers caution that general groupings can cause stereotyping, reductionism, or even discrimination (Bradley, 2018; Cortazzi & Jin, 2011). In cross-cultural and intercultural research, particularly in intercultural education and language education, there has been much discussion on deciphering the notion of “culture”. In viewing culture, Holliday (2011) outlined the two ends of this continuum, i.e., essentialism and non-essentialism, also known as the “big culture” and the “small culture” approaches (Holliday, 1999, 2016), as illustrated in the table below.

Table 2.1

Essentialist and Non-essentialist Views of Culture (Holliday, 2011, p. 5)

Essentialist view of culture	Non-essentialist view of culture
A physical place with evenly spread traits and membership. Associated with a country and a language. Has an onion-skin relationship with larger continental, religious, ethnic, or racial cultures, and smaller subcultures. Mutually exclusive with other national cultures. People in one culture are essentially different from people in another culture.	A social force which is evident where it is significant. Complex, difficult to pin down characteristics. Can relate to any type or size of group for any period of time, and can be characterized by a discourse as much as a language. Can flow, change, intermingle, cut across and through each other, regardless of national frontiers, and have blurred boundaries.
What people say	
“I visited three cultures while on holiday. They were Spain, Morocco, and Tunisia.” “When crossing from Japanese culture to Chinese culture...” “People from Egypt cannot.... When they arrive in French culture....”	“There was something culturally different about each of the countries I visited.” “There is evidence of a more homogeneous culture of food in...than in...” “Private secondary schools in...tend to have a more evident culture of sport than state secondary schools in...” “The culture of...in some businesses in...is changing.” “The rapid influx of immigrants from...is having an impact on the work culture in the high street.”

At the essentialist end of the continuum are people who tend to hold the belief that sociocultural groups are defined by certain underlying essences, which are mutually exclusive properties that are not possessed by other sociocultural groups. On the other end of the continuum, the non-essentialist believers tend to see social and cultural groups with much more flexibility and arbitrariness, with fewer

boundaries and socio-political constructions (Bradley, 2018; Chao, Chen, Roisman, & Hong, 2007; Tador, Chao, Hong, & Polzer, 2013). Nevertheless, as Bradley (2018) pointed out, it is unlikely that people take the very extreme forms of the essentialist or the non-essentialist view on national cultures, as essentialism often serves as a cognitive coping mechanism when people are interacting with the world, which suggests the fertile middle ground on the essentialist and non-essentialist continuum.

Holliday (2011, 2020) further proposed the notion “neo-essentialism”, amid the debate on understanding culture. It can be seen as an incomplete rejection of what has been argued by Hofstede (1997, 2001), a highly influential theorist of essentialism, whose approach to culture is overwhelmingly accepted in academia and everyday life. Compared with essentialism, Holliday’s (2011) neo-essentialism advocates a more liberal and non-essentialist attitude. He urges the neo-essentialist approach because much intercultural communication research has shown limitations of taking the essentialist view and overgeneralising cultures, while cultural diversity is gaining more attention. Neo-essentialism confirms that there are elements essential to certain cultures which make them distinct from others, while rejecting the overgeneralisation approach to understand culture and acknowledging the importance of diversity within a culture (Holliday, 2012). Therefore, it includes both the essentialist and the more liberal non-essentialist ideologies. It reminds us both as researchers and readers to bear in mind the connections between any research involving Chinese learners and other relevant people and studies, to be aware of the scope and depth of the research when interpreting data, conducting analysis, drawing conclusions, proposing and implementing suggestions.

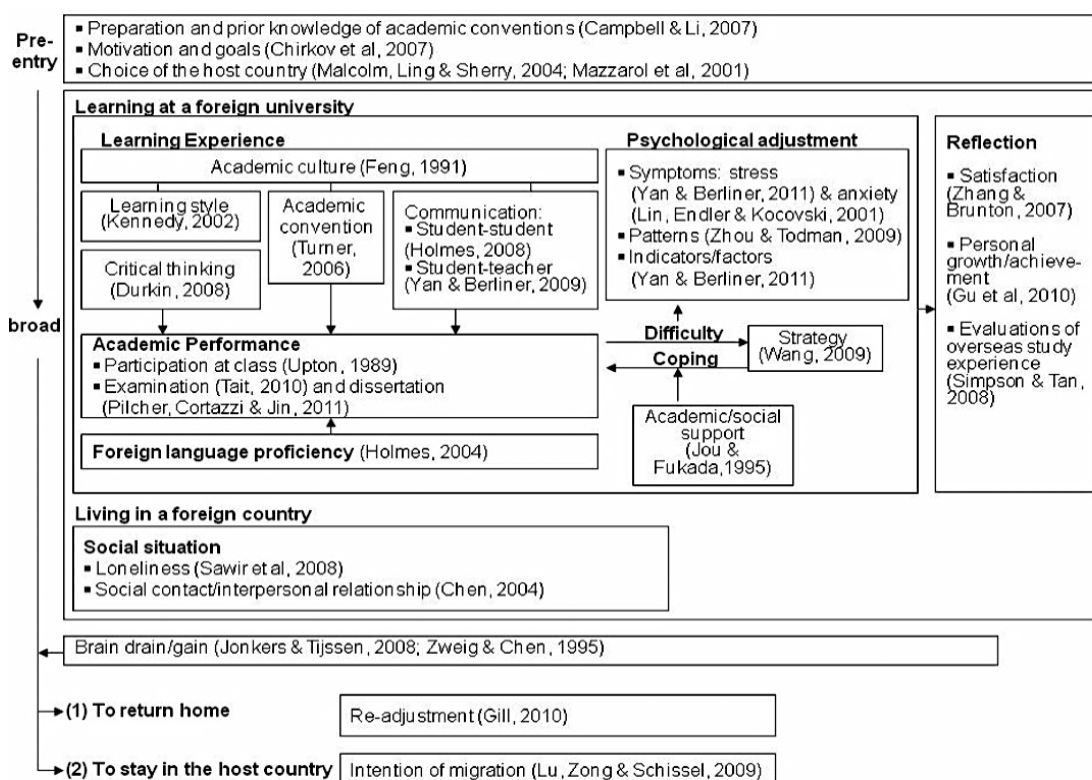
2.1.3 Research on Chinese students abroad

As presented in the previous section, the number of Chinese students studying abroad has increased drastically over the past decades. Extensive research has discussed the different aspects of these students' experiences, although sometimes Chinese students are studied as part of the international student cohort rather than a specific group. Different researchers have viewed Chinese learners through different lenses, and new approaches have been emerging as well.

A great number of researchers have endeavoured to explore Chinese students' experience at universities abroad, especially in English-speaking countries, including the UK (Gao, 2017; Hu, 2017; Jackson, 2016; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Wang, 2012; Wang & Byram, 2011; Ye & Edwards, 2015), the US (Heng, 2018; Rawlings & Sue, 2013; Wei et al., 2007; Zuo & Wang, 2016), Canada (Fang, Clarke, & Wei, 2016; Gao, 2019; Guo & Chase, 2011; Zhou, Liu, & Rideout, 2017), Australia (Ehrich, Howard, Mu, & Bokosmaty, 2016; Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011; Wang, 2017), and New Zealand (Li & Campbell, 2008; Jiao, 2014; Skyrme & White, 2011). Some have investigated Chinese students' satisfaction with overseas study experience (Bamber, 2014; Songsathaphorn, Chen, & Ruangkanjanases, 2014; Wang et al., 2011), while others researched Chinese graduates' job prospects and employability after studying overseas (Huang, 2013; Huang & Turner, 2018; Li, 2013). In recent years, there is also a growing body of literature on Chinese returnees, focusing on the status, identities, and experience of Chinese students who return to China after studying abroad (Farquharson & Pruthi, 2015; Gow, 2014; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Ma & Pan, 2015; Zweig & Wang, 2013). Amid the increasingly large and diverse research literature, Henze and Zhu (2012) put forward the figure below as an initial attempt to provide a systematic overview of the research landscape of Chinese students studying abroad.

Figure 2.6

Landscape of Current Research on Chinese Students Studying Abroad (Henze & Zhu, 2012, p. 91)



Henze and Zhu's (2012) summary indicates that ISE consists of several chronological stages, in line with the ISE literature presented in Section 2.1.1. It outlines the various research focuses within the ISE literature, acknowledges the learning and living aspects of Chinese students' ISE, and shows the interplay of various influencing factors. However, as shown in the figure above, foreign language proficiency in this synthesis is regarded primarily to serve academic performance, undermining its connection with other aspects of ISE.

Empirical studies have revealed that there are many common challenges faced by Chinese students, in that they are often perceived as passive rote learners with poor English proficiency, particularly with written and spoken English ability, partly due to the differences in academic conventions between China and the host countries (Heffernan, Morrison, Basu, & Sweeney, 2010; Turner, 2006; Wang & Roopchund, 2015). In addition, some have pointed out that Chinese students tend to

lack critical thinking ability (Wang & Byram, 2011), and they make less contribution to classroom discussions compared to their peers (Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009), while others focus on the challenges brought by the differences between the teaching and learning styles across nations (Gu, 2008; Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011). These challenges are suggested to be the results of students' personal attitudes and previous experiences (Arambewela & Hall, 2013), insufficient support from the universities (Bamford, 2008), and differences in social and academic practices (Zhou et al., 2008). However, this overwhelmingly deficiency-based narrative regarding Chinese students' capabilities and learning styles has been challenged in recent research (Heng, 2018, Li & Cutting, 2011; Rao & Chan, 2010; Ryan, 2011; Wu, 2015; Ye & Edwards, 2015). Section 2.1.4 will elaborate on Chinese students' experiences in UK universities specifically, and Section 2.3 will expand on Chinese students' OP in the study abroad context in much more depth.

Moreover, one may not assume or overgeneralise Chinese students' learning strategies or experiences simply based on their cultural background. Underlying such stereotypes is a binary "us" vs "them" approach and a simplistic essentialist view of a group of learners who collectively lack some of the qualities to excel in Western universities (Arkoudis, 2006), as argued in the previous section. Recent studies have witnessed such stereotypes being challenged by revealing that some Chinese students react positively to overseas studies (Heng, 2018; Wang & Byram, 2011). Exposure to a different culture of education and adjusting to the host nation's social conventions and values have been viewed by some as great opportunities to learn and develop skills in intercultural collaboration (Wang, Harding, & Mai, 2012). Therefore, instead of trying to solve the "problems" brought by the growing population of international students, including Chinese students, it is more important to see them as valuable assets and involve them in the two-way process of enhancing the teaching and learning experience in international universities, as suggested by Ryan (2011).

2.1.4 Research on Chinese students in the UK

When viewing IHE, the focus often stays on certain levels, i.e., institutional, national, regional, and global (Knight, 2013). IHE is taking place on a global scale, but different nations, areas, or even institutions are taking different paths at different paces. The UK has always been one of the most favoured destinations for international students (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014), and the expansion of the international student population in the UK is thought to be the most apparent manifestation of its higher education sector becoming globalised and internationalised (Tian & Lowe, 2013a). As mentioned in Section 2.1.2, research shows that there seems to be a general belief in some developing countries like China that attaining a higher education degree in developed countries, such as the UK, would provide students with upward mobility and benefit them economically as it can bring better job opportunities and lead to higher social recognition (Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

There is a long history of Chinese students coming to the UK for higher education, and the soaring population of this group is remarkable, from less than 3000 in the late 1990s to almost 142,000 in 2019/20, taking up more than one-third of the non-EU students enrolled in the UK universities (UKCISA, 2021). Similar to the studies concerning Chinese students' experiences abroad in general, most studies on Chinese students' experiences in UK universities also focus on issues such as the difficulties faced by Chinese students when adjusting to new academic environment, the differences between academic cultures between the education systems in China and the UK, and how British higher institutions can assist teachers and Chinese students to enhance their teaching and learning outcomes (Edwards & Ran, 2006; Li, 2007; McMahon, 2011; Yu & Moskal, 2019; Zhao, 2014). Researchers in the West seem to be intrigued by Chinese students' ways to learning, which seem to follow a very different school of thought and practice, and sometimes even seem to be the opposite from the Western perspective. Table 2.2 demonstrates such a comparison of academic values between the Chinese and British education systems.

Table 2.2

Comparison of Chinese and British Academic Values (Ryan, 2013, p. 282)

<i>China</i>	<i>UK</i>
• Level of knowledge • Learn from the teacher • Respect teachers and texts • Harmony of the group • Consensus /avoiding conflict • 'Reflective' learners • Critique of the 'self'	• Type of (critical) thinking • Independent learning • Question teachers and texts • Student-centred learning • Argumentation /assertiveness • 'Deep' learners seeking meaning • Critique of the 'other'

Besides the areas pointed out in the table above, other distinctions between the two education systems are also cited in the literature, such as the Chinese system was found to be more hierarchical than the education system in the UK (Edwards & Ran, 2006), and oracy skills are much more favoured than listening skills in British academia and society in general, as evident in the dialogic and interactive classroom communication and employers' preferences (Dippold, 2015; Sequeira, 2021).

In the meantime, there are some general impressions associated with Chinese students. For instance, classes tend to be organised in a teacher-centred fashion, and Chinese students are used to trusting and following the direction of teachers in learning, whereas classes tend to be more student-centred in the British education system, and learners' creativity and independence are expected (Turner, 2006). The table below summarises the different characteristics of a typical model Chinese student and a model British student.

Table 2.3

Comparisons of Chinese and British Student Archetypes (adapted from Turner, 2006)

The 'model' Chinese student	The 'model' British student
Young, unmarried, full-time student	Any age, studying through many patterns
Works hard to achieve results – the harder working, the better the student	Combines hard work and trained/natural ability
Passive-receptive learner, listens to the teacher and studies privately	Active learner, asks lots of questions and participates vocally in class
Learns mainly by reading and processing knowledge	Learns by combining a range of learning skills – an active, problem-solving-based learner
Responds to teacher direction obediently and adopts both structures and substance of the study according to teacher direction	Meets the teacher's suggestions with independent mind and imagination, studies in trained but personalised style
Combines intellectual capability and 'good' moral behaviour – a good citizen	Intellectual and moral behaviour not an inevitable combination – the development of individual ethics
Highly competitive with others in cohort, strives to be the 'best'	May strive to 'do one's best' against the standard
Does not question accepted norms and ideas in the classroom	Takes a critical stance on knowledge and learning
Learns within defined disciplinary rules and boundaries	Contextualises learning and relates it to other aspects of life in a holistic manner

Although this is a somewhat outdated summary of characteristics of the two groups of students, elements of this comparison correspond to some findings of other studies of similar interests (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Hu, van Veen, & Corda, 2016; Jones, 1999; Littlewood, 2001; Nakane, 2007). However, Turner's (2006) summary takes a very binary perspective regarding the differences between Chinese and Western academic cultures. Such stereotypes have been challenged by more recent studies (Heng, 2018; Mathias, Bruce, & Newton, 2013). One may argue that such a disparity in education systems stems from the differences in cultures and social ideologies, i.e., collectivism vs individualism, which influence the teaching and learning process, and in turn, lead to further reinforcement of such cultural differences. More issues regarding differences in academic cultures, how such differences can influence Chinese students' OP, and the problematic binary view of culture will be discussed in Sections 2.3.3.1 and 2.3.3.3.

Nevertheless, despite the rote-learning, overly authoritative teachers and parents, large classes, and other factors which seem to hinder effective learning, Chinese students continue to excel academically and can even achieve higher academic outcomes than their Western counterparts (Biggs, 1996). Watkins and Biggs (2001) gave this phenomenon a name – “the paradox of the Chinese learner”. It has been argued that Western educators may have long misunderstood the Chinese educational pedagogical philosophy, in that the Chinese learners are not what they considered as surfaced learners through the repetitive memorisation strategy, but they can achieve deep and effective learning through such strategies (Kontoulis & Williams, 2000; Watkins, 2000). Research has suggested that Chinese students do value meaning understanding and reflecting, and they incorporate understanding of the content through memorisation as part of their learning practice (Au & Entwistle, 1999; Baumgart & Halse, 1999; Cooper, 2004). Moreover, some recent research has also attempted to seek similarities between the Western tradition and the Confucian-heritage-based Chinese tradition of education rather than focusing on their differences, and explored opportunities for transcultural learning while broadening approaches to internationalising the curriculum (Ryan, 2013).

Tian and Lowe’s (2013a) research is one of the few studies that presented a relatively clear explanation of the relationship between linguistic proficiency and student adaptation regarding Chinese students’ ISE. Two studies were conducted and compared against each other: one was an intensive, longitudinal study of 13 Chinese students on taught Masters programmes in one UK university while the other was done by interviewing 14 undergraduate students at seven UK universities across different disciplines. Despite the differences in age and experience, majors and levels of study, length of stay, and locations in the UK, similarities between different participants were discovered. This study showed that students who fell into the separation/marginalisation category (based on Berry’s (1997) model of acculturation strategies mentioned in Section 2.1.1) seemed to lack the motivation, incentive, and sufficient opportunities to engage in intercultural communication in order to improve their English ability. Most of the participants fell into the integration/separation domain, which suggested that they were open to socialising outside the Chinese community and might have even actively participated in social activities to explore

intercultural experience. However, their experience did not reach their expectations, and for various reasons such as inability to understand other students' accents and the increasing academic workload, they failed to establish and maintain meaningful intercultural relations. As a result, they gradually made less effort to engage in intercultural communication and tended to end up in Chinese-only networks. The third domain is integration/identity retention, where students were successful in creating intercultural friendships and experiencing host society culture, but they still associated with many Chinese students. Interestingly, participants in this category did not necessarily possess great English-speaking skills. What was more important was the extensive exposure to the intercultural environment and their WTC in English. The final domain is integration/assimilation, indicating someone highly motivated to develop English skills and actively made use of opportunities to do so, which resulted in diminishing contact with fellow Chinese people, despite their disliking of certain British lifestyles.

What is particularly interesting about Tian and Lowe' (2013a) research findings is that although high English proficiency seemed to be an effective enabler for students to integrate better to the host society, many more contributory factors were discovered, such as social contact, individual personalities, relationship status, requirement from course work, residence accommodation, personal interests, career development, and so on. That is to say, high level of English proficiency does not necessarily lead to integration or assimilation with the host culture, and diversity within the Chinese student cohort in the UK could not be overlooked. However, Tian and Lowe (2013a) only indicated the possible connection between high English proficiency and successful integration. Whether some students ended at the other end of the adaptation continuum due to low English proficiency remained under-explored in their study.

This section has looked at the overall experience of Chinese international students in English-speaking universities overseas, especially in the UK. It is worth highlighting that one of the most concerning and frequently mentioned challenges for many Chinese students abroad lies in English language competence, as pointed out by Pan, Wong, Joubert, and Cha (2010). It is primarily because to most Chinese

students, language difficulty is not simply the challenge of mastering a different language, since the lack of proficiency in the language prohibits them from participating in classroom discussion and wider intercultural communication (Henze & Zhu, 2012), which will be further elaborated in Section 2.3. The next section will focus on the English language in the target context, particularly its connection to students' overseas experience.

2.2 The English language in international universities

2.2.1 English and international student experience

English and IHE have a mutual influence on one another because the global spread of English facilitates IHE, which in turn increases the demand for English in the higher educational domain (Kirkpatrick, 2012). The population of non-native English speakers (NNESs) has far outnumbered native English speakers (NEs), and it is estimated that for every NE, there are four NNEs, and this ratio is only getting larger (British Council, 2013). English as the international language in business, diplomacy, and other domains has led to it being the lingua franca (medium of communication between speakers of different first languages) on intercultural campuses, as well as the phenomenon of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education around the world, which refers to using English to teach subjects in places where the native language is not English (Wilkinson, 2013). Given that English is the host language in the UK, it is considered an important “pulling factor” in attracting international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Zhao, 2014; Zheng, 2014). Students choose to come to the UK partially due to anticipation of learning more about the West, with relative familiarity and knowledge about the host country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), and it saves time for international students like Chinese students to learn another foreign language, which is often required when studying in a different country (Gong & Huybers, 2015). From the perspective of a host institution, a high international profile suggests easy access to educational services, including language support for international students, which is another pulling factor that has long influenced students' choice of destination (McMahon, 1992).

Competence of the host country language is considered a major factor that influences ISE, not only in students' academic studies but also in their social and cultural experience. Previous studies suggest that English proficiency not only plays a vital role in students' academic performance (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Young et al., 2013), but also in their psychosocial adjustment (Sümer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Young et al., 2013), and sociocultural adaptation (Andrade, 2009; Poyrazli, 2003; Schartner & Young, 2020). Many studies have provided evidence that international students do struggle with the target language and have investigated the consequences of such difficulties. For instance, Halic, Greenberg, and Paulus' (2009) phenomenological study revealed the important role of English proficiency in constructing NNES international students' (primarily PhD students) academic identities, and their overall self-confidence and self-esteem as valuable members of the new environment. Similarly, Walsh (2010) found that within the European context, language difficulties (along with cultural issues) exacerbated the difficulties that international PhD students experienced.

Similarly, Brown's (2008) longitudinal ethnographic study on international postgraduate students at a British university suggested that the English language was a major stressor for international students, especially at the initial stage when some of them were confronted with emotional challenges. Moreover, Hennebry, Lo, and Macaro's (2012) study which investigated the linguistic experiences of NNES Master's students at a British university showed a promising increase in student self-reported confidence in English proficiency after spending time in the institution. Interviews in Hennebry et al.'s (2012) study suggested that the increasing level of confidence was associated with many factors, such as intensive exposure to the target language, improvement in communicative skills, and high expectations of the language demand prior to arrival. Nevertheless, their study mostly focused on English experience for academic purposes, while English for everyday communication and life outside campus was barely discussed.

While low English proficiency can be a significant obstacle for students having a thriving social life, when an international student is perceived to have good English language skills, discrimination toward that student group can be reduced

(Karuppan & Barari, 2011). High English proficiency is also suggested as one of the most significant facilitators for international students to achieve desirable overseas study outcomes, as mentioned in 2.1.1, and highlighted in Martinez and Colaner's (2017) four-dimensional approach to unpack Asian students' experience in English-speaking countries. However, it seems that even among international students who were satisfied with their educational experiences, they still had language concerns (Huang, 2008). According to Erichsen and Bolliger (2011), the linguistic challenges encountered by international NNEs students could potentially lead to confusion, miscomprehension, troubles with course materials, anxiety, and stress when participating in class and presenting in public. In addition, it is worth noting that most research on this issue tends to treat language ability as an isolated factor, parallel to other factors such as academic ability, rather than exploring the connection between these factors. Therefore, more close examination of the relationship between the English language and different areas of ISE is called for, and Section 2.2.3.2 will analyse international students' English language needs in greater detail.

2.2.2 English proficiency as a yardstick

In the context of studying abroad, English plays a vital role as the yardstick in international universities. Due to the increase of “overseas study fever”, coupled with English ability often being the indicator of international NNEs' satisfactory command of English competence, it is understandable how English proficiency exams such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS) have gained so much popularity in recent years (Hyatt, 2013). Such English language requirements have led to the ever-expanding English language programmes as a consequence of the “washback effect”, which refers to the impact of testing on teaching and learning (Green, 2013). As one of the top choices for those who wish to work or study in an environment where English is the medium of communication, the IELTS test is recognised by approximately 9000 organisations in more than 140 countries worldwide as a proof of English proficiency (IELTS, 2014). Statistics show that a record 3.5 million IELTS tests were taken in 2018, indicating its dramatic

growing importance (British Council, 2019). In response to the increasing need to take IELTS exams, there has been a booming private tutoring business for IELTS preparation courses in China in recent years, which has been criticised for turning the language preparation into a mastery of test-taking skills (Hu & Trenkic, 2019; Quaid, 2018; Yu, 2014).

However, whether such English proficiency exams have predictive validity on students' academic performance is worth questioning. It has been long argued that language tests have limitations in design to reflect the real-life use of the language, and many studies were carried out to investigate the correlation between IELTS test scores and students' subsequent academic performance (Daller & Phelan, 2013; Dooley & Oliver, 2002; Feast, 2002; Green, 2007; Hill, Storch, & Lynch, 1999; Hu & Trenkic, 2019; Kerstjens & Nery, 2000; Stigger, 2019; Yen & Kuzma, 2009). Nevertheless, results from these studies showed much inconsistency. While some studies found no or little evidence of a statistically significant connection between students' IELTS scores and their academic performance, e.g., Cotton and Conrow (1998), Dooley (1999), and Dooley and Oliver (2002), other investigations stated an overall positive correlation between the two (Bellingham, 1993; Dang & Dang, 2021; Feast, 2002; Schoepp, 2018). Despite finding a relatively strong relationship between students' English proficiency and academic success in their studies, Hill et al. (1999) and Kerstjens and Nery (2000) still argued that the overall predictive power of the English test results remained weak.

From a methodological perspective, studies with quantitative approaches have shown inconsistency in the predictability of such language exams, and the way different studies used various measurement of academic performance might also raise questions to their conclusions. For instance, some studies used scores in the first semester (Bellingham, 1993), while others took grades in the second semester (Gibson & Rusek, 1992) or taking both semesters into consideration (Yen & Kuzma, 2009). Hu and Trenkic' (2019) study introduced two additional tests to measure students' English proficiency. Moreover, research such as Huong's (2001) study selected participants from different countries studying various disciplines at different

levels. This type of heterogeneous sample arguably added much difficulty in making the correlation between IELTS performance and academic success.

With a focus on IELTS and Chinese student experience in a UK university, Yen and Kuzma's (2009) study seemed to support the positive predictivity of the IELTS scores. However, they also reported that such predictive power would become weaker as students stay in the university longer, because the positive correlation was found much stronger in the first semester than in the second semester. Moreover, the positive correlation they claimed was only valid for the listening, reading and writing sections, while speaking was the only aspect where no such correlation appeared. One possible explanation Yen and Kuzma (2009) provided was that the participants were recruited from business school, and they were mostly graded on written assignments rather than presentation. This result also illustrated the difficulty of investigating such research topics when the proficiency exam results are further broken down into different abilities, as supported by Dooley and Oliver's (2002) study, which only claimed a positive correlation between the reading score and students' GPA in Australia. Likewise, Daller and Phelan (2013) found that listening and writing scores positively correlated to students' academic performance in the UK context but such a correlation did not extend to the other sections.

Regarding the four language skills, reading and writing skills were traditionally viewed as more important in international academic contexts, while speaking skill has been receiving more attention in recent years (Carroll & Ryan, 2005), along with the shift in teaching methodology that places more value in students' active participation and interactive communication in class (Ducasse & Brown, 2011). Ducasse and Brown's (2011) study investigated the level of validity of the speaking section in the IELTS exam by comparing its content to the actual verbal communication required in a university context. They analysed institutional documents, interviewed staff members, and observed classroom interaction in an Australian university. The study revealed that although there are similarities between the IELTS speaking test and university classroom interaction, students also needed to produce communicative and interactional management functions, which is less required in the IELTS interview (Ducasse & Brown, 2011).

Furthermore, the social dimension of interaction required in communication situations and daily life in overseas study context, such as group work, presentations, and communication with peers and supervisors, was also raised in other studies (Dunworth, 2008; Sawir, Marginson, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, & Ramia, 2012; Yeoh & Terry, 2013). Ingram and Bayliss (2007) found that students' OP in class generally reflected their IELTS score in terms of linguistic features such as pronunciation, coherence and cohesion, syntax, lexis, pragmatic awareness, etc. One issue worth re-addressing is that language is just one factor influencing the complex process of ISE. As Ingram and Bayliss (2007) pointed out, although a good level of English proficiency indicated by the exam results could be a facilitator for better ISE, neither does it suggest that these students would not struggle with academic demands, nor can it guarantee that the students would not encounter linguistic difficulty. It is also supported by Paul's (2007) study, in which participants confirmed that they were faced with language difficulties and had troubles with studies as the complexity of the academic tasks increased.

In addition to submitting standard English language test results, some universities have policies that allow students to prove their English proficiency with alternative means, such as proof of prior degrees taught and assessed in English or having study experience in English-speaking countries (The University of Edinburgh, 2021a; University College London, 2021). Many UK universities have designed materials and provided pre-sessional English for academic purposes (EAP) courses for international students who hold conditional offers prior to full acceptance (Cranfield University, 2021; The University of Edinburgh, 2021b; The University of Manchester, 2021), and continue to support them after enrolment, which suggests the vital role that the English language plays in international students' academic experience.

Despite English proficiency being a yardstick, passing the entry requirement is insufficient. Research shows that some students experienced frustration and shock due to the mismatch between the English they thought was required and what they actually encountered while studying overseas (Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011). Hennebry et al. (2012) also discovered the student-reported discrepancy between

English they encountered in the UK and what they learnt in China, including the preparation for language proficiency exams such as IELTS, which suggests a lack of awareness and proper preparation for English to be used in a study abroad context. It has been highlighted explicitly in Liu's (2011) study that international students' oral English skills do not automatically develop due to the increase in exposure to the English environment. Once international students are in the new environment, their English competence will most likely no longer be assessed in the form of English proficiency exams or achievement exams but different kinds of assignments and projects. Liu (2011) also pointed out a gap in the literature regarding students' voices in explaining what they need and how they view what is required of them.

2.2.3 Needs analysis and international students

2.2.3.1 Needs analysis in English language education

Central to L2 teaching and learning is learner needs, which can be established by conducting Needs Analysis (NA). It involves procedures used to understand learners' needs, and it was introduced to the L2 curriculum through the English for specific purposes (ESP) movement. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) pointed out that in order to enable learners to use English adequately in target situations addressed in ESP courses, there ought to be an initial process in the ESP course design to identify the target situation as well as its linguistic features, which in turn would inform the ESP course syllabus. This process is identified as NA by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) or target situation analysis termed by Chambers (1980). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) further explained that what distinguishes ESP from general English courses is not solely the content, such as specific subjects, but the awareness of the learners' needs.

Since its first appearance in the 1960s, a number of NA models and categorisations have been proposed. Munby (1978) proposed an influential and rigorous sociolinguistic model, i.e., target-situation analysis, which specifies the profile of a target situation, where the communicative context, purpose, medium, mode, channel of communication, main speakers and their English proficiency, and

other relevant elements are identified in detail in order to develop a syllabus. Although this target-situation-based approach sets to provide a detailed guidance, critics have pointed out that it is neither practical nor flexible, while being too complicated, time-consuming, and lacking consideration for practical constraints and reflection of real-world English (Jordan, 1997; West, 1994). Richterich and Chancerel's (1997) systemic approach or present-situation analysis model addressed the problem of flexibility by putting more focus on the learners and learners' emergent needs throughout a course, where their needs are checked constantly. Nevertheless, this model is also criticised for neglecting learners' needs in the real world, and it relies too much on learners' own perceptions of needs (Kaewpet, 2009). Following Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) learning-centred approach, which will be explained in the next section, Berwick (1989) and Brindley (1989) advocated the learner-centred approach. They offered some lens to view learner needs, perceived and felt needs (from different people's perspectives), product and process-oriented interpretations, and objective and subjective needs. Other earlier researchers who also contributed to the development of NA include Allwright (1982), Holliday and Cooke (1982), Nunan (1988a, 1988b), Robinson (1991), and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998). As the various models and approaches to NA suggest, needs can be interpreted and investigated in various ways, and different models can overlap and be combined effectively as they complement each other.

Later, Long (2005a, 2005b) recommended a task-based approach to NA and language teaching with less stress on the linguistic elements. Tasks are the units of analysis, and learners are believed to acquire the target language by using it in real-life tasks rather than what has been taught by teachers. Hyland (2006) incorporated earlier work on NA and provided a broad definition of NA, in which "needs" is regarded as a multi-faceted concept comprising learners' backgrounds, aims, motivations, language proficiency, preferences of learning and teaching, and situations to communicate in the target language. It involves "what learners know, don't know or want to know" (p. 74). However, perhaps it is more comprehensive to add "what learners need to know" to the definition above, as the "necessities" type of needs illustrated below. Table 2.4 is an often-cited illustration of an example of needs proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). Their model distinguished

different types of needs, namely necessities, lacks and wants, referring to what learners are required to know, what aspects of language the learners do not know, and what the learners wish to know in a given situation.

Table 2.4

ESP Needs as Necessities, Lacks, Wants (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 58)

	OBJECTIVE (i.e. as perceived by course designers)	SUBJECTIVE (i.e. as perceived by learners)
NECESSITIES	The English needed for success in Agriculture or Veterinary Studies	To Reluctantly cope with a 'second-best' situation
LACKS	(Presumably) areas of English needed for Agriculture or Veterinary Studies	Means of doing Medical Studies
WANTS	To succeed in Agricultural or Veterinary Studies	To undertake Medical Studies

Although challenged and modified by other scholars on the grounds of lacking consideration of environmental constraints (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) and lacking empowerment of the learners (Benesch, 2001), Hutchinson and Waters (1987) provided a NA framework to guide future research on language focus and developing specific NA methods. The development of NA in recent years suggests an emergence of a flexible theoretical framework of NA and that NA should be flexible in design to best fit the inquiry (Rahman, 2015). A range of methods can be used to carry out NA, such as questionnaires, interviews, observation, informal consultation with teachers and learners, practitioner intuitions, language audits, text-based analysis, tests, analysis of exam paper, textbooks, and authentic spoken and written work, e.g., diaries, journals, and logs (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Huhta, Vogt, Johnson, & Tulkki, 2013; Long, 2005a; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Triangulation of data from various sources should be included in the investigation for potential implications and quality assurance of NA (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

Researchers have used NA as a device to investigate the English language needs of university students in different contexts around the world. NA studies

conducted in higher education are usually found in EAP-oriented books and journals, as well as ESP publications. Some NA studies do not state NA explicitly, but their goals and focuses tend to resemble that of a NA study, such as EAP programme evaluation and attitude towards English. According to Paltridge et al., (2009), NA in academia often focuses on macro-skills, among which writing skills get the most attention. For instance, Prior (1995) conducted a longitudinal and triangulated ethnographic NA study to investigate students' writing and teachers' responses in seminars. Chin's (1994) ethnographic study used field notes, sample writings and interviews with students to investigate a postgraduate journalism course.

As outlined in Johns and Makalela's (2011) review of the development of NA in ESP, there has been a shift from focusing on objective needs in target situations to a more ethnographic viewpoint through which social contexts, subjective needs, and intentions of stakeholders have been investigated and emphasised. Such a shift reflects the influence of educational philosophy development on English language teaching (ELT), namely from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach. Since the 1980s when task-based language teaching emerged, the ethnographic dimension of NA has received more attention, resulting in the increasing use of ethnographic methods, as advocated by Brown (2009). For instance, Northcott (2001) explored the role of interactive lecturing styles in an MBA programme at a UK University by conducting an ethnographic NA with observation as the main data collection method. Holme and Chalauisaeng (2006) investigated learner needs for an EAP reading course by conducting a case study with a group of pharmacology students by employing mixed methods, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews with students and staff, and questionnaires.

In Mahmoud's (2014) NA study, which aimed to find out students' English language needs at the foundation year in an EMI university in Saudi Arabia, the researcher conducted the following steps: placement test analysis, interviews with faculty members across disciplines, focus group with students, interviews with instructors, and comparing results to the current Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Results showed that university students hope to be included in the syllabus design process for English courses and that different

faculties have different expectations and requirements for specific English skills. It also showed that if students do not know what language they need in order to function effectively in the target situation, foreign language instructors cannot measure the gap between what students know at present and what they are required to know at the end of a certain programme, which hinders them from providing effective support for the students.

2.2.3.2 International students' English language needs

Following the general discussion on the importance of English in ISE in Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, it is worth looking at some of the specific English needs of international students in various situations. Previous research has revealed repeatedly that NNES students encounter linguistic and communication challenges in relation to their academic, psychological, and sociocultural adjustment (Andrade, 2009; Ellis, Sawyer, Gill, Medlin, & Wilson, 2005; Galloway & Jenkins, 2005; Gu et al., 2010; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Poyrazli, 2003; Scharnter & Young, 2020; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Sümer et al., 2008; Wu & Hammond, 2011; Young et al., 2013; Zhang & Brunton, 2007).

Results from previous research seemed to focus much more on the “lacks” type of needs, highlighting the deficient narrative with regard to international NNES students (Heng, 2018). A lack of familiarity and understanding of the expectations such as teaching and learning styles, classroom expectations and communication norms in the target academic environment can cause confusion and impede students' participation, particularly for East Asian students in Western universities (Gu, 2008; Gu & Maley, 2008; Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011; Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Viete, 2009; Turner, 2013). In the meantime, a lack of self-perceived competence in their English ability, fear of mistakes and negative evaluation may lead to students' language anxiety and further hinder their participation, especially in tasks involving speaking, such as group work, seminar discussions and presentations (Andrade, 2006a; Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011; Grey, 2002; Halic et al., 2009; Hellstén & Prescott, 2004; Jenkins, 2014; Wang & Roopchund, 2015). Furthermore, the use of colloquial and

idiomatic expressions, and jokes by their teachers and local peers has been often raised by international NNES students as they tend to lack sufficient cultural references to comprehend such use of the English language effectively (Ellis et al., 2005; Gao, 2017; Grey, 2002; Lacina, 2002; Leask, 2009; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Zhao & Bourne, 2011). Although one can argue that such instances can help with one's development of the English language ability by learning English in the cultural-specific contexts, the research above suggested that they often tended to leave students feeling excluded, disempowered, and misunderstood.

It is also worth mentioning that international NNES students often raise concern about the other speakers' unfamiliar accents, including both NESs' and NNESs' accents (Tian & Lowe, 2013a; Yu, 2017). Moreover, speakers' fast speed of speech is another issue that often emerges from the research, which can impede students' comprehension (Galloway, 2011; Liu, 2002; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Robertson et al., 2000). Although some students seem to be positive towards challenges in that they prefer lecturers not to adjust to a lower English level for NNES students on purpose, and they consider such challenges as great opportunities for them to improve English skills (Hellstén & Prescott, 2004), more studies seem to reflect NNES international students' anxiety as a result of spending too much time on trying to understand reading materials and completing other academic work (Gow, 2014; Grey, 2002; Hennebry et al., 2012; Holmes, 2004).

It is therefore critical for faculty and local NES students to raise awareness of their own limitations and potential biases, and avoid the mistake of looking down on international students' academic ability and intellectual capability based on their perceived deficiency in English ability or different learning styles (Heng, 2018; Wu, 2015). Teachers need to avoid assuming cultural common grounds and try to clarify their meanings whenever there might be biases or misunderstandings (Schuerholz-Lehr, Caws, Van Gyn, & Preece, 2007). NNES international students who are not yet familiar with using English in a new environment need to be treated with patience and respect, and provided with support on developing language skills and a safe space to have their voices heard (Grey, 2002; Sherry et al., 2010). Moreover,

curriculum and pedagogical practices need to be constantly reflected and developed. Certain principles regarding intercultural communication in an educational setting need to be followed to better respond to the increasingly diverse student cohort in many international universities (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Ryan & Viete, 2009; Zhao & Bourne, 2011).

2.2.4 (Intercultural) Communicative Competence

2.2.4.1 Communicative competence

The previous section has critically reviewed the notion of NA. However, NA needs to be viewed together with the construct of language competence to clarify the specific aspects of language needs investigated in a given study, which seems to be overlooked in NA studies. The construct of language competence has remained a very controversial notion in the field of linguistics, particularly in applied linguistics, for the past four decades (Newby, 2011). Its first appearance in the 1960s is commonly regarded in association with Chomsky's (1965) early distinction between competence and performance, with the former referring to "the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language", and the latter referring to "the actual use of language in concrete situations" (p. 4). However, this definition of language competence was soon disapproved by other linguists. For instance, Hymes (1972) pointed out that this definition is inadequate due to its almost idealised depiction and solely linguistic emphasis on competence, while overlooking the social aspect of language exchange, which is the communicative and sociolinguistic aspect of language.

Based on this remark, Hymes (1972) proposed the influential construct Communicative Competence (CC), advocating the importance of both the inherent grammatical competence as well as the ability to use it for various communicative purposes. According to Hymes (1972), appropriateness in communication is also essential because a successful speaker should know "when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner" (p. 277). Munby (1978) approved Hymes' (1972) model on its intention "to show the ways in which the systematically possible, the feasible, and the appropriate are linked to produce

and interpret actually occurring cultural behavior” (p. 16). This definition of CC refers to both one’s knowledge of the language and the ability to apply such knowledge in real communication through meaning negotiation (Brown, 2007), and it is regarded as more realistic, extensive, and comprehensive as compared to that of Chomskyan tradition (Bagarić & Djigunović, 2007).

CC started to gain momentum in applied linguistics in the 1970s, around which time communicative language teaching emerged as a new language teaching approach which regards CC as its final goal (Richards, 2006). Therefore, a clear understanding of CC is imperative for cultivating learners’ CC. Various models of CC have been proposed over the years, e.g., Hymes (1967, 1972), Canale and Swain (1980), van Ek (1986), Bachman (1990), Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995), Bachman and Palmer (1996), Richards (2006), and Littlewood (2011). Although these models have minor differences in emphasis, they built upon each other and furthered the theories on CC. Applied linguists Canale and Swain’s (1980) conceptualisation of CC is one of the most influential CC models in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and language testing, which is most likely for its easiness for comprehension and application (Bagarić & Djigunović, 2007). Viewing CC as a synthesis of a system of knowledge and skills required for communication, Canale and Swain’s (1980) CC model consists of three types of competencies – grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. This model was later revised by Canale (1983), adding discourse competence, which refers to the cohesion and coherence of utterances.

Around the same time, van Ek (1986) in Europe proposed a framework for the objective of foreign language teaching, promoting social competence, learner autonomy, and social responsibility. Van Ek’s CC model, or “communicative ability” in his term, consists of the following aspects: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, sociocultural competence, and social competence. It is easy to notice the overlap between van Ek’s model and the previously mentioned Canale and Swain’s (1980) CC model. Both consider CC as a complex concept consisting of different components. The grammatical competence in Canale and Swain’s (1980) model is very similar to the linguistic

competence in van Ek' (1986) model, which both primarily deal with grammatical rules. The sociolinguistic competence in Canale and Swain's model refers to the same competence which van Ek divided into sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence. Moreover, strategic competence is also included in both models.

Based on previous CC models, Bachman (1990) put forward a much more complex and comprehensive CC model, or "a theoretical framework of communicative language ability" (p. 84), to be more precise. This model includes three components: language competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological mechanisms. Language competence comprises organisational competence (incl. grammatical and textual competence), and pragmatic competence (incl. illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence). One of the important contributions of this model is that different from Canale and Swain's (1980), strategic competence in Bachman's (1990) model was raised to the same level as language competence, as shown in Table 2.5 on the next page. This is because Bachman did not consider communication strategies to be limited to only linguistic ones. He disagreed with Canale and Swain (1980), who viewed strategic competence as mostly compensatory. He further stated the importance of strategic competence as "an important part of all communicative language use, not just that in which language abilities are deficient and must be compensated for by other means" (p. 100). The strategic competence in this model includes three main components: assessment, planning, and execution. Bachman also briefly mentioned the psychophysiological mechanisms, which refer to the auditorial or visual channels, and the receptive or productive modes through which competencies are implemented.

Bachman's (1990) CC model was later adjusted by Bachman and Palmer (1996) (see Table 2.5), who focused on the interactions among language users' personal characteristics, their topical knowledge, affective schemata, and language ability, and how these factors interact with the language situation. The wording of "language competence" has been changed to "language ability" for the purpose of measurement, as they suggested an ability to be a construct in testing. Language ability here involves language knowledge and strategic competence. Similar to

Bachman's (1990) model, language knowledge in this model consists of organisational competence and pragmatic competence. Organisational knowledge refers to the language user's ability to organise formal language structures, while pragmatic knowledge refers to the ability to relate the use of the language to both the communicative goals and the traits of the communicative setting. The former includes grammatical competence and textual competence, and the latter involves functional competence and sociolinguistic competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Specific areas of knowledge are presented in the table below.

Table 2.5

Model of Communicative Competence (adapted from Bachman and Palmer, 1996)

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE				
Language Knowledge				Strategic Competence
Organisational knowledge		Pragmatic knowledge		Goal setting
<i>Grammatical knowledge</i>	<i>Textual knowledge</i>	<i>Functional knowledge</i>	<i>Sociolinguistic knowledge</i>	
vocabulary	cohesion	ideational functions	dialects/varieties	Assessment
syntax	rhetorical or conversational organisation	manipulative functions	registers	
phonology/graphology		heuristic functions	natural or idiomatic expressions	Planning
		imaginative functions	cultural references and figures of speech	

As for strategic competence, Bachman and Palmer (1996) defined it "as a set of metacognitive components, or strategies, which can be thought of as higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use, as well as in other cognitive activities" (p. 71). Three areas where these metacognitive strategies can come into play are also identified: goal setting, assessment, and planning. Specific communicative strategies have also been

proposed and classified by various scholars, which broadly include avoidance or reduction strategies, and achievement or compensatory strategies (Bialystok, 1990; Dörnyei & Scott, 1995; Færch & Kasper, 1983; Paribakht, 1985; Tarone, 1977; Willems, 1987). Dörnyei and Scott (1997) synthesised 33 categorisations of communicative strategies, which provided a comprehensive guide for systematic assistance for improving L2 learning.

As demonstrated in the CC models mentioned above, language competence has been taken apart into different components and layers by different theorists, with each category consisting of more aspects of language. Linguists such as Savignon (1972) highlight three important characteristics of CC, which are dynamic, interpersonal, and relative. CC is also suggested to be highly influenced by context (Spolsky, 1990; Stern, 1986). These characteristics are highly similar to that of language needs mentioned in Section 2.2.3.1.

Despite CC's successful development, especially in the 80s and 90s, Byram (1997) warned us about the problem of transferring Hymes' (1972) conceptualisation of CC, which was originally proposed in a monolingual context, to the context of foreign language teaching, as it might give the impression that foreign language learners need to mimic what native speakers do while overlooking the importance of their own identities and competence. Similarly, Leung (2005) argued that in the recontextualisation of CC, Hymes' (1972) ideas have gone through a process of an "epistemic transformation" (p. 124), in that it shifted away from what is grounded in actual communication practices to an idealised version of L2 curriculum. Despite Byram's (1997) high praise of van Ek's (1986) mission statement of the purpose of language education with the aim of enabling students to fulfil their full potentials, and van Ek's early detection of the problematic concept of "national" community, he critiqued van Ek's (1986) CC model put forward for the Council of Europe on its implicit suggestion of a native speaker model, therefore creating an impossible goal for L2 learners to achieve, or even set them out to have "inevitable failure" (Byram, 1997, p. 11).

Evidence to support this critique includes language in van Ek's model such as requiring language learners to use the language "in accordance with the rules of

language concerned and bear their conventional meaning” (van Ek, 1986, p. 8) when explaining linguistic competence, where conventional meaning refers to “that meaning which native speakers would normally attach to an utterance when used in isolation” (van Ek, 1987, p. 33). Van Ek (1987) also referred to “awareness of the sociocultural context in which the language concerned is used by native speakers” when explaining sociocultural competence (p. 8). Byram (1997) argued both from the perspectives of pragmatic education, which suggests the unlikelihood of an L2 learner ever reaching the so-called perfection in a target language, as well as the disempowerment of an L2 learner to discard their own linguistic and cultural identity in the hope of becoming like a native speaker and being accepted by other native speakers, hence in danger of becoming “linguistic schizophrenic” (p. 11).

Although Byram’s critique of van Ek’s CC model is not necessarily directly applicable to the other CC models, which appeared around the same time and later, it certainly raised awareness around issues concerning L2 learners’ cultural and linguistic identities. This later contributed to the continuous discussion on native-speakerism, which refers to the established belief and pervasive phenomenon in the field of ELE/ELT where NESs are put on a pedestal for their superior entitlement by birth to acquire the English language, promoting inequalities between NESs and NNEs, causing prejudice against non-Western culture’s methodology and ideology, and resulting prolonged frustration of L2 learners (Holliday, 2005, 2006). The problem with the idealised image of native speakers has also been pointed out by other scholars, such as Alptekin (2002), Kramsch (1998), and Leung (2005), who consider it to be somewhat outdated or an unrealised myth. Echoing Byram’s (1997) point, Kramsch (1998) argued that the native-speaker model disempowers the non-native speakers’ places in interactive relations, and it defines learners by giving them a label for who they are not, and probably will never be. In the same light, Alptekin (2002) questioned the validity of the conventional pedagogical implications of a native-speakerism based CC. He maintains that such a framework is “utopian” because it idealises the heritage of a native language user, “unrealistic” because it fails to recognise English as a world language, and “constraining” as it restricts learners and teachers’ autonomy in authentic communication.

Amidst the growing development of CC, the notion of intercultural speakers has been gaining more attention, which refers to people who are equipped with knowledge and curiosity about multiple languages and cultures, carry different social identities, and enjoy creating meaningful relationships with people who have cultural backgrounds that are different from theirs (Byram, 1997; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Soler & Jordà, 2007; Wilkinson, 2012). Building upon the pre-existing CC models, Byram proposed the influential model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which will be presented in the next section.

2.2.4.2 Intercultural communicative competence

The increasing global interconnectedness in all areas has given rise to the cultural shift on CC as a field of study and an approach for teaching. A more recent development of CC is the emerging discourse on ICC, in response to the growing attention on culture-related matters in communicative contexts which involve speakers from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds, stressing that communication through a lingua franca requires awareness and understandings of one's own culture as well as other speakers' cultures (Byram, Holmes, & Savvides, 2013). ICC has been given various definitions, which essentially refers to the ability to use the language effectively and appropriately in intercultural communication (Byram, 1997; Zhu, 2019). It has been argued that the difficulty in reaching a united definition of ICC (Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 2000; Kim, 1991, 1995, 2001; Ruben, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 1993; Wiseman, 1989, 2002) is due to the challenges in specifying the elements involved in the complex concept of ICC or IC (Deardorff, 2006b). In an attempt to measure and assess study abroad student's IC as one of the outcomes of IHE, Deardorff (2006a, 2006b) reported that the topmost agreed definition of intercultural (communicative) competence among intercultural experts is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (p. 238).

However, it remains unclear what the explicit distinctions between IC and ICC in Deardorff's (2006a, 2006b) work are, as she used ICC as the abbreviation of

intercultural competence, and she referred to Byram's (1997) work on IC by citing his definition of ICC. According to Wilberschied (2015), some discussions on IC literature do not highlight or even mention the element of foreign language competence. It is worth pointing out that some researchers do differentiate ICC and IC, while others use them more interchangeably. In Byram's (1997) model, for instance, IC simply refers to one's ability to interact with people from other cultural backgrounds, while ICC emphasises the ability to interact with people from other cultures in a foreign language, which would require one's insight into the knowledge of that target language and culture. That is to say, when NESs are communicating with other NNEs in English, the NESs can be utilising and developing their IC, while the NNEs, and only the NNEs, can be developing their ICC. It also means that native speakers, according to Byram's (1997) original work, are excluded from developing what he suggested as ICC.

Although Byram's (1997) conceptualisation of ICC has been scrutinised and reconceptualised over the years over issues such as the relationship between cultures and nationalities (Byram, 2009; Kramsch, 1999), it served as a starting point and easy access for educators to develop and evaluate learners' ICC. Prior to proposing the ICC model, Byram (1997, p. 34) laid out a schema of the factors involved in intercultural communication, as presented in Figure 2.7, including the following dimensions, with a focus on knowledge, attitudes, and skills:

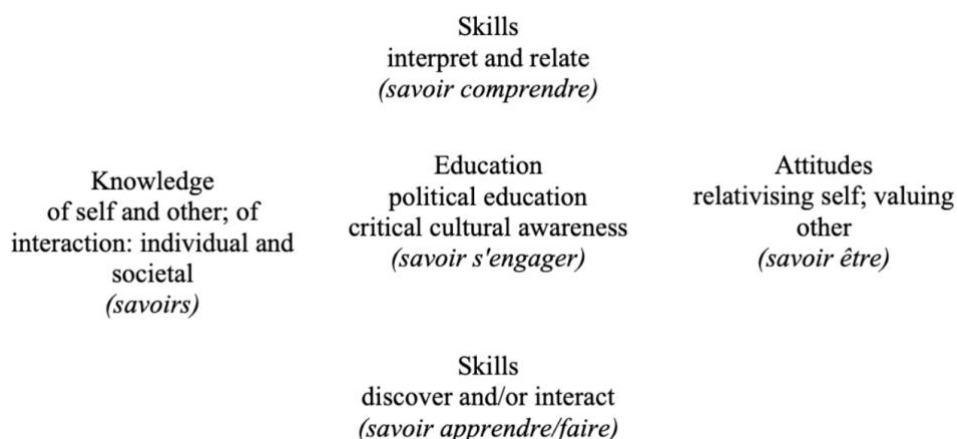
1. Open and curious attitudes towards other peoples' culture and willingness to challenge ones' own beliefs;
2. Knowledge of one's own social groups and culture and that of the other interlocutors, knowledge of the communication process both at the individual level and societal level;
3. Skills to interpret cultural meanings and relate one's knowledge to other cultures, analysing the information regarding other cultures, one's own culture, and the relationship between them; and
4. Skills to discover knowledge about another country in or without real communication, and skills to interact with interlocutors from other cultures.

In addition to the four aspects of interaction, Byram (1997) advocated for teaching intercultural communication to be embedded within a broader teaching

philosophy such as political education and raising students' critical cultural awareness regarding their own and others' countries. The name of the same figure was later changed to dimensions of intercultural (communicative) competence in Byram's (2020) latest work.

Figure 2.7

Factors in Intercultural Communication (Byram, 1997, p. 34)



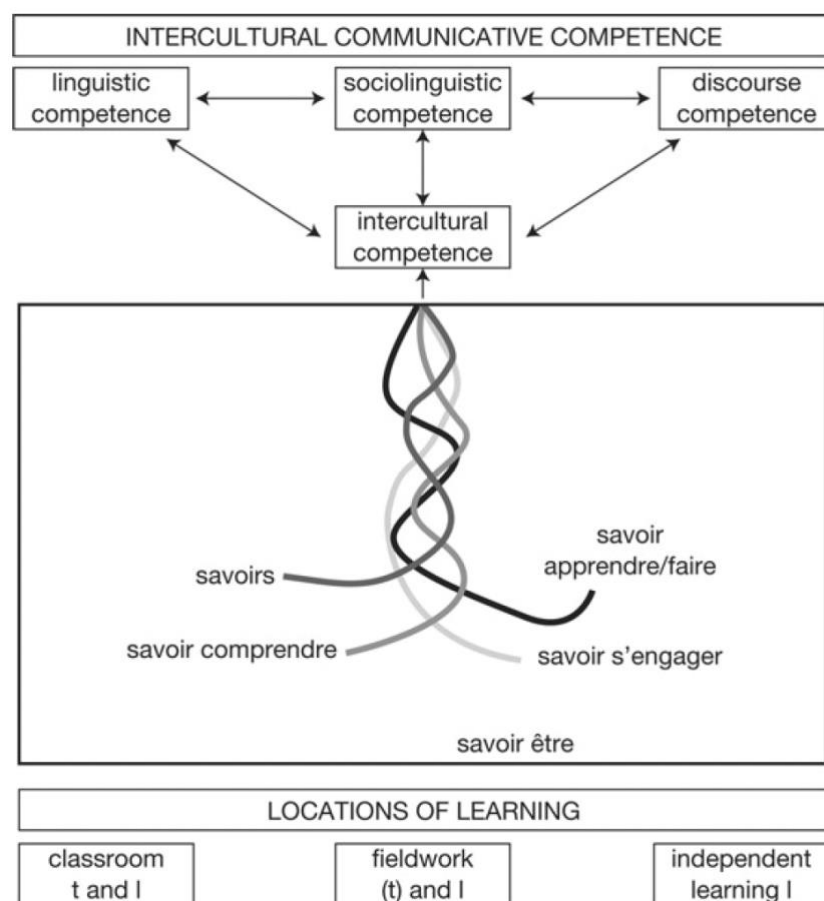
According to Byram (1997), a competent intercultural speaker is able to communicate effectively in a foreign language and establish relationships with other people while speaking in an L2. They expect problems to occur in intercultural communication due to language users' insufficient knowledge of each other's cultures, and they accept criticisms of the value they take for granted in their own cultures. They would also take different speakers' cultural knowledge and insights into account during communication and make an effort to develop ICC.

Based on his IC schema, Byram (1997) further developed his ICC model (see Figure 2.8), which remains influential in the field of language education. Besides being proposed as early as 1997, the reasons why Byram's ICC model has been widely accepted and adopted is also due to its dual focus, which includes both language and culture, as well as its pedagogical implications by offering guidelines for teaching and assessment (Belz, 2007). If one sees CC and IC as two ends of a continuum, then ICC can be understood as the in-between of the continuum, connecting IC and CC, which have been criticised for lacking either sufficient focus

on language or too much focus on linguistic elements (Baker, 2015; Leung, 2005; Liu, 2019). It is clear that one merit of this ICC model is that it illustrates the interplay between different elements and how IC feeds into the other competencies central to CC (Liu, 2019). In addition, this model specifies the locations of learning, as well as the roles of teachers and learners (indicated by “t” and “l”) in such locations, hence offering practitioners some guidance in the operation of developing ICC (Zhu, 2019). Since its first appearance, this model has been used to assist in teaching, learning, and assessing objectives in the curriculum as part of the joint forces of researchers and practitioners (Liu, 2019).

Figure 2.8

Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997, p. 73)



Furthermore, the expanding discourse on ICC has taken CC to the next level, particularly in an era where NNEs have outnumbered NESs and English is

frequently used as the lingua franca in a wide range of contexts. More importantly, going back to the point made in the previous section on the criticism of the pervasive phenomenon of native-speakerism in foreign language education, which is also implicitly present in some of the previous CC models (see Section 2.2.4.1), the ICC perspective has challenged the beliefs based on the superiority of native-speaker model of competencies (Byram, 1997, 2020; Kramsch, 1993, 1997), thus empowering the large population of NNEs.

It is worth mentioning that many researchers and scholars have cited Byram's (1997) work for various purposes. However, the interpretations have not always been clear or could even accurately reflect Byram's original intention. Byram advanced the theories on CC, mainly based on van Ek' (1986) model, without giving specific and detailed explanations of each and every component of the model to the degree that van Ek did, leaving space for readers' interpretation. Therefore, one needs to be cautious when referring to the models and concepts of such influential and widely-cited work. Besides Byram's model, many models regarding ICC or IC have also been proposed, e.g., the pyramid model of IC and the process model of IC (Deardorff, 2004, 2006a, 2006b). Other models that share similar interests include the intercultural sensitive model (Bennett, 1993), transcultural competence (Slimbach, 2005), symbolic competence model (Kramsch, 2006), translingual competence model (Molina, 2011), and performative competence model (Canagarajah, 2013). Different components in Byram's (1997) original model have also been given specified attention over the years, such as the promotion of "intercultural citizenship" which furthers the political dimension of education by Byram (2008), and similarly, and by Risager (2007) in discussing the "intercultural competence of the world citizen" (p. 222). Moreover, online literacies as a new dimension to the ICC model indicates one of the core abilities in the new technology era, which contributes to what Guth and Helm (2010) called "Telecollaboration 2.0".

In addition to the field of language education, the notion of ICC has also appeared in discussions across different disciplines, including intercultural education, international business and management studies, and communication studies, to name but a few (Zhu, 2019). Therefore, there is also a world of interdisciplinary discourse

on terms similar to Byram's (1997) ICC, such as intercultural communication competence, which is more commonly used in interpersonal communication studies (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Chen & Starosta, 2000). As pointed out in the literature, ICC is also often overlapped with concepts such as IC, global citizenship, intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural competence, global competence, and intercultural transformation (Deardorff, 2006a; Wilberschied, 2015; Zhu, 2019). According to Liu (2019), one of the reasons for the success of Byram's model is because it positions itself among the middle ground of interdisciplinary discourse on IC research, welcoming insights from different fields of research such as psychology and international business management. Therefore, it is important to contextualise the focused discussion on ICC, and perhaps a multidisciplinary approach to ICC is needed to grasp the bigger picture of the evolvement of ICC.

2.3 Chinese students' oral participation in the study abroad context

2.3.1 Willingness to communicate

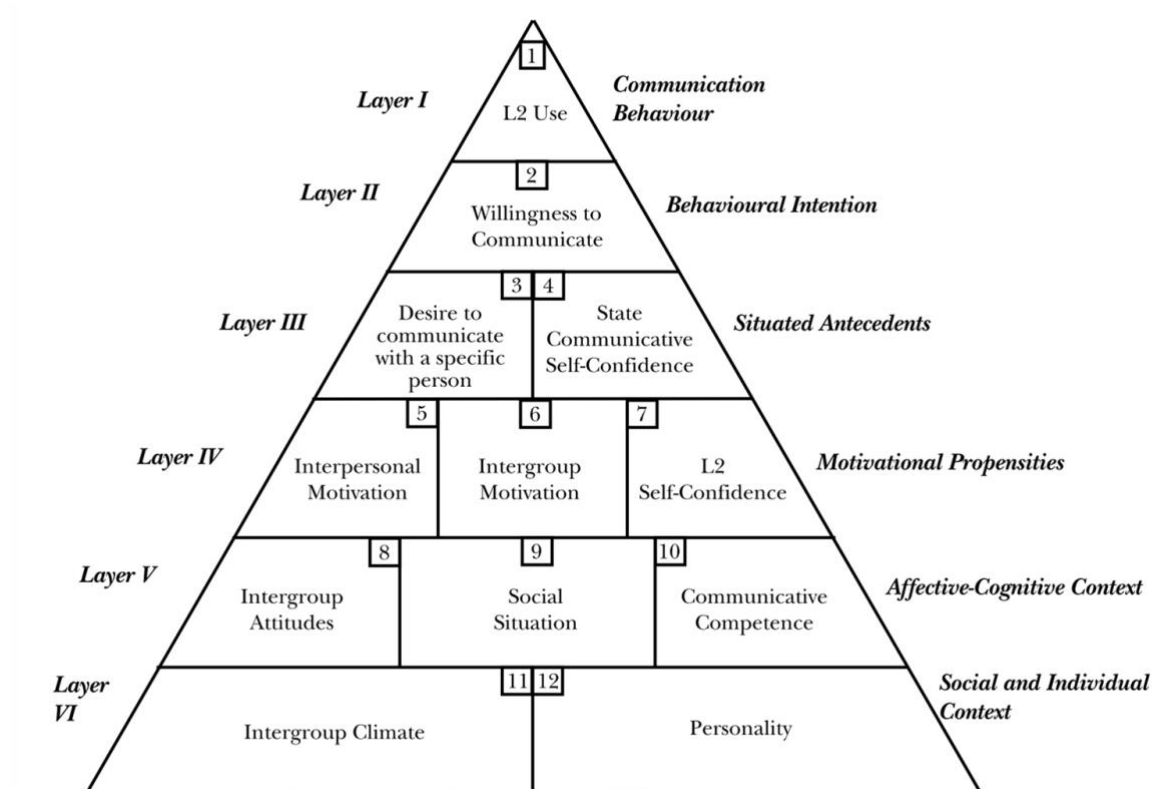
Given the focus of the current study on students' OP in English, it is important to discuss the notion of WTC, a term which has gained much popularity recently in the field of SLA, particularly in research involving East Asian language learners (Shao & Gao, 2016). Different from WTC in L1, where the concept was initially introduced and considered as a static trait-like predisposition (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991), WTC in L2 is reinterpreted as dependent on the communicative context. It is defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998, p. 547). It has been argued that L1 WTC does not simply transfer to L2 WTC due to a range of situational variables such as interlocutors, conversational topics and contexts, as well as the complexity of social factors involved in the use of L2 (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003; MacIntyre et al., 1998).

SLA theorists have argued that L2 output plays an essential role in achieving the pedagogical goal of SLA (Gass & Selinker, 2001; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011;

Swain, 1985). Empirical research shows that L2 WTC can predict the frequency of L2 learners' communicative practice and indicates a positive correlation between learners' L2 WTC and the frequency of authentic engagement in L2 (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Mahmoodi & Moazam, 2014; Yashima, 2002). Therefore, understanding L2 WTC is significant for facilitating and explaining learners' SLA achievement, and it is also essential for providing L2 input and creating an appropriate environment for learners which will increase their engagement in L2 communication (Wood, 2016). The figure below shows the ground-breaking L2 WTC model proposed by MacIntyre and his associates (1998), which illustrates the multi-folded nature of the situational intention to communicate in L2.

Figure 2.9

The Model of Variables Influencing WTC (Macintyre et al.,1998, p. 547)



This heuristic pyramid-shape model designed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) adopted a relatively situated approach which viewed L2 WTC as an intention (not) to

speak at a particular moment. This model makes a clear distinction between fluctuating situational antecedents and long-lasting factors influencing L2 WTC, particularly at the transition between Layer IV (motivational propensities) and layer III (situated antecedents), where the issue of time has emerged. The important notion of time is in accordance with Dörnyei (2001, 2003, 2005), who argues that L2 learners' temporal awareness is crucial for understanding L2 motivation and behaviour, in that there is a distinction between motivation to enter a communicative situation and to make a meaningful effort to stay in that situation, as well as the subtle changes of motivation at different stages of the communicative event. The strength of the MacIntyre et al. (1998) model is that it incorporates both trait-like and situational antecedents in the conceptualisation of L2 WTC, which provides a theoretical framework for WTC studies.

Besides the factors included in the WTC model above, empirical research which adopted quantitative methods has shown different categories of variables that can influence L2 WTC or similar concepts with different wordings, including group size, cultural backgrounds, topical preparation, interlocutors' participation and familiarity with interlocutors (Cao & Philp, 2006), communication anxiety and perceived competence (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003; Öz, Demirezen, & Pourfeiz, 2015), L2 motivation (Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre et al., 2001; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Pourhasan & Zoghi, 2017), international posture (Ulu, Fan, & Shi, 2015; Yashima, 2002; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004), sex and age (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2002; Peng, 2014), teacher behaviours (Hsu, 2014; Khodarahmi & Nia, 2014), mastery of vocabulary, planning time and chances to engage in oral communication (Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015). Similar findings were also reflected in studies using qualitative methods such as observation, self-reflected journals, interviews, and focused essays (Cao, 2011, 2013; Kang, 2005; Macintyre, Burns, & Jessome, 2011; Peng, 2014; Riasati, 2012; Zarei, Saeidi, & Ahangari, 2019; Zarrinabadi, 2014). In summary, research has demonstrated the complexity of L2 WTC as a result of the interplay of multiple situational and personal factors.

Despite the growing volume of research on WTC, particularly with quantitative approaches, the measurement of WTC has been questioned, not only for the complexity of observing learners' psychological propensities but also because some of the commonly used WTC scales, such as the ones in McCroskey and Baer (1985), Weaver (2005), and MacIntyre et al. (2001) are heavily influenced by L1 WTC, as pointed out by Peng (2013), who calls for updated measurements more appropriate for L2 WTC research. Furthermore, although the influence of the pyramid model remains paramount, this model needs to be viewed critically because it was proposed during MacIntyre's early research. Most of the relevant research which led to the development of this model was conducted on learners of French as an L2 in Canada, a context where the French language is commonly used outside the classroom setting, and learners could have frequent encounters with French speakers. However, in an environment such as China, where English is learned as a foreign language and as a compulsory subject based on the national curriculum, most English language learners do not have the opportunities to use English for everyday life or practise with other proficient English speakers. Therefore, some of the constructs in the pyramid model need to be revisited, and specific contexts need to be examined when applying the WTC model to learners in various language learning contexts.

2.3.2 Research on Chinese students' (un)willingness to communicate

Owing to the large population of English learners in China, many researchers have examined Chinese students' WTC in various contexts. This section reviews some of the pertinent literature on the issue of Chinese students' WTC in English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) contexts.

First, given that WTC was initially proposed and studied in the Western context, Wen and Clément (2003) attempted to conceptualise the notion of WTC in the Chinese setting, and they suggested a framework applicable to Chinese learners of English. They extended Macintyre et al.'s (1998) model by illustrating some linguistic, communicative, and socio-psychological factors that influence WTC and

their relations with the Chinese culture. Wen and Clément (2003) suggested four categories of factors which can transfer learners' desire to communicate (a preference) to WTC (readiness to act), including: 1) societal context (group cohesiveness and teacher support in class); 2) personality factors (learners' risk-taking tendency and tolerance of ambiguity); 3) motivational orientations (cultural need for affiliation and task-involvement tendency); and 4) affective perceptions (conscious self-monitoring and cultural expectation of positive evaluation in communication). By moderating these factors, Wen and Clément (2003) believe that a more positive and encouraging environment can be achieved in class, and learners' foreign language anxiety can be reduced, which will lead to an increase in WTC.

Despite the lack of empirical research conducted in Wen and Clément's (2003) work, their cultural-specific reconceptualisation of WTC can be seen as a synthesis of a wide range of literature on WTC, social psychology, intercultural communication, and SLA in the Chinese context, which is still very relevant today. Wen and Clément's (2003) contribution lies in the emphasis of cultural issues in understanding learners' WTC. Not only has it enriched the variables proposed in Macintyre et al.'s (1998) model, it has also broadened the scope of Macintyre et al.'s (1998) theory by applying and accommodating it to a wider ELE/ELT setting.

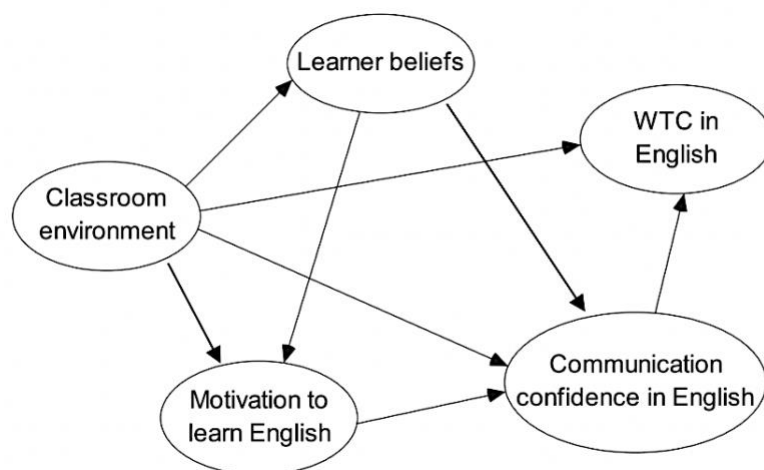
In contrast to WTC, the notion of unwillingness to communicate (un-WTC) is often associated with Chinese students. For instance, Wen and Clément (2003) analysed that Chinese students' unwillingness to communicate is a two-fold issue, which is the result of the long-standing tradition of collectivism and consideration of self-image in other people's views, as well as the cultural practice of submissiveness in learning. This is supported by Liu and Jackson's (2008) study, which explored Chinese students' un-WTC and English language anxiety. They surveyed a large number of undergraduate non-English major students (n=547) in EFL classrooms in a prestigious Chinese university and adopted four types of WTC measurement scales. The study revealed a significant positive correlation between Chinese university students' un-WTC, foreign language anxiety, self-perceived English proficiency, and access to the English language. However, due to the instruments employed, Liu and

Jackson's (2008) study failed to address a broader range of factors, such as cultural factors, classroom environment, learner beliefs, and learning strategies.

In another university EFL context in China, Peng and Woodrow (2010) hypothesised a five-factor model consisting of WTC in English, L2 motivation, L2 communication confidence, learners' beliefs and the classroom environment, which was proposed based on an analysis of previous literature. Following a large-scale pilot study (n=330), 579 non-English major students recruited from eight universities in China participated in the questionnaire. Results proved their hypothesis while enriching their model regarding the interplay between individual variables and classroom contextual variables (see Figure 2.10). The study showed that the classroom environment could predict learner beliefs, L2 WTC, communication confidence, and motivation to learn English. Motivation was found to have an indirect impact on L2 WTC by influencing communication confidence. Learner beliefs were identified to have direct effects on motivation and confidence. Peng and Woodrow's (2010) study indicated the importance of drawing from both contextual and individual factors when assessing WTC in classroom communication.

Figure 2.10

L2 WTC Model in Chinese EFL Classroom (adapted from Peng and Woodrow, 2010)



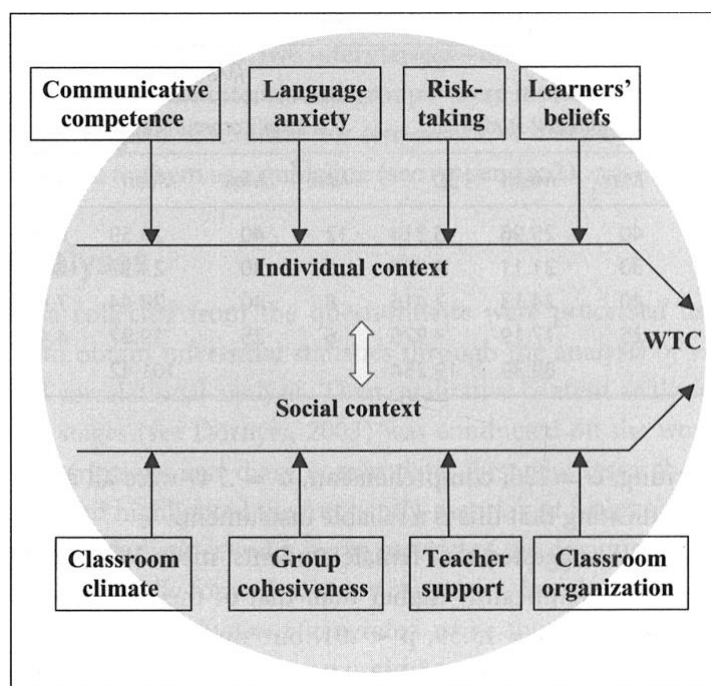
Moreover, one original contribution of this study lies in the illustration of the interplay between different factors that influence learners' WTC in English, directly or indirectly. Again, the results of this study suggested that more variables and a

wider language context need to be taken into consideration when assessing L2 WTC, which exposed the limitation of the quantitative top-down approach to WTC studies.

In another similar context in China, Peng (2014) reported a mixed-method exploratory study conducted by the same researcher in 2005, which included measuring WTC of 118 students in one Chinese university and four group interviews. This study observed a general lack of WTC in the EFL classes among university students, while female students showed a higher WTC than male students. In addition, this study identified eight factors contributing to learners' WTC, which were classified into two categories (see Figure 2.11): 1). individual context (communicative competence, language anxiety, risk-taking, and learners' beliefs), and 2). social context (classroom climate, group cohesiveness, teacher support, and classroom organisation).

Figure 2.11

Factors Contributing to L2 WTC in Chinese EFL Classroom (Peng, 2014, p. 256)



Furthermore, both the culture of learning and the culture of communication in the Chinese context were raised as they offer many insights into understanding Chinese students' psychology and behaviours in a social context such as L2

classrooms (Peng, 2014). In addition to the individual factors shown in the table, another study by Peng (2007) also found a positive correlation between learners' integrative motivation and WTC, suggesting motivation has strong predictability of WTC.

Unlike the studies above, Lu and Hsu (2008) approached the issue of Chinese students' WTC by conducting a comparative study which measured WTC of both American and Chinese students studying in China and both groups of students in the US, respectively. The study administered questionnaires (n=194) to the four groups of students and found that American students showed a generally higher degree of WTC than their counterparts, which was thought to be due to the differences in Western-centric and Asian-centric ways of communication. More importantly, participants who were studying in another country were found to exhibit a higher degree of WTC than those in their home countries, which suggested immersion in a different culture could have a positive impact on WTC, concurring MacIntyre et al. (2003). Overall, Chinese students' WTC were found to be positively associated with self-perceived communication competence, self-perceived language competence, immersion time, and motivation, and it was negatively related to communication apprehension. What differed between the two groups was that immersion time and self-perceived language competence seemed to have a more significant influence on Chinese students abroad than American students in China. However, some details of the study are worth further questioning. For instance, 50% of the variance of WTC was not explained by the factors mentioned above, perhaps due to the limitation of research design. Additionally, Chinese students' use of L2 in the study while American students were using L1 might increase Chinese students' language anxiety and hence influenced the results of the study.

Methodologically speaking, the studies above adopted various WTC measurement scales with quantitative methods. Cao (2011, 2013) conducted two WTC studies using different qualitative methods, including observation, interviews, and reflective journals. Cao's (2011, 2013) studies investigated students' situated WTC in an advanced university-based EAP programme in New Zealand, with the majority of participants in both studies being Chinese students. Similar to previous

studies (Kang, 2005; Peng, 2007), Cao (2013) also revealed the fluctuating and dynamic nature of WTC, suggesting both short-term changeability and long-term stability of WTC. Cao (2011) concluded that WTC is influenced by the interplay of various factors broadly under the categories of environmental, individual, and linguistic dimensions, entailing a variety of specific factors, as synthesised in the table below.

Table 2.6

Factors Contributing to L2 WTC (based on Cao, 2011)

Dimensions	Specific factors
<i>Environmental</i>	topic, task type, interlocutor, teacher, class interactional pattern
<i>Individual</i>	perceived opportunity to communicate, personality, self-confidence, emotion
<i>Linguistic</i>	language proficiency, reliance on L1

Therefore, an ecological perspective on WTC is promoted, which contextualises the use of language and emphasises the constantly negotiated relationship between learners and classroom environmental factors. Nonetheless, cultural factors which seemed to be specifically relevant to Chinese learners were yet to be investigated in Cao's (2011, 2013) studies. Peng (2012, 2014) also advocated the ecological view on WTC in his multiple case study which investigated the factors influencing four students' WTC at a Chinese university. Data were collected through interviews, learning journals and observations (Peng, 2012). Based on the analytical frameworks of human development known as the ecological systems theory formulated by psychologist Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993), Peng (2012) identified six factors influencing learners' WTC in the microsystem (classroom), which include learner beliefs and motivation, cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors, and classroom environment factors, such as teachers and task types. Peng's (2012) analysis also moved beyond the classroom setting and explored the link between WTC and learners' relevant mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, although at a rather simplistic level. Peng (2012) calls for a wider range of factors in the learners' ecosystems to be considered when understanding their WTC in further studies.

Despite the growing understanding of EFL students' WTC, it is important to highlight that because WTC remains primarily a concept used in the field of SLA, most WTC studies are only conducted in the EFL classrooms. It means that little research has been done to explore this notion in the broader communicative context where English is used as a lingua franca. In the study abroad context, Chinese students are not only English learners but also English users. Without the conventional EFL classrooms, they are faced with various opportunities and challenges to engage in authentic English communication. The following section will review the literature on Chinese students' OP in international universities and explore if some of the aforementioned factors are relevant outside the English language classroom setting.

2.3.3 Research on Chinese students' oral participation abroad

The learning behaviours of Chinese students, such as OP in English in the international university contexts, have been investigated in previous research with a focus on academic settings, such as discussions and responses to questions in classrooms, seminars, group work, and supervision meetings (Bowker, 2014; Greenholtz, 2003; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Wang & Roopchund, 2015). In the meantime, students' OP in non-academic settings can be different from academic settings, which is much less explored in the literature. This could be due to limited intercultural interaction, difficulty in data collection, and less perceived research value. Similar to the variables affecting WTC, empirical research suggests that various factors, including cultural, linguistic, and situational factors can influence NNES students' OP (Chen, 2003; Cheng, 2000; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Kim, 2008; Liu, 2001; Robertson et al., 2000). In their quest to help American teachers to better implement cultural-sensitive pedagogy, Lu and Han (2010) found out that Chinese students' (lack of) OP were mostly influenced by their language abilities, knowledge of the education and social system, students' personalities, influence of the Chinese culture, as well as socio-economic changes. The following sections will

take a closer look at Chinese students' OP in English communication by synthesising some of the reoccurring themes that emerged from the empirical literature.

2.3.3.1 Differences in academic cultures

Cultural differences, particularly the differences between China and the Western culture, have been discussed repeatedly in relation to students' overseas study experience literature in the attempt to explain some behavioural differences between Chinese students and their Western counterparts. Cultural heritages of East Asia, such as the Confucian heritage, have been sought by researchers as potential explanations for certain cultural personalities, which lead to seemingly similar behavioural (learning) patterns in the group (Griffiths et al., 2014). Regarding OP, the notion of "culture of learning" has been proposed to explain behaviours such as reticence in class. Defined by Cortazzi and Jin (1996), "culture of learning" suggests that students' behaviours in classrooms are based on the socially taken-for-granted "expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs" (p. 169) regarding what good learning means, how teaching and learning works, approaches to asking questions, the purposes of textbooks, and the connection between language teaching and broader issues involved in the process of education. A comparison of Chinese and British education systems was presented in Section 2.1.4, including their respective view on what a good student is like (Turner, 2006), even though such a binary view has been critiqued to be insufficient, outdated, and potentially misleading. More analysis on this issue will be presented in Section 2.3.3.3.

Previous studies revealed that different cultures of learning could bring different expectations of classroom behaviours, both from the students and the teachers. For instance, in a study conducted by Parris-Kidd and Barnett (2011) to investigate Chinese students' classroom participation in a multicultural English class in Australia, the researchers argued that the Chinese students' lack of participation was shaped by their shared cultural understanding that a teacher takes the leading role in a classroom, and knowledge is emphasised by transferring rather than negotiation. This is in line with the belief that the teacher-student role is the teacher

taking the authoritative role in Chinese collectivist society (Ho & Chiu, 1994; Liberman, 1994; Turner, 2006). Moreover, Chinese students are used to being trained to learn in a test-oriented learning culture where knowledge is passed on to them by the master, i.e., the teacher, as the authority and the source of knowledge (Ng, 2000; Ng & Liu, 1999; Zhang, 2004). On the other hand, the Australian culture, which is predominantly individualistic, adopts a learner-centred pedagogy, which stresses originality and creativity, independent learning, and puts more value on classroom participation (Aldridge, Fraser, & Huang, 1999; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In Parris-Kidd and Barnett's (2011) study, the Australian teacher adopted a more learner-centred and process-oriented approach, and deliberately challenged the Chinese students to get out of their comfort zone by encouraging them to do activities that required them to speak actively. Overall, research suggests that Chinese students tend to depend on their teachers when educated in their home country, whereas the Western academic environment values students' independence in learning.

However, the level of adjustment and adaptation also varies based on individual preferences. For example, a student in Parris-Kidd and Barnett's (2011) study realised that learner autonomy was expected from the Australian classroom but still stated her preference for teacher guidance, which supports Auerbach's (2000) view that language learners have their own opinions about how they should acquire the target language, and not all types of teaching style fit their preference. This suggests that students have a certain level of willingness to adjust, but it also suggests that teachers might consider adjusting their practice to better suit students' styles and preferences of learning – reconsidering whether “learner-centred” education is better. Despite the extensive volume of research, what seems to be less explored is the peer-dynamics between Chinese students and other students, as in whether there is an expectation of academic practice for them to work together in these intercultural academic settings, and how to better facilitate such intercultural collaboration (Holmes, 2004; Li & Campbell, 2008).

Apart from differences in the norm of teaching and learning and classroom participation, cultures also differ regarding the understanding and evaluation of

academic success. The education system in China and some other Asian countries put more emphasis on exams results, and therefore, mastering the knowledge which has been passed on from teachers is by demonstration of being able to reproduce it, while education outcomes in Western countries are arguably more process-oriented (Holmes, 2006; Ng, 2000; Zhang, 2004). Furthermore, it is believed that some Asian cultures tend to attribute poor achievement to insufficient input and effort, while in the West, the same results might be perceived as an indication of individuals' lack of competence (Deveney, 2005). Such effort includes learners' observable active participation in class, but perceptions of active participation may vary based on cultural practices. This may explain why a Chinese student would be quiet in class but still considers their concentration and presence as meaningful engagement and showing a willingness to learn, and see it as an opportunity to process and internalise knowledge, as evident in Chinese and other East Asian participants' experience in previous studies (Bao, 2014; Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005; Harumi, 2010; Wu, 2015). Such reticence to participate goes beyond the academic sphere as a deeply rooted social issue, which will be further explained in the next section.

2.3.3.2 “Silence is gold” – collective reticence for oral participation

As briefly mentioned in previous sections, Chinese students in the English-speaking context are often associated with stereotypical impressions such as passive learners, quiet in class, and poor spoken English (Cheng, 2000; Hsu, 2015; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Zhou et al., 2005). An overarching image associated with the Chinese students in terms of their behaviours in universities overseas is that they tend to be relatively quiet in such academic settings, which in its extreme form is known as the silence phenomenon (Hu, 2017; Lu & Han, 2010). Nevertheless, if a student remains quiet in a class, the phenomenon itself says very little about their English ability, academic competence, attitude towards English, and motivation to study, which calls for research to examine the underlying reasons for such reticence. It has been argued that Chinese students' silence or reticence in class in the studying abroad context is more than an educational issue, but it also connects to deep sociocultural issues (Bao, 2014; Wen & Clément, 2003). Moreover, researchers have

pointed out that silence can carry different cultural interpretations and can be derived from various reasons, and a lack of understating regarding this matter can lead to misunderstandings for both the teachers and students (Bista, 2012; Ha & Li, 2014; Liu, 2002; Zheng, 2010).

Besides differences in the culture of learning, other aspects of culture may also account for Chinese students' reticence, such as the use of politeness strategies and self-preservation in public, which not only apply to teaching and learning settings but also to a wider social context. As an ancient Chinese saying goes, "Silence is gold." This saying demonstrates that it is a cultural etiquette for the Chinese people to be reserved towards others' opinions, listen carefully, hold one's tongue, and focus on receiving information rather than providing one's own opinions (Lu & Han, 2010; Zhu, 2016). Research has found that Chinese people in general are low risk-taking, over-users of monitoring in public communicative settings, and they tend to adopt more face-saving strategies to protect their self-images to avoid appearing stupid or wrong in the eyes of others (Brown, 1987; Krashen, 1982; Mathias et al., 2013; Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011; Yang, 1981). Although the notion of "face", which refers to an individual's sense of self-image, has been found to be an aspect of communication in many cultures to varying degrees, it seems to be central to social relations in the Chinese culture and highly important in cultures that are traditionally characterised as collectivist societies, such as China and Japan (Frank, Harvey, & Verdun, 2000; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Hu, 1944; Hwang, 1987; Gudykunst, 1998; Wen & Clément, 2003). These cultures specifically value solidarity and the harmonious and positive relationships between in-group members, such as teacher-student relations in the educational context (Neuliep, 2020; Spencer-Oatey, 1997).

Jin and Cortazzi (2006) further argued that Chinese students tend to show more tolerance and their reluctance to speak up in class is potentially due to their effort to preserve not only their own but also other members' faces. This strategy is also argued to be one part of one's pragmatic competence, i.e., a type of face-saving strategy (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Therefore, asking a question in class can make the student lose face in that it shows the student does not understand or lacks

competence or effort. Moreover, it may also threaten the teacher's face if the student's action is seen as challenging the authority, and asking for clarification may indicate the teacher is not doing their job well enough, which also makes them look bad in public. In short, the tendency to say nothing to preserve one's own dignity and others' images could be preferred by Chinese students in public to saying something which might harm "faces". This practice is a well-understood social etiquette among Chinese people beyond the classroom setting and the principle of prioritising group harmony needs to be followed in class, hence the potential cultural conflicts in intercultural educational contexts (Chan, 1999; Flowerdew, 1998; Lu & Han, 2010).

Liu (2002) conducted a multi-case ethnographic study with interviews with and observations of Chinese students at an American university to explore the functions of Asian students' use of silence. Her study concluded five categories of factors that may lead to silent behaviours: cognitive, pedagogical, affective, sociocultural, and linguistic factors. Liu's (2002) study further explained how silence could be used to serve different functions in intercultural communication, particularly as a face-saving strategy, by drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory while distinguishing the notion of "face" in Brown and Levinson's theory and in Chinese culture, in that the latter carries dual conceptualisations of both the self-image and the community reputation. Results in this study showed that Chinese students' silence in class was perceived negatively by the local students and teachers, which is no news, as silence is often seen as a negative phenomenon and associated with a lack of confidence, competence, preparation, and deficient English ability in "performative learning culture" (Sequeira, 2021, p. 45). A similar observation of the silence treatment was also found in Nakane's (2006) study, which showed silence was a strategy extensively used by Japanese students to save face, but it was negatively viewed by their Australian lecturers and their local peers, resulting in a negative stereotyping and poor rapport between the Japanese students and local teachers.

In the meantime, Nakane's (2006) study also found that silence could be negotiated between interlocutors, indicating the potential development of ICC in international educational settings. Likewise, Liu's (2002) study suggested that

Chinese students should negotiate the facework by participating in more in-class activities, and that more support and encouragement from the teachers and peers can be helpful to elicit more engagement from the Chinese students. This also concurs with Chan (1999), who explained that the often-present long silence in Chinese students' learning style could indicate their careful thought process while waiting for the expected encouragement from instructors, which should not be mistaken as students' rejection of participation. Some studies also suggest that listening attentively while staying quiet can be a valid form of learning for East Asian students (Kim, 2008; Wu, 2015). Furthermore, Cheng (2000) argues the importance of situational interpretation of students' quietness instead of a simplistic diagnosis of cultural behaviours. Ryan (2013) stresses the danger of misinterpreting Chinese students' reticence to participate as lacking the academic ability to learn and undervaluing the quiet internal reflection of knowledge as a legitimate form of learning. Such a growing awareness of the multiple explanations of silence in class, particularly from international students, is also reflected in teaching guides provided to university staff, e.g., Bond and Scudamore (2011).

What also calls for caution is the potential danger of mistaking students' lack of OP and weakness in oral English proficiency for assumed cultural behaviour (Hennebry et al., 2012; Robertson et al., 2000). Cheng (2000) challenged the idea of cultural predetermination when it comes to some Asian students' quiet and seemingly passive classroom behaviours, and argued that such a phenomenon may well be caused by teaching approaches and language ability issues. Additionally, Cheng (2000) pointed out the potential harm of holding such cultural stereotypes, which may lead to even fewer OP opportunities for Asian students. The misinterpretation of cultural norms leads to the need to revisit the notion of culture, breaking the traditional binary view of culture as in the East versus West dichotomy, which warrants a more in-depth and contemporary view of the student cohort.

2.3.3.3 Revisiting the problematic binary view of culture

Having acknowledged some of the potential culture-related differences between Chinese students and the Chinese educational norms as well as their Western counterparts, it is also important to note that one should be cautious about applying the notion of cultural difference whenever there seems to be a mismatch or breakdown in intercultural communication. In the past, there was a tendency to view Western and Asian learners as the opposite in terms of teaching and learning styles, as illustrated in Table 2.2 and Table 2.3 in Section 2.1.4 regarding Chinese and British academic values (Ryan, 2013) and the archetypes of model students (Turner, 2006). Descriptive words such as “independent versus dependent”, “deep versus surface”, “active versus passive”, and “adversarial versus harmonious” are used to reinforce such a false dichotomy (Ryan & Louie, 2007). As the nature of “culture” is not static or permanent but rather dynamic, changeable, and open to interpretation (Holliday, 2012), it would be inaccurate to believe that one culture of learning applies to all members of that cultural group and that the majority of members of the cultural group always tend to learn in a certain manner.

Some researchers have advised against stereotyping international students’ capabilities based on the aforementioned binary perspectives, further pulling the two groups of students away from each other while ignoring the complexity and diversity which exist within either cultural cohort and the similarities between them (Ryan & Louie, 2007). This type of “us versus them” rhetoric promotes the nativism attitude, viewing the Western or native English-speaking culture to be inherently superior (Ryan, 2013). Heng (2018), and Ryan and Viete (2009) highlighted the problem of such an essentialist view of cultural practices and criticised some research which promotes a remedial approach when teaching international students, viewing international, NNES or Chinese students as deficient, which is by no means correct, appropriate or contemporary. Furthermore, the “native versus non-native” division or “native-speakerism” ideology undermine the cultural contributions of NNES teachers or students, implying a deficit view of non-Westerners (Holliday, 2006). Holliday (2015) even argues that the native-speakerist cultural disbelief represents neo-racism,

although implicit, it “rationalises the subordination of people of colour on the basis of culture” (Spears, 1999, p. 11-12).

Despite the widely held views of the typical Western and Chinese academic values and practices, some of which might still hold water, the concept of Chinese or East Asian students being homogenously passive, dependent, and unable to engage in critical discussions is becoming outdated. As Cortazzi and Jin (2011) argued, Confucian-based cultural value and learning tradition should not be seen as a static and past historical artefact, but heterogeneous, dynamic, and vibrantly taking various forms, as well as continuing to have influence on the contemporary society. Moreover, research has also found traits of the new generation of Chinese students as they respond to innovative pedagogical approaches (Chan, 2010), welcome classroom interaction, and are becoming more critical of knowledge delivered to them (Shi, 2006). Growing evidence from empirical research suggests that they value classroom interaction and would like to make more verbal contribution to discussions, they are independent and capable learners often misunderstood in the West, and there is a large diversity among this assumed cultural group (Bao, 2014; Hsu, 2014; Li & Campbell, 2008; Marlina, 2009; Tian & Lowe, 2013a; Wu, 2015).

The problematic binary view of culture is also demonstrated in the polarising view of silence versus voice. Upon examining the literature on students’ classroom participation, Wang (2020) criticised the oversimplification of equating OP to classroom participation, and that much of the existing literature has seen active participation, commonly practiced in Western classrooms, as a better form of learning than silence, concurring what Hao (2011) and Ryan (2013) suggested as the Western-centric approach to intercultural communication and pedagogy. Schweisfurth and Elliott (2019) also highlighted such a tension between the two regions and pointed out the presumed superiority of Western pedagogical practices. Likewise, Doherty and Singh (2005) also problematised the practice of idealised Western pedagogy in an international educational context, which further reinforces the concept of “others”. Moreover, Sequeira (2021) argued for a multi-dimensional view of silence and advocated silence as critical pedagogy to challenge the status quo of the current Western higher education.

In short, with a binary view towards culture and a narrow approach to cross-cultural differences, silence has often been associated with negativity, loss of power, deficiency in verbal skills, and failure in interaction (Bosacki, 2005; Ollin, 2008; Sequeira, 2021; Wink, 2005). However, it has been argued that silence should not be simply seen as the opposite of voice or an inferior version of expressing oneself (Hao, 2011), and the relationship between those who have and who do not have the voice is not straightforward nor should it be oversimplified (Li, 2004; Wang, 2020). Moreover, there seems to be an inherent contradiction in using the aforementioned binary terms whilst discussing the problematic nature of a binary approach. Therefore, a more inclusive approach to silence and the notion of culture is suggested.

2.3.3.4 Social-contextual factors and Chinese students' oral participation

Social-contextual factors such as students' social networks and situated variables can also influence their OP experience. Wang (2020) argued that there is a difference between the same students' behaviours in different settings. However, little research has been done to investigate contextual factors, such as power relations between different languages, and reciprocal cultural familiarity, as raised in Zhou et al. (2005). Moreover, Wang (2020) disagreed with treating culture as a convenient factor which might overlook the complexity of the socio-culturally and linguistically diverse academic settings.

Different from the general tendency to group students based on their ethnicity or cultural backgrounds, an alternative way is to investigate their involvement in different CoPs (Cai et al., 2019; Gao, 2017; Palmer, 2016; Wenger, 2010). The former approach indicates a big-culture or essentialist view of culture, and the latter has more to do with the small-culture or non-essentialist stance (Hofstede, 1997, 2001; Holliday, 1995, 1999), as mentioned in Section 2.1.2. According to Hofstede (2011), a culture can be described as a "programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 3). This loosely

defined notion of culture allows flexibility for students to take on multiple membership identities of various CoPs, which are typically associated with their academic disciplines and other social groups such as student societies where they identify themselves as a member. Differences among disciplines can influence students' OP as different disciplines have their own forms of assessment, varying from oral presentations, poster presentations, essays, reports, and written exams, to portfolios, projects, experiments, and models, etc.

As explained in the WTC model in Section 2.3.1, various contextual factors or state variables can influence greatly whether Chinese students decide to engage in oral communication, and they can be rather subtle and complex to capture (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; Macintyre et al., 1998; Peng, 2014). The number of people in the communication context is cited as the primary contributor factor influencing students' level of participation in Cao and Philip's (2006) study, in which the participants suggested a group size of three or four is ideal for discussion. Wen and Clément (2003) viewed the class size factor to be related to the bigger picture of the group cohesiveness factor. They argued that groups of larger sizes tended to lack cohesiveness, which would hinder learners' sense of security when speaking. Kang (2005) added that it would also decrease students' sense of responsibility to contribute. The relationship between interlocutors is another important factor, including students' familiarity with other interlocutor(s), as well as interlocutor(s)' level of participation, which help to establish the atmosphere of the dialogue (Cao & Philp, 2006; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991). Moreover, other contextual factors such as familiarity with subjects, medium of communication, cultural background, instructors' attitude, and teaching practices were cited for contributing to students' level of participation (Cao & Philp, 2006; Marlina, 2009). Norms of interaction and required skillset were also reported to influence students' English needs in a university setting (Mahmoud, 2014). Instructors' and peers' English accents were also found in Wu's (2015) study to influence students' classroom participation.

Given the large number of Chinese students at UK universities, it is understandable that they would often associate with fellow Chinese students, as some research reported, particularly if they are in the same programme as many other

Chinese students (Yu, 2017). For instance, Liu (2007) investigated intercultural communication among Chinese postgraduate students at a Scottish university from the perspective of social networks. Her study revealed that Chinese students tended to socialise with other Chinese students. Although some of them participated in the intercultural activities actively and reported that their IC improved, it was revealed that many of them faced two major problems in student-student intercultural communication, namely, linguistic deficiency and cultural differences, which inhibited their success in intercultural communication. Some studies also found that in courses where there were many Chinese students or joint programmes which allowed a group of Chinese students to come to the UK to study together, it was very common for them to form cliques and socialise in small groups (Zhou & Todman, 2008). Although this kind of community could support students' transitional experience, not all Chinese participants in Zhou and Todman's (2008) study appreciated having many co-nationals on campus. Some Chinese students showed an apparent negative attitude towards having such an overwhelming Chinese student population on campus, as it did not match their expectation of being in a foreign environment and hindered their willingness to integrate into the local community (Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, Jing, & Wang, 2017). This point was further concurred with their non-Chinese peers in the same study, as they observed that Chinese students tended to socialise within their own community, and they were not willing to participate or interact with students outside their community.

In a study conducted by Yu (2017) to understand Chinese students' church participation in the UK, participants reported having limited chances to interact with the locals. They seemed to have formed the closest friendships with fellow Chinese students while forming rather superficial friendships or acquaintances with students from other backgrounds, as one participant described such a relationship as "hi-bye friend" (p. 117). The limited access to the local English-speaking communities as a source of frustration for Chinese students has also been discovered in other studies, such as Gao (2017), and Tian and Lowe (2013a). As a result, some Chinese students in Yu's (2017) study resorted to going to church to increase their involvement in the local activities as well as to seek a sense of comfort. In the same light, a recent study by Yu and Moskal (2019) at a UK university on Chinese international students'

interaction experience found that institutional arrangements such as a large number of Chinese students in one particular school hindered the possibility and quality of intercultural contact on campus for them, and resulted in some of them exploring a broader scope of engagement with the local culture. Yu and Moskal's (2019) study argued for a higher quality environment and more opportunities for international students for their learning and personal development, as well as local students' development of IC.

2.3.3.5 Individual differences and Chinese students' oral participation

As mentioned in Section 2.1.1, differences in one's prior knowledge of the target environment, English proficiencies, autonomy in the decision to study abroad, and levels of IC on arrival can lead to students exhibiting different levels of readiness to engage in the new environment (Schartner & Young, 2020). Similar to the diverse trajectories of Chinese students' experiences presented in Section 2.1, Chinese students' English OP also varies based on a number of individual differences. However, it seems to remain less explored in the literature coherently as individual differences are often linked with students' adjustment experience, but a clear connection between individual factors and their engagement in English communication is often subtle or given less attention to.

Some studies suggest that given the increase in the length of stay in the target environment, students get more familiar with the environment, e.g., more familiar with the classmates/other interlocutors, more understanding of the discussion etiquette, they may be able to gain confidence in their language ability, knowledge of their study, and they are more likely to participate in classroom discussion as a result (Cao & Philp, 2006; Guo, 2015; Heng, 2018; Wang et al., 2012). This is also evident in Parris-Kidd and Barnett's (2011) study, which observed that some Chinese students made the successful transition from lacking the skills and confidence to communicate with others in class to being willing to ask questions and participating animatedly in discussions after the initial weeks in the English classroom. Parris-Kidd and Barnett's (2011) study found that student's change was not primarily driven

by an increase in spoken English proficiency but by an increase in the familiarity of the classroom norm. However, despite the increasing confidence seen in some students, some participants still reported continuing to experience spoken English-related challenges when confronted with new speaking tasks (Heng, 2018).

In the meantime, the increasing understanding of the expected cultural norm does not necessarily lead to behavioural change, nor does it guarantee a shift in learner's preference. In Parris-Kidd and Barnett's (2011) study, one student reported that she was fully aware of the differences between her own and the local culture of learning, and she understood the expectation from the teacher to have them conform to the more participatory and independent learning classroom atmosphere. Her response suggested openness and intercultural awareness, but it did not lead to the total adjustment in her action since she clearly stated her preference for her own primary culture of learning, which in her eyes was more effective and suitable for her development. It is perhaps not surprising that postgraduate-level students who have established a long-term learning pattern would know what works best for them. One may even argue that this type of resistance shows a learner's autonomy, independence, critical thinking, evaluation ability, as well as taking responsibility for their own learning.

As illustrated in Macintyre et al.'s (1998) WTC variables model (see Figure 2.9), personality trait-like variables are in layer VI, which are also important factors influencing WTC. Liu (2011) attributed her personality to the heavy influence of the Confucian-based tradition, and even argued that this Chinese cultural personality was a determining factor in her losing opportunities to interact with people and build meaningful relationships during her postgraduate study experience in Canada. As a self-identified introvert, Liu (2011) preferred observing rather than speaking and she tended to stay in her comfort zone, such as only taking courses taught by the same professor rather than trying to meet new teachers and students. Nevertheless, not all Chinese people share such an introverted personality or similar approaches. Different strategies for classroom OP were adopted by the Chinese students in Mathias et al.'s (2013) and Wu's (2015) studies based on their learner beliefs and their attitudes towards their peers' opinions. Moreover, personal interests and attitudes towards the

local culture can influence Chinese students' OP as a result of their willingness to participate in local activities such as pubbing and clubbing, as well as other forms of socialisation (Gao, 2017; McMahon, 2011; Tian and Lowe, 2013a; Wang, 2018). The British "drinking culture" has also been discovered in the broader research involving international students, which sometimes created social barriers for them to meet and build relationships with local British students (Ploner, 2018; Schartner, 2014; Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009).

Having taken a closer look at Chinese students' OP in English communication during their living and learning experiences overseas, we can see that there are some behavioural patterns such as reticence in academic settings that seem to be explained by shared cultures characteristics. In addition, a range of social-contextual and individual factors have been found to influence Chinese students' OP in study abroad contexts, which calls for more exploration of the dynamics between such factors and students' OP in overseas experience.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter started by providing an overview of the theories and empirical studies on ISE, particularly concerning Chinese student experience in English-speaking contexts such as at UK universities. It then explained how the English language plays a vital role in international universities by analysing international students' English language needs, specifically how English language competence interplays with other factors that contribute to ISE. It also critically evaluated research on Chinese students' (un)willingness to engage in English oral communication and their OP in overseas study context, including analysing some of the prominent issues such as differences in academic and cultural practices, a binary view of voice and silence, social-contextual factors, and individual differences. The next chapter will present the design of the current study, including theoretical underpinnings, RQs, data collection methods, data analysis methods, and other methodology-related issues.

Chapter 3 Methodology

The previous chapter introduced concepts and notions central to the current study, and it reviewed relevant literature to lay the theoretical foundations for this study. This chapter aims to explain the research design and provide the rationale for the approaches and strategies adopted in the current study. It begins by revisiting the research questions (RQs) and explaining the reasons for choosing the qualitative approach. It then introduces the data collection methods in detail. Other issues such as the pilot studies, participant recruitment, research ethics, thematic analysis, and research limitations will also be addressed and discussed.

3.1 Research aim & questions

The central aim of the study was to explore Chinese postgraduate students' experiences at a UK university with a focus on oral participation (OP) in English. The three RQs are:

1. What are Chinese postgraduate students' English oral participation needs while studying at a UK university?
2. What factors influence their English oral participation?
3. How do students think their oral participation needs can be addressed and met?

3.2 Methodological foundations

3.2.1 Qualitative approaches

A qualitative research design was chosen for the following reasons to best address the research aims. First of all, this study aimed to investigate participants' experience, perceptions, attitudes, and feelings in detail, which tend to be very challenging to capture with quantitative approaches (Bryman, 2016). Thus, a qualitative design was preferred to develop a thorough comprehension of the participants' personal experiences, considering the variation in students' experiences

abroad. Compared to a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach is better for eliciting an in-depth understanding of international students' diverse learning and living experiences (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Second, this study aimed to address the research gap in the literature mentioned from an inductive perspective rather than a deductive perspective, with the latter being associated with specific presumptions or hypotheses to prove (Silverman, 2013). Third, this study included much descriptive and narrative data, which needed to be interpreted with reference to the complex and specific contexts. Therefore, a qualitative approach was more advantageous for this study in preserving and managing the richness of data and complexity of context (Atieno, 2009). Other studies with similar research interests referred to in the previous chapter also adopted qualitative approaches, e.g., Brown and Holloway (2008), Gao (2017), Ha and Li (2014), Northcott (2001), Tian and Low (2012), Tobbell, O'donnell, and Zammit (2010), Wang et al. (2012), and Yu and Moskal (2019).

3.2.2 Ethnographic case study

Under the umbrella of qualitative design, there are several traditions of inquiries, each with a unique focus while sharing some overlapping properties (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Informed by the empirical studies on similar topics and given the particular stance of the researcher (me) and the research context, this study took a pragmatic approach and drew from both the ethnography and case study traditions. Such an ethnographic case study has been recommended by Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2017) for novice student researchers like myself, who are limited in resources such as time and finances.

Ethnography as a qualitative approach generally focuses on a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2013). It is used to investigate shared values, behaviours, beliefs, and other characteristics of the group and provide a thick description (Creswell, 2013). Immersion and intensive involvement with the studied cultural group is widely considered the essence of ethnography (Bryman, 2016). According to Creswell (2013), researchers in ethnographic studies need to manage to enter the

cultural group under investigation and immerse themselves in their everyday lives in the field for an extended period of time. As explained in Section 2.2.3.1 on needs analysis (NA), a more ethnographic approach to NA has been promoted in English for specific purposes (ESP) research in recent years due to the influence of the learner-centred educational philosophy in ELE/ELT. The current study sought to examine Chinese postgraduate students' shared experiences of learning and living in the UK with a focus on their OP. An ethnographic NA intends to provide comprehensive and detailed descriptions of participants' perspectives, answer "what" their language needs are and "how" to meet the needs (Hyland, 2006), which is the central inquiry of the current study.

One key concept in ethnographic studies is the distinction between "emic" approaches and "etic" approaches. Originated in linguistic research and coined by Pike (1967), the "emic" approach refers to the researcher taking the stance of an insider, whereas the "etic" approach refers to the outsider stance of the researcher. As the researcher of the current study, I took a predominantly emic approach to the inquiry based on my shared knowledge, experience, and identity as a Chinese postgraduate student with the participants. Such a shared identity as well as my active role in the Chinese student community, granted me access to the extensive immersion in the research context and meaningful involvement with the participants. Nevertheless, as stated in Section 1.4, I am aware of the paradox for "insider" researchers, in that research may reveal divisions within the cultural group and findings unfamiliar to the insider researcher (Ganga & Scott, 2006), despite the closeness of the researcher and the group being studied. Therefore, I kept an open mind and a reflective attitude throughout the study, as suggested by Bergman and Lindgren (2018).

As pointed out by Bryman (2016) and Fetterman (2010), most ethnographic researchers leave the field due to reasons such as end of research funding, deadline of the written report, the confidence that enough data have been collected and data saturation has been reached, personal issues such as illness, or when "the law of diminishing returns" suggests that it is time to go home (Fetterman, 2010, p.9). In the current study, I stayed in the researched context so it was easy to check missing

information and consolidate research findings, which many other studies could not afford. After the Covid-19 pandemic started, which was during my final writing up stage, I became more distant from the research context when most people in the UK understandably switched to working from home. In the meantime, I managed to keep in contact with Chinese postgraduate students at the target university. As suggested by Fetterman (2010), such prolonged engagement and interaction with the cultural group under investigation also enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings.

In addition to ethnography, this study also had features from the case study tradition. According to Bryman (2016), case study research comprises rich details and intensive investigation into a single case. A case study typically develops in time, showing as a series of interrelated incidents and events concur within the context under investigation and are treated as a whole (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Case study highlights the research context, which is defined based on the boundaries drawn by the researcher as what counts as a case and what counts as the context of the case in another study (Yin, 2014). Focused on Chinese postgraduate students' OP at one particular UK university, the current study started from the premise that student experience should be regarded as holistic, and the students' use of English in the academic context should not be investigated in isolation without considering other aspects of their living experience in the UK. The study was bounded in time and space following the case study tradition, a design often adopted by researchers with similar interests (Beaven & Spencer-Oatey, 2017; Cao, 2013; Gao, 2017; Wu, 2015; Zheng, 2010).

The next sections will move on to explain what type of data were collected, where and how they were collected in detail.

3.3 Context of the study

The current study took place at the University of Edinburgh (UoE) during the academic year 2016-2017. As a Russell Group university, UoE has a high intake of international students, particularly Chinese students at the postgraduate level. According to UoE statistics, there are almost 40,000 students in UoE in total, among which 43% are international students (Annual Review 2016/17, 2019). Regarding the Chinese student cohort, there are approximately 3,000 students and around half of them are postgraduate students. The percentages of Chinese students at the postgraduate taught (PGT) level are significantly higher than those at the postgraduate research (PGR) level. Although UoE has a high proportion of Chinese students at the postgraduate level overall, the students are spread across different schools disproportionately. The university has a few campuses across the city, which has created various school-based sub-communities within the university. At the postgraduate level, students live in accommodations all over the city instead of only staying at designated university accommodation sites, which is different from many universities in China.

It is also worth mentioning that I worked as a research assistant for two UoE funded Principal's Teaching Award Scheme (PTAS) projects during my PhD (see timeline in Table 3.1). The first project was *The English Bonus: Assessing the impact of non-credit English and academic writing programmes on the academic performance of non-native speaker PGT Chinese students at the University of Edinburgh* (Woodman, Benson, Northcott, & Boeren, 2020). This mixed-method study aimed at understanding the effects of pre-sessional English courses, in-session non-credit bearing EAP support courses provided by UoE on PGT Chinese students' academic performance, as well as these students' subjective study experiences over a year. As a research assistant, my job included designing the interview guide, attending group meetings, accompanying the principal investigator to meet with directors of seven schools, liaising with PGT Chinese students, conducting individual interviews (n=30), transcribing recordings of interviews, and analysing some of the qualitative data. The large scale mixed-method study included quantitative data on the entire Chinese student population in UoE over the past three

academic years, with a particular interest in their academic performance and English ability. The second PTAS project was *More engagement means more good memories* (Benson, Holden, Green, Cutting, & Choi, 2020), which aimed to investigate the impact of pre-sessional EAP courses on international PGT students' OP, where the participants were all Chinese students. My role in this project mainly included observing and transcribing live lessons and pre-recorded EAP lessons, and interviewing one PGT student. Involvement in these two research projects has provided me with much more comprehensive knowledge about and deeper insights into Chinese postgraduate students' experiences at UoE and different stakeholders' perspectives on this issue.

3.4 Research design and methods

3.4.1 Research design timeline

The literature discussed in the previous chapter informed the researcher of some directions of data collection and analysis instruments. Together with the preliminary findings from the exploratory and pilot stage, they contributed to the design of constructs and questions in the interviews and focus groups (FGs). The table below provides an overview of the data collection and analysis process.

Table 3.1

Data Collection and Analysis Process

Time	Phase	Methods & instruments	Informants & Participants	Relevant work
01/2016 - 10/2016	Exploratory Stage	Conversations with informants, field notes, observation, other sources of information, e.g., social media and online forums	Informants (n>100) e.g., Chinese & non-Chinese postgraduate students, supervisors, lecturers, support staff, colleagues, people with relevant experience	Attending events and creating networks, e.g., joining societies, taking on student representative roles
11/2016 - 02/2017	Pre-pilot Stage	Develop interview guides & Participant recruitment		

03/2017 - 06/2017	Individual Interviews	Pilot Interviews (n=3)	3 PhD students with overseas Masters study experience	Conversations with informants;
		Main Interviews (n=20)	10 Masters students & 10 PhD students	Design PTAS project I's interview guide
07/2017 - 08/2017	Preliminary analysis of interviews & Develop FG questions		Conducted individual interviews with Chinese PGT students for PTAS project I (n=30) Meeting with directors of 7 schools	
08/2017 - 09/2017	Focus Groups	Pilot FG (n=2)	3 Masters students & 3 PhD students	Preliminary analysis of the PTAS project I interviews
		Main FG (n=2)	5 Masters students & 5 PhD students	
10/2017 - 05/2018	Interview and FG data transcription & continuous analysis		PTAS project I: Interview data transcription & analysis	
01/2019 - 03/2019	Synthesising interview and FG results		PTAS project II: Observe & transcribe PGT students' participation in 7 lessons; interview 1 PGT student & transcribe the interview	

As indicated in the table, this study adopted a sequential design. Data were collected from 20 interviews with Chinese postgraduate students across 10 different schools in UoE, followed by two FGs. This study was also informed by ongoing conversations with a large number of informants. The two PTAS projects, which shared common research interests with the current study, also contributed to the current study by providing me with a more comprehensive picture of the student cohort and context under investigation. The following sections will provide detailed explanations of the procedures and rationales for this research design.

3.4.2 Exploratory & pre-pilot stages

From an ethnographic perspective, the exploratory and pre-pilot stages of the current study shown in Table 3.1 were for the researcher's initial rapport establishment and understanding of the research context (DeWalt, DeWalt, & Wayland, 1998). During this phase, I created an extensive social network by actively participating in all kinds of university activities, events, and societies, such as attending conferences and workshops, organising student events, and taking on various student representative roles. This allowed me to meet many Chinese students and people who had experience interacting with Chinese students in the research context, such as home students, non-Chinese international students, lecturers, tutors, and other staff such as members of Institute for Academic Development (IAD), English Language Education/Centre for Open Learning (ELE/COL), postgraduate office and Edinburgh Global, administrators, and technicians. Furthermore, as a returning student to the UoE, I used my previous contacts to expand the social network, and many followers of my online channel shared their experience speaking English in the UK as well. These people are considered "informants" who provide relevant and useful information to the design and analysis of a study (Morse, 1991). Based on their own experiences, the informants provided a large volume of interesting stories and profound insights, as well as statements and stereotypical assumptions. They held different or even contradicting perspectives and attitudes towards intercultural communication, international education, and interactive experience with Chinese students. Some informants provided more insightful observations as they had more experience and expertise in this regard, and they were able to reflect on their practice and experience. These personal stories and accounts provided me with a broad picture of international student experience and the use of English language in the target context, including the success and challenges of Chinese postgraduate students, and other stakeholders' impressions of Chinese postgraduate students.

The main approach during the exploratory and pre-pilot stages was informal conversational interviewing (see Appendix J), an approach commonly used in qualitative research, particularly in ethnographic studies involving prolonged

fieldwork, which aims to generate data by discussing with people on issues relevant to the research topic in informal conversations (Richards & Morse, 2013; Roulston, 2008). Conversational interviewing was suitable for this study because I investigated Chinese postgraduate students' experiences in a familiar context for an extended period where I was able to interact with many stakeholders in the university, as suggested by Long (2005a). Moreover, conversational interviewing was advantageous to lay the foreground for the research design and interpret theories and literature with the real-life experience of informants from various backgrounds. It is particularly valuable for research that involves in-depth interviews, such as the current study. In a similar setting to this study, Gao (2017), a Chinese researcher studying Chinese learners' participatory experience in the UK, also used this strategy. This informal approach facilitated spontaneous and extended conversations between the informants and me in a friendly, open, and recording-free atmosphere with little power difference between speakers (Roulston, 2008). This "chameleon" strategy (Shenton & Hayter, 2004), together with prolonged engagement in the case context, allowed me to communicate with many students and staff from various countries and across an array of disciplines. Conversational interviewing continued to enrich the research during the main data collection stage and extended all the way until the writing up of the thesis. Information from these conversations, such as comments, critical incidents, personal stories, and coping strategies was noted down in a notebook and occasionally on post-it notes on the spot for research's convenience, following Bryman's (2016) suggestion.

Concurring with Ogden (2008), informants at different stages during this PhD journey served various purposes, from providing new information in the beginning to illuminate the research design and direct research focus, to further clarifying, triangulating and validating data generated in the later stage of the study. Outcomes from the exploratory stage broadened the scope of my knowledge, enriched my understanding of the subject under investigation, and contributed to the study design, such as drafting the interview guide and participant recruitment.

3.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

The following sections will explain why semi-structured interviews were used as a primary method for data collection and introduce the interview participants. It will then elaborate on the development of the interview guide and the pilot interviews, and provide a detailed explanation of the main interviews.

3.4.3.1 Rationale and advantages

First, this study aimed to capture insights from the target students regarding their language needs during the overseas study experience. The interview method was chosen because it can give participants a voice to express their interpretations of certain life situations freely and create a warm and close personal interaction between the researcher and respondents (Kvale, 2006). Second, a semi-structured interview method was useful to find out the common and diverse OP needs of students, because semi-structured interviews contain a series of questions organised in a relatively logical order and ask all participants to cover the ground but not necessarily following the same order (Richards & Morse, 2013). Unlike the other two types of interviews, i.e., structured and unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews have a relatively standardised protocol while embracing openness and freedom to certain degree (May, 2011). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allow researchers to seek clarification and ask follow-up questions while making sure all the key issues are addressed (Thomas, 2013), which could enrich the diverse insights of students in this study.

As Richards and Morse (2013) suggested, in cases where the researcher might have enough knowledge and understanding of the inquiry, they would be able to develop specific questions knowing what they want to ask but not knowing what answers they might get. An interview guide should have a certain structure while allowing flexibility and openness for both the interviewer and interviewees. In this study, 20 interview questions were organised in three sections to address a series of topics (see Appendix D). Most of the interview questions were open-ended, aiming to explore different topics and providing interviewees with the freedom to express

themselves and follow-up questions based on their answers. As indicated in the interview guide, prompts and follow-up questions were prepared for further exploration. During the actual interviews, knowing the interview guide inside out, I was able to navigate the interviews flexibly, make transitions between topics and questions smoothly, and actively follow up on interviewees' responses.

In addition, the advantage of having an organised list of carefully worded questions was to make sure that participants responded to approximately the same questions, which increased the comparability and reliability of responses across different participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Richards & Morse, 2013). This was particularly important because this study aimed to compare and contrast student participants from 10 different schools at two different levels of postgraduate studies, which will be explained in the next section.

3.4.3.2 Interview participants

Interview participants were recruited through purposive sampling, which is different from the probability form of sampling, for the latter tends to be on a random basis and aims to reach generalisation to a population, while purposive sampling chooses participants that fit certain criteria to address the RQs being posed (Bryman, 2016). Since one objective of the study was to explore the diversity of student experience regarding the use of English, a sample of cross-disciplinary and cross-sectional students would fit the purpose. Studies such as Liu (2013) and Tran (2008) showed that different disciplines and levels of study differ in requirements of students, e.g., English proficiency, subject-specific terminologies, and assessment styles. Zhu (2016) also highlighted the impact of previous intercultural experience on the Chinese students' overseas experience. In addition, although Masters students and PhD students are both at the postgraduate level, there are distinctive differences between the programme requirements and student cohorts (Tobbell et al., 2010), e.g., length of stay, age and maturity, forms of interaction with academic staff, abilities of independent research, academic environment and opportunities, and communities of interaction. Therefore, the purposive sampling strategy with a combination of

snowball sampling, typical case sampling, and maximum variation sampling was adopted (Bryman, 2016; Palys, 2008) in order to explore the diversity of the target group and the impact of individual differences on communicative experience.

Following the initial exploratory phase, 23 individual interviews with Chinese postgraduate students were conducted (see Table 3.2), including the three PhD students in the pilot study (see Section 3.4.3.4). Among the 20 students who took part in the main interviews, 10 were Masters students and 10 were PhD students.

Table 3.2

Interview Participants Composition

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	College of Science and Engineering
1. Moray House School of Education	7. School of Engineering
2. Edinburgh College of Art	8. School of Informatics
3. Business School	9. School of Geosciences
4. Law School	10. School of Chemistry
5. School of Social and Political Science	
6. School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures	

The number of Chinese postgraduate students varied across schools, same with the spread of Chinese students in different programmes at UoE (Woodman et al., 2020). Given that the percentage of Chinese students at the Masters level in a school could be very different from that at the PhD level, there were some challenges during the recruitment for participants from specific schools. For example, out of the 10 Masters student participants, nine were on PGT programmes, and one was a PGR student from School of Chemistry, where most Chinese Masters students were taking the PGR courses.

Similar to my strategy at the exploratory stage (see Section 3.4.2), I approached the participants by expanding my social network and establishing many new acquaintances, including joining groups on social media and providing help to fellow Chinese students, attending student activities, and taking roles such as student representatives. Apart from the basic criteria for selecting interview participants, maximum variation sampling was also used, which emphasises the differences between participants in order to bring different voices and generate adequate data and to obtain a more holistic view of the target group in the case university (Palys, 2008). Such variations included students' disciplines, levels of study, language proficiency, educational backgrounds, social activities, and work experience. For instance, regarding educational background, some of the participants studied in conventional Chinese universities while others went to English as a medium of instruction (EMI) universities, attended 2+2 programmes, or obtained their previous degrees abroad (including in the UK). Participants' work experience varied from zero to up to four years in different fields and locations. Last but not least, the participants aged between 23 to 29, concurring with what was suggested in the previous literature that Chinese postgraduate students abroad today tend to be relatively young. More information on the interviewees can be found in Appendix F.

3.4.3.3 Developing the interview guide

As the exploratory stage informed the development of the interview guide over months, multiple drafts of the interview guide (see Appendix D) were amended and developed to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Malmqvist, Hellberg, Möllås, Rose, & Shevlin, 2019). The draft used for the first two pilot interviews was modified again and then applied in the third pilot interview, leading to the final interview guide. As demonstrated in Appendix D, the original interview guide was much more deductive and rigid, whereas the final version allowed much more freedom for participants' voices, showing the advantages of semi-structured interviews (Richards & Morse, 2013).

One of the concerns in developing and using the interview guide was the language difference (Squires, 2009). The interview guide was initially designed in English, and it was later translated into Chinese because interviews were to be conducted in Chinese. The Chinese draft was adjusted and translated into English again to ensure the trustworthiness of translation. Minor changes were made due to differences in cultural references. A case in point was words such as “teachers” and “classes” in Chinese tend to be vague and cover a more comprehensive range of references than their counterparts in English. For instance, the Chinese term “老师 *lao shi*” (teachers) includes lecturers, tutors, supervisors, workshop presenters, language teachers, and support staff who can provide some guidance and assistance to students. By using the less specific Chinese term “老师”, the interview questions became more open and allowed the participants to talk about the experience that they considered relevant. This issue also concerns the researching multilingually approach (Holmes, Fay, Andrews., & Attia, 2013), which will be explained in more depth with respect to ethics in Section 3.7.

3.4.3.4 Pilot interviews

Prior to the main interviews, three pilot interviews were conducted. The three interviewees were in different years of their PhD study, and they had studied outside China for their previous degrees, indicating a good knowledge of international student life as postgraduate students, and allowing intra-personal comparisons between Masters and PhD experience to be explored. Pilot participants were selected from three schools: School of Education, School of Engineering, and School of Languages, Literature and Culture. These three disciplines were chosen on purpose due to the differences in the perceived reliance on the English language as the medium of communication. These three students were also selected for their different social networking and lifestyles, e.g., participation in social activities, relationship status, and part-time jobs. The preferred interview time and locations were chosen by the interviewees to best suit their needs. Interviews were conducted in library study rooms and a participant’s office, and each lasted for approximately one hour.

The pilot stage of the study was very important for the following reasons. First, it helped me as the researcher to check the information sheet and the consent form to make sure everything was explicit and clear to participants and to gather their feedback on possible improvement in the interview process, as suggested by Kim (2011) and Majid, Othman, Mohamad, Lim, and Yusof (2017). All participants responded positively and stated that they found it interesting and rewarding to reflect on their own overseas journeys. One participant even suggested that the university conduct such interviews more often so that more students' voices can be heard. The second purpose of piloting was to assess the interview guide to increase the construct validity and reliability of the interviews, as suggested by Dikko (2016). More specifically, the piloting process served as an evaluation of the interview guide regarding its effectiveness in eliciting the expected responses and exposing problems in the current design, such as unclear items that may lead to potential misunderstandings (Harding, 2013; Majid et al., 2017).

Thirdly, the pilot interviews were helpful for me to familiarise myself with the interview guide, particularly regarding the transition between different questions and practicing coherent conversations without over-relying on the interview guide. It was also a chance to practise interview techniques such as meaning checking with the interviewees by repeating or paraphrasing, asking follow-up questions, keeping constant eye contact with the interviewees, and using relaxing body language (Majid et al., 2017). Moreover, the pilot interviews provided initial potential codes and themes, and allowed me to practise data analysis techniques. I compared different transcription software, such as ELAN and Express Scribe Transcription, and eventually chose Express Scribe for its convenience (e.g., automatically rewinding the recording a few seconds after each pause during transcription). Data were analysed both on printed copies of transcription and in NVivo, which will be explained in Section 3.5. In addition, I tested two audio recording devices for battery lives, quality of sound, and transferring the digital files to computers, as suggested by Robson and McCartan (2016). Last but not least, I also tested the audio recorders in various locations to check the clarity of sound captured in different settings.

Adjustments and modifications were made accordingly following the pilot interviews (see Appendix D). Changes included rewording to clarify the questions or make them less leading, deleting similar questions, combining overlapping questions, adding questions, and re-ordering questions to make the conversation more logical and coherent. These changes were made to both the English version and the Chinese version. The amended guide was piloted again in the final pilot interview.

3.4.3.5 Main interviews

As illustrated in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2, 20 interviews (10 PhD students and 10 Masters students from 10 schools) took place at the end of the second semester of the academic year 2016/17, by which time the Masters students already had sufficient experience in their programmes. The PhD students were at various levels of their studies. Some were close to finishing their theses while others were in the middle of their journeys. Based on Kuchuk (2012), McKay (2009), and Wu (2014), the diverse backgrounds of the students could influence their behaviours, perceptions, language needs, academic performance, and social interactions in the UK. Therefore, additional questions relevant to the educational and language background of the participants were also asked, such as demographic information, current programmes, previous universities and programmes, medium of instruction for their previous degrees, and results of language proficiency exams (see Appendix C). Responses to these questions informed me of the interviewees' characteristics and helped direct discussions by highlighting individual differences.

Interviews were conducted primarily in Chinese, which was the shared first language of the participants and me, which according to Shono (2006), could empower the interviewees and establish a more harmonious relationship between the interviewees and the interviewer. As suggested in Cortazzi, Pilcher, and Jin's (2011) study, such a choice could better facilitate the interview discussions, not only by creating a friendly and relaxing environment for the participants, but also making sure that language did not pose any barriers for generating data, similar to the point made by Squires (2009) in Section 3.4.3.3. Other strategies to ensure the

trustworthiness of the study will be presented in Section 3.6 in more detail. One interesting point worth mentioning is the constant code-switching throughout the interviews with all participants, with some specific words used more frequently or even exclusively in English, such as “academic”, “assignment”, “essay”, “paper”, “dissertation”, “group work”, “supervisor”, “tutor”, “lecture”, “workshop”, “tutorial”, “conference”, “seminar”, “native speaker”, and “non-native speaker”. The reason for such frequent code-switching was speculated that these words or concepts carry specific local frames of reference, and the participants might have made initial contact with some of the concepts in English and have frequently been using these terms in English during their studies in the UK. If they found it more natural and comfortable to code-switch during the interviews, I would respect their language preference and transcribe truthfully, in accordance with the principle of researching multilingually (Holmes et al., 2022).

Furthermore, a comfortable interview environment can enable participants to express themselves freely with little feeling of being judged (Yin, 2014). Interviews in this study were mostly administered in library study rooms, with a few in participants’ offices or accommodation. Locations were mostly suggested by the participants and were eventually chosen based on convenience for both the participants and me. As suggested by Elwood and Martin (2000), by allowing the interviewees to choose preferred locations, I could make them feel more in power and less threatened by the “expert” (the researcher). All interviews were audio-recorded by two devices to provide precise, authentic, and accurate primary narrative data for transcription, and also to allow the interviewer to focus on the interviewees and the flow of the discussion rather than being preoccupied with notetaking (Cohen et al., 2011; Markle, West, & Rich, 2011).

3.4.4 Focus groups

Following the interviews, FGs were conducted. This section starts by briefly referring to the previous literature review where FGs were used in international higher education-related studies and ESP research. It expounds on the advantages of

FGs where the present study is considered, followed by detailed explanations of two pilot FGs and the two main FGs, including reflections on using the novel technique – *Six Thinking Hats*. Potential problems and strategies adopted to ensure the success of FGs will also be discussed.

3.4.4.1 Focus groups in IHE and ESP research

FG method has been used in higher education-related studies in recent years for various research purposes, from students' transitional experience (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Heussi, 2012), students' perceptions of teaching and learning with modern technology (Gikas & Grant, 2013), to students' attitudes regarding intercultural learning and social integration in an international university (Volet & Ang, 2012). Some of these studies are more relevant to the current study in terms of research focus. For instance, Zhu and Flaitz's (2005) study explored international students' English needs for academic purposes by conducting FGs to gather a variety of representative perspectives, including international students, academic faculty, and administrative staff. Dalglish (2005) explored international students' expectations and real encounters at an Australian university by conducting FGs with international students. Apart from in the field of higher education, FGs are also widely used in all sorts of NA projects to investigate specific needs of people in various organisations because FGs allow participants to reflect on their own beliefs and experience in comparison to others' views (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Although there is a long tradition of FG being used in the business world, particularly used by market researchers to examine consumers' needs and satisfactions (Greenbaum, 2000), the FG method seems to be used infrequently in English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) education and applied linguistics (Galloway, 2020). For instance, in Starfield's (2016) discussion on recent changes in research methods in ESP research including NA, she called for more exploration of ESP research methods, while FG remained as "other forms of data collection" (p. 154).

Therefore, the current study offers empirical evidence for using the FG method to inquire about ESP NA in an international university. More importantly,

this study makes an original contribution to the application of the "*Six Thinking Hats*" technique (see Section 3.4.4.4) for facilitating FGs in the educational context, following a robust pilot study, furthering the exploration of the FG method in qualitative research. The following sections will explain why FGs were chosen and how they were conducted in this study.

3.4.4.2 Rationale & advantages

As a qualitative research method, FGs are particularly helpful in gathering voices of specific interest groups by creating an interactive, natural and comfortable environment for participants to express their feelings, attitudes, and beliefs, and exchange a range of ideas (Galloway, 2020; Rossman & Rallis, 2016). FGs empower the participants by providing communicative opportunities, and it elicits spontaneous thinking, and stimulates interesting ideas and insightful perspectives in the dynamic exchange (Kairuz, Crump, & O'Brien, 2007; Liamputtong, 2011). Furthermore, the presence of other participants may help scaffold ones' answers better because group interaction can help participants co-construct thoughts and understandings, draw from and build upon each other's input, or alternatively argue against others' suggestions to reinforce their own stances (Galloway, 2020; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

In the current study, FGs were conducted following the interviews and the preliminary analysis of interview results. Such a sequential design was to complement individual interviews, triangulate interview results, facilitate saturation and generate adequate information, and further explore themes and topics that emerged from the interviews (Galloway, 2020; Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). As suggested by Greenbaum (2000), FGs can cover fewer topics and be more focused. Therefore, different from the interviews which aimed to address a wider range of topics and explore participants' personal experiences and feelings, the FGs in the study concentrated on an in-depth exploration of a smaller range of topics, and focused on what actions the university and students could take in order to enhance Chinese students' OP.

Moreover, FGs were utilised because they are particularly useful for generating information which represents the interest of a small group of people (Milena, Dainora, & Alin, 2008), such as the participants in this study who represented the Chinese postgraduate students' interests. Despite the points made earlier regarding individual differences among the Chinese postgraduate students and the danger of over-generalisation, it is important to acknowledge the common interests and voice of this target group. As explained above, salient issues that emerged from the interviews worth exploring in FGs did not necessarily concern any particular individual. FGs zoomed out the lens of discussion in that they looked at specific topics from a holistic and big-picture perspective rather than concentrating on any individual student's situation. Since one participant is hardly representative, the voice of a group could potentially support some of the arguments made. This also enabled the current study to further develop from descriptive and exploratory to explanatory, as suggested by Hennink (2007). Last but not least, FGs created solidarity for the participants to validate their individual experiences, as well as empathising and supporting each other (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013), which met their expressed willingness to know more about other students' experiences after the individual interviews.

3.4.4.3 Potential concerns & solutions

Despite the many strengths of FGs, a few areas of concern are particularly worth pointing out. Specific strategies were applied accordingly to overcome such challenges and improve the trustworthiness of the study.

One potential problem with the FG method is the power imbalance, which could be the result from various reasons. As pointed out by Milena et al. (2008), the over-dominance of a particular participant in the FG who tends to be more talkative with a stronger personality can impose much influence on the rest of the group. Such a presence might make the other participants less confident and more reluctant to speak up for fear of losing face or being judged, or having insufficient time to think about the issue under discussion. Rossman and Rallis (2016) also alerted that this

kind of power imbalance could potentially lead to an unrealisable consensus with some participants hindering their honest opinions to preserve their self-image.

Three strategies were adopted to deal with this issue. First, each group was only comprised of students at the same level of study, i.e., Masters group or PhD group, to ensure the power difference between the participants was less distinctive, so that speaking up was less threatening. Second, similar to the interviews, the FGs were conducted in the participants' first language to eliminate language barriers. Third, the Six Thinking Hats (de Bono, 2000) strategy was adopted to ensure all participants were given equal opportunities to speak, which was especially useful for preventing the over-dominance of one participant. The technique will be explained further in the next section.

Furthermore, the power imbalance may also be manifested between the participants and the moderator, whose role is crucial for the success of FGs (Greenbaum, 2000). Fischbacher-Smith et al.'s (2015) study, which conducted FGs with very similar participants' profile to this study, specifically highlighted the benefit of employing a postgraduate researcher as the moderator rather than a university staff member. They argued that such an arrangement would mitigate the power imbalance between students and the researcher and take advantage of the postgraduate researcher's "insider identity" to better encourage students to open up and engage in the group discussion. Similarly, in the current study, I acted as the moderator considering my knowledge and personal experience regarding the research topic, established rapport with the participants from the interviews, as well as the "cultural insider" stance. Additionally, I took part in a training course at the university, where I learnt the Six Thinking Hats technique and other strategies for engaging and facilitating successful group discussions.

The second area of concern is the potential impact of group dynamics in collectivist culture on the success of FG discussion. It is believed that East Asians tend to have a less participatory discussion culture, as discussed in the literature review chapter. Evidently, studies such as Lee and Lee's (2009) cross-cultural experiment, which compared the effectiveness of FGs with East Asian to Western

participants, showed passive participation and poor and insufficient interactions between members in the East Asian group. Another relevant point is the overall critical attitude of people from one culture towards certain issues and the ability to verbalise it openly. It is argued that East Asians seem to have less critical attitudes or are less willing to express it openly than their Western counterparts (Chavan, 2005; Hall, de Jong, & Steehouder, 2004). McMahon (2011), Turner (2006) and many others pointed out that this may be a result of different educational ideologies between Confucian culture and Western culture. The former, which is considered a high-contextual culture (Nisbett, 2003; Kim, 2005) tends to reach agreement as a group even over controversial topics or avoid conflicts in communication in order to maintain the harmonious group dynamics, which can be viewed as a politeness strategy in interaction (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). This problem may lead to insufficient member engagement, leaving out some participants' opinions (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

To deal with these potential challenges, FG ground rules were laid out before the discussions (see Appendix E). Various techniques were adopted to put participants at ease and create a harmonious group environment, e.g., offering snacks and drinks, warming up time, and seating arrangement (Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Lee & Lee, 2009; Milena et al., 2008). The Thinking Hats technique to used highlight the expectation of everyone's participatory contribution and encourage the participants to discuss from various angles. Moreover, FGs are sometimes criticised for being inclined to give rise to direct positionings, such as participants' attitudes and views while having an insufficient and in-depth exploration of participants' personal experience (Smith et al., 2009). However, this was not a problem for the current study, because the FG members all took part in the previous interviews and remained interactive with me throughout the research process.

The next section will elaborate on the Thinking Hats technique and explain how it was applied with modification in response to the two pilot FGs.

3.4.4.4 The *Six Thinking Hats* technique and FG topics

One innovative strategy adopted for the FGs was the *Six Thinking Hats* technique. Proposed by Edward de Bono in 1985, this technique is widely used in organisations both in the public and private sectors as a thinking tool for group discussion and to facilitate individual thinking about certain issues. Its underlying principle is that there are six ways to consider any given issue and the “hats” are colour-coded representations of different modes of thinking, as summarised below.

Figure 3.1

Six Thinking Hats and Their Meanings (based on de Bono, 1985)



The Thinking Hats technique encourages inclusive participation, parallel thinking, individual thinking and speaking time, as well as group negotiation and collaboration (de Bono, 2000). In addition, changing between different thinking hats can cultivate one’s critical thinking. In the educational setting, Thinking Hats are widely used in schools in the UK which can be found in many classrooms, and there are voluminous resources online for teachers to involve this technique in lesson plans. However, it seems that little has been written on its application in research for academic purposes. Therefore, such an attempt makes a methodological contribution

to the FG research method and ESP and applied linguistics literature, as advocated by Galloway (2020) and Starfield (2016).

During the FG discussions, the researcher commenced by wearing the "blue hat" and outlining the ground rules to inform the participants of the FG discussion process. This was followed by a warm-up activity designed to promote familiarity among the participants. As the moderator of the FG, the researcher introduced the "Thinking Hats" as a thinking tool for group discussion and to encourage individual thinking. Six topics, which had been proposed by the students themselves during interviews, were then presented to the FGs. Participants subsequently engaged in a discourse on each of the given topics, while wearing different thinking hats in turn, following the order of red-yellow-black-orange, corresponding to the perspectives of "feelings and emotions", "pros and advantages", "cons and cautiousness", and "creativity and suggestions". It is worth noting that in the main FGs, the colour orange was used instead of green to avoid breaching cultural taboos, which will be further explained in Section 3.4.4.6.3. After discussing each topic with the thinking hats technique, participants were at liberty to engage in more unstructured discussions. The FG topics which emerged from interview analysis were as follows:

Table 3.3

Focus Group Discussion Topics

Number	FG Discussion Topic
1	Language preparation prior to arrival
2	Washback effect
3	Peer support
4	English enhancement activities
5	Online short videos - English for learning and living purposes
6A	Preference for medium of communication (Masters FG only)
6B	Practise oral engagement skills for various purposes (PhD FG only)

Each FG discussion topic was provided with specific explanations and prompts, which are presented in Appendix E.

The Thinking Hats technique is particularly useful for the FGs in the current study, because this approach to dialogue facilitates participants to explore various perspectives, even opposing standpoints, in a relatively harmonious manner. As pointed out in the previous section, this is very suitable for participants from certain cultural groups who highly value group harmony (Kwan, Chun, & Chesla, 2011). Furthermore, the FG guide was used with a degree of flexibility to facilitate the structure and flow of the discussions. This technique was piloted in two FGs and adjusted prior to the main FGs, which will be critically evaluated in the next section.

3.4.4.5 Two pilot focus groups

Two pilot FGs were conducted not only for general purposes similar to those of the interviews, as explained in Section 3.4.3.4, but also to evaluate the use of the Thinking Hats technique. Each pilot FG was a “mini-focus group” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 7), consisting of three participants and one moderator. Participants in the two groups were from the following schools, shown in Table 3.4. Each FG had a good mix of disciplines in that they included students from both College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and College of Science and Engineering.

Table 3.4

Pilot Focus Group Composition

PhD Group	Masters Group
School of Chemistry	School of Social and Political Science
Moray House School of Education	School of Literatures, Language and Culture
School of Engineering	School of Geosciences

Two pilot FGs instead of only one FG were conducted to achieve the specific purpose of assessing the Thinking Hats and ensure the rigour of the FG design by doing intra-group and inter-group comparisons, as shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5

Design of the Two Pilot Focus Groups

Topic	Group A – PhD	Group B – Masters
1	Conventional	Thinking Hats
2	Conventional	Thinking Hats
3	Conventional	Thinking Hats
4	Thinking Hats	Thinking Hats
5	Thinking Hats	Thinking Hats
6A/6B	Thinking Hats	Thinking Hats
Reflections on using the Six Thinking Hats Technique		

The table above briefly exhibits the design of the two pilot FGs procedures. Group A and B both were given six topics for discussion, with only one difference: the final question for Group A was PhD student-specific, and for Group B was Masters student-specific. Group A started in a conventional free discussion manner which served as the controlled experiment purpose. After three questions, I introduced the participants to the Thinking Hats technique and guided them through the other three questions. Differently, Group B used the Thinking Hats technique only. Participants' thoughts on using the Thinking Hats in FGs were collected after discussing the six topics.

3.4.4.6 Reflections on using the *Six Thinking Hats* Technique

Participants were asked to reflect on their experience in the pilot FGs and how I could modify the procedure for better facilitation. Most feedback was very positive, while a few concerns were identified, and suggestions were made accordingly. One particular point concerning cultural sensitivity in international research was also raised, leading to the modification of the Thinking Hats technique when used with Chinese participants.

3.4.4.6.1 Positive feedback

All participants displayed a very positive attitude towards the discussions and highly regarded the Thinking Hats technique as interesting, innovative, and effective. For instance, one student said it was easy to be interrupted during conventional free discussions and lead to other directions before finishing one's thoughts, which was avoided when wearing the Thinking Hats. Another participant highlighted the communicative harmony in the group and the organised way of communication, which made each group member feel respected. In addition, one student considered this technique constructive and effective in cultivating both individual thinking and group thinking. He even suggested that it should be introduced to his own programme to facilitate group discussion.

Another advantage was raised from the listener's perspective in that it was easier to follow another speaker's points when they knew the overall direction of the conversation instead of trying to follow various points at once. Moreover, students said that they did not feel pressured when they knew their response was not thorough enough at one turn. Last but not least, one PhD student took a researcher's perspective and pointed out how the Thinking Hats was more researcher-friendly during data analysis than the conventional FGs, given that discussions were facilitated following a certain logic. Utterances were produced in a more orderly manner, and talking points were easier to capture and categorise, which to a certain extent solved the problem of matching words to participants during analysing conventional FG data.

3.4.4.6.2 Problems & solutions

One concern with using the Thinking Hats technique was that participants' initial flow of thoughts might be interrupted due to specific procedural rules, leading to them forgetting about certain specific talking points. Therefore, paper and pens were provided for each group member during the main FGs to note down any thoughts whenever they wanted as a reminder. Second, the speaking order was only set clockwise during the pilot FGs, meaning that each round of turn-taking started

and ended with the same student. However, one student expressed the concern that the first student might feel pressured always to speak first while the last student might have fewer opportunities to contribute to others' ideas. Therefore, I modified the turn-taking rule, in that the five students in one main FG would take turns to be the first/last to speak in order to provide participants with more equal opportunities to contribute. Lastly, due to my concern of students' ability to follow the Thinking Hats rules, I used PowerPoint slides to help explain this strategy and kept it on display during the discussions to remind the participants of the order. All participants expressed that it was relatively easy to get accustomed to the Thinking Hats rules after practicing two topics, especially with the assistance of the PowerPoint slides.

3.4.4.6.3 Taboo and cultural sensitivity in international research

One interesting point worth highlighting from using the Thinking Hats strategy is regarding cultural sensitivity in international research. De Bono's (2000) Six Thinking Hats model includes a green hat, symbolising creativity. However, the expression of wearing a green hat (戴绿帽子) in Chinese culture has a negative connotation – it refers to a man whose wife or girlfriend has cheated on him. Due to my knowledge of this Chinese cultural reference, I was aware of this potentially problematic issue, especially for male participants, as “wearing a green hat” is culturally shameful and insulting to Chinese men. During the pilot FGs, I consulted the participants and decided to introduce the Six Thinking Hats as its original form in the main FGs, but changed the colour green to orange during the actual discussion phase to avoid the uncomfortable connotation.

This issue also concerns multilingual research (Holmes et al., 2013), which will be explained in more depth with respect to ethics in Section 3.7. One implication for researchers is that in the increasingly interconnected world where theories and models are applied in various ways and different contexts, researchers must raise intercultural sensitivity rather than taking things for granted and conduct research in a culturally appropriate manner (Liamputtong, 2010). If needed, they should make proper adjustments according to participants' cultural values and practices.

3.4.4.7 Two main focus groups

Two main FGs were conducted after the two pilot FGs. The main FGs took into consideration of the problems raised in the pilot FGs and made adjustments accordingly.

3.4.4.7.1 Participants

FG participants were recruited from the interview participants to make sure the researcher already had established a healthy rapport with them and had a sufficient understanding of their individual backgrounds. Moreover, these students were familiar with the research topic in that they had spent much time thinking about their overseas study experience and perspectives of OP in English communication. Additionally, the four-month gap between interviews and FGs allowed the participants to have more learning and living experience in the target context and potentially have more reflections on their experiences. Ten students took part in the two main FGs, and the breakdown of the participants' schools is shown below.

Table 3.6

Main Focus Groups Composition

PhD Group	Masters Group
Moray House School of Education	Moray House School of Education
Law School	Business School
Edinburgh College of Art	School of Informatics
School of Engineering	School of Engineering
School of Geosciences	School of Chemistry

Another reason for holding two FGs concerns the concepts of homogeneity and heterogeneity. It has been suggested that the homogeneity of FG members could enable participants to feel more comfortable and speak more openly and freely

(Galloway, 2020; Morgan, 1997). In this context, the FG participants who were from a similar culture and language background naturally created a community with the shared identity of being Chinese postgraduate students studying at the UoE. The importance of this sense of community and familiarity surpassed the importance of anonymity (Colucci, 2008). This sense of community and shared cultural background is also particularly significant considering sensitive and challenging issues (Liamputtong, 2011). With respect to the inevitable diversity among the participants, the relative high-level homogeneity of each FG could better elicit the interest of their representative group.

One strategy to recruit the participants was to highlight the potential benefit they could gain from the opportunity to sit down and talk about their experience with fellow students outside their disciplines, which seemed to be what many students lacked and desired. In fact, this was a “selling point” and participants showed their appreciation for having such a discussion where they were given attention to, and their voices were highly valued. Additionally, following Liamputtong’s (2011) suggestion, a dinner invitation was provided as an incentive and token of appreciation for participants’ contribution.

3.4.4.7.2 Organising the focus groups

One big challenge in organising the FGs was participant availability. FGs with the Masters students were held after completing their dissertations/graduation projects at the end of the academic year in August 2017. Even though all 23 interviewees gave the initial verbal consents to take part in the FGs, many of them did not want to participate until the end of the third semester, and some were no longer in Edinburgh after submission, leaving a short window for the FGs. Similarly, some PhD students were not in Edinburgh over the summer in 2017, while some had other arrangements in September. Therefore, participants were selected based on convenience sampling (Bryman, 2016), which required much negotiation back-and-forth with different participants to find a suitable time for everyone.

During the pilot FGs, I made a mistake by organising two FGs on the same day. One participant could not make it and informed me only the day before, which forced me to reschedule the FG plan. Having learnt the lesson, I only arranged one main FG on one day and asked the participants to clear their schedules around the planned time slot. The strategy of over-recruitment was adopted to deal with the potential problem of participants' unexpected unavailability (Morgan, 1997; Wilkinson, 2004). I had two backup participants selected from the pilot interviews and the PTAS I project, which focused on a very similar topic as the current study. Fortunately, all the students initially recruited for the FGs showed up, so replacements were not needed.

3.5 Data analysis

According to Krueger and Casey (2015), the purpose of data analysis is to answer the RQs, and data analysis starts by revisiting the aims and objectives of the study. With this in mind, I was able to make sense of the key information embedded in the substantial data sets and diverse voices. Given the ethnographic nature of the current research, data analysis and collection took place simultaneously, as suggested by Fetterman (2010), and it was an ongoing process from the beginning of data collection to the end of the project. Both interview and FG data were analysed with an inductive thematic analysis approach, which will be explained in Section 3.5.1. A data analysis tool NVivo was also used to assist in analysing the interview data, which will be explained briefly in Section 3.5.2.

3.5.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the narrative data from interviews and FGs for its flexibility, which allowed me to identify themes from the data and work with different theoretical frameworks (Richards & Morse, 2013; Silverman, 2011). This approach is helpful in summarising key constructs and themes from a large

volume of narrative data and providing a thick description of data, uncovering the commonalities and distinctiveness across the data set, and generating unexpected and interesting findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis suited this study which focused on the “meaning” rather than the “language”, namely “what” the participants said rather than “how” the information was provided linguistically, as pointed out by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis in this study followed a six-step framework as elaborated in the following sections. In the meantime, it is important to point out that thematic analysis was not a strictly linear process because identifying, classifying, and reporting themes is a slow, constant, spiral, and iterative process, as observed by Creswell (2012), and Ryan and Bernard (2000). The steps below were interconnected and informed by one another.

3.5.1.1 Data familiarisation & transcription

The first step of data analysis was familiarising with the data, which involved replaying the audio-recorded interviews and FGs, transcribing verbatim the narrative data into texts, and re-reading the transcripts before coding. I also highlighted texts and noted down ideas for coding at the initial stage, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) suggestion. Transcribing narrative data to texts is a crucial phase in data analysis, which is a process of transforming data, familiarisation with data, and in a way interpreting data on its own, but often this practice is taken for granted without much consideration (Bird, 2005; Davidson, 2009). There is an ongoing discussion regarding what to transcribe and to what extent should transcriptions be detailed (Silverman, 2011; Walford, 2001), as the same recordings can be transcribed in various ways with different levels of details to serve different research purposes (Rapley, 2007). Therefore, whichever way the researcher chooses to transcribe data should be based on the purpose of the transcription (Lapadat, 2000), and researchers need to come up with their own approaches that best fit their studies (Duranti, 2007).

Given that this study is interested in interpreting what participants say rather than how they say it, only verbal data were transcribed (Smith et al., 2009). Verbatim transcription was done as a semantic record of the interviews and FGs, and data were

transcribed in Chinese (except for some English words uttered by participants) to preserve the authenticity of the data. Although some software with voice recognition functions can make transcription easier and less time-consuming, I chose to transcribe by myself to better comprehend the data during transcription and enhance interpretation at later stage, as advocated by Spencer, Ritchie, O'Connor, Morrell, & Ormston (2014).

3.5.1.2 Initial open coding

After an interview was transcribed, I would read it through and identify potential codes by highlighting parts of the transcript, such as activities, strategies, comments, and events that are prominent and relevant to the RQs (Gibbs, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Texts were divided into segments and highlighted, often longer than necessary to preserve the context of data, as noted by Bryman (2016). Coding at this stage remained descriptive, and the initial open coding was to identify and label text segments that were interesting and relevant to research, which could potentially become themes (Creswell, 2012). During the line-by-line scanning of the transcripts, I conducted initial open coding (creating “nodes” in NVivo), which was primarily based on the narrative data, but also involved constructs from the literature review (Robson & McCartan, 2016). According to Gibbs (2007), and Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), this approach to data analysis can be considered as a combination of data-driven and concept/theory-driven data analysis, also known as inductive and deductive approaches. This mixture of approaches enabled the researcher to uncover original and exploratory insights and adequate evidence from participants’ voices, and also helped to overcome criticism of thematic analysis – lack of rigour – by drawing concepts and theories from relevant literature (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Through the process of generating initial open coding, raw verbal data were transformed from being natural units produced by the participants in their own words to the words of the researcher (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). It is worth noting that according to Richards and Morse (2013), coding is a constant process of learning, reflecting, and theorising, which took place constantly throughout the data analysis in the current study.

3.5.1.3 Theme identification & meaning categorisation

The third step was to go through the whole data set again, compare and make connections of codes across different transcripts, which were then categorised or labelled again with another level of codes in the becoming of themes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Themes here refer to the reoccurring patterns or constructs which emerged based on the coding, categorisation, and reflection, and are extensively discussed in the data worthy of attention (Creswell, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). This step facilitated the data analysis process by filtering irrelevant data and extracting segments central to the research, assigning second layer codes and labels rather than simple descriptions, and systematically organising text segments into new groups that make sense to the researcher (Creswell, 2012; Tuckett, 2005).

Emerging themes and concepts were then grouped, labelled, and coded again, and categorised systematically and hierarchically, as instructed by Spencer et al. (2014), to create different levels of codes. This meaning categorisation step involved much reduction of overlapping and redundant codes, which enabled codes to be collaged into groups. I was then able to put forward a thematic framework based on the interview data, which means the interviews were reduced and trimmed with a focus in relation to the research aims and questions and, therefore, transformed again. An initial thematic map (Braun & Wilkinson, 2003) was drafted, and I was able to get an overview of significant themes central to the research. However, many codes and themes remained messy and chaotic at the stage, which would be assembled, separated, deleted, or amended later.

3.5.1.4 Meaning condensation & thematic framework

Based on the categorised codes, the next step was condensing meaning from the rich description, including reducing redundancy in previous codes and further grouping codes into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Next, coded data extracts were revisited and reviewed, and the most prominent themes emerged from the mist of the data. While some candidate themes turned out

to lack supporting evidence across the data set, which were then discarded, some similar ones were combined and grouped together. An important part of this process was to revisit the whole data set with the identified themes in mind, check if each individual theme made sense, and look for evidence in the data to see if anything was missed out or did not fit well. This step also involved naming the themes and sub-themes while re-reading the texts to clarify the core meaning of a theme or sub-theme in a more explicit manner.

As Braun and Clarke (2006) pointed out, such a condensation process could potentially be never-ending in that the researcher may get too excited and end up getting lost in the large volume of interesting themes. In order to stay focused, I revisited the themes with the study aims, objectives, and RQs in mind to avoid what Richards and Morse (2013) called “over-coding”. By the end of this reviewing process, a coherent thematic framework, which was a condensed and precise version of the previous thematic map, was developed. The initial interview coding and thematic framework are presented in Appendix K, and the final interview thematic framework is presented in Section 4.1. The initial and final thematic frameworks developed based on FG analysis are presented in Appendix L and Section 5.1, respectively.

3.5.1.5 Meaning interpretation

Meaning interpretation is of great importance since the same data can be interpreted in different ways (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Coding in the previous steps evolved from being descriptive to conceptualised themes, but as Richards and Morse (2013) pointed out, there was little interpretation of the themes. Good thematic data analysis requires the analytical interpretations to be based on but beyond the basic or semantic level of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Meaning condensation and meaning interpretation are different in that the former filters through the texts and extracts the essence of it by de-contextualisation, whereas interpretation goes beyond what is said by re-contextualising statements, enriching and expanding them, linking them to a broader frame of reference, and making a

connection with literature, personal experiences, and reflections (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). As mentioned above, the analysis combined both data-driven and theory-driven analysis. Therefore, I went beyond the semantic level of analysing the themes and extracts and interpreted them in relation to the literature and RQs to form arguments.

3.5.1.6 Producing and presenting analysis

Last but not least, the final step was communicating the analytical results to readers. The challenge then was to transform what made sense to the researcher, make it understandable to the audience, and convince them the credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). To accomplish this, I reviewed the themes, organised them, and presented them in a logical, insightful, coherent, and cohesive manner. Two thematic frameworks were put forward (see Sections 4.1 and 5.1). Sufficient, appropriate, and effective supporting evidence, including examples and extracts from the data, were chosen to illustrate themes and arguments best (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5).

3.5.2 Data analysis tool – NVivo

NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, was utilised to create and organise themes, analyse interview data, and facilitate the analytic process, primarily because of its compatibility with the thematic analysis approach (Zamawe, 2015). As Bazeley and Kackson (2013) pointed out, NVivo is useful for importing and storing audio files and transcriptions for the researcher to retrieve at any time, especially when the researcher is away from the interview data for some time. Second, NVivo supports originality in coding, and it is helpful to organise codes and themes after the initial free coding by enabling codes to be grouped and aggregated (Zamawe, 2015), which granted me flexibility in coding and helped me manage data from a comprehensive perspective. Thirdly, NVivo made it easier to

cross-reference between 20 different interview transcripts by linking specific coded sentences or paragraphs in one transcription to those in another transcription. Such cross-referencing was also advantageous at a later stage when FG transcriptions were ready. In addition, NVivo enables the visualisation of data analysis, a function particularly effective in showing the connections between different codes and themes (Zamawe, 2015), such as the examples shown in the figures below. Other functions such as memos and annotations were also helpful in keeping notes alongside the analysis.

Figure 3.1

Visualisation of Themes Generated by NVivo - Example 1



Figure 3.2

Visualisation of Themes Generated by NVivo - Example 2

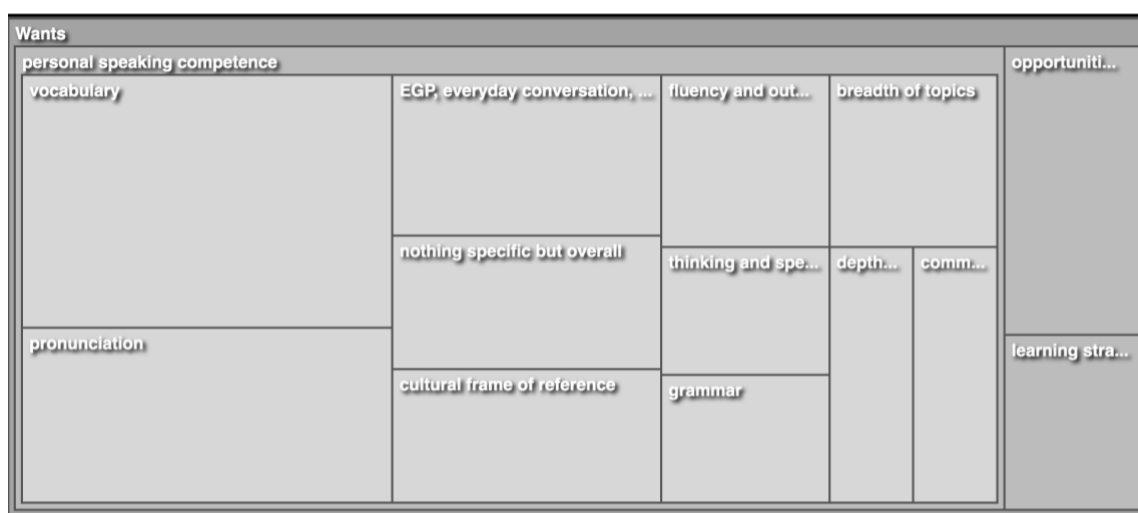


Figure 3.3

Visualisation of Themes Generated by NVivo - Example 3



3.6 Trustworthiness

The notion of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is widely adopted when evaluating the rigour of a qualitative study, which entails credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

Procedures and strategies were adopted in the current study to ensure research credibility, also known as internal validity, which deals with the truth value, and it is considered the most important factor in achieving trustworthiness (Anney, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, method triangulation was applied in this study, which is significant in establishing credibility (Patton, 2015). Using both interviews and FGs allowed the researcher to compare and contrast different perspectives and gain a more nuanced understanding of the needs of students from different backgrounds, such as different disciplines and levels of study, with a few months apart. FGs provided complementary data to interviews and also validated the themes that emerged from the interview data. Second, my early familiarisation with the research context and prolonged engagement with the participating organisation also contributed to improving research credibility, as suggested by Silverman (2013). Interaction with random informants, particularly at the exploratory stage, to gain a better understanding of the target student group and other stakeholders' voices served the same purpose (Bouma & Atkinson, 1995; Shenton, 2004).

Other strategies to achieve credibility of the study included frequent discussions with supervisors and fellow researchers about the project (Bitsch, 2005; Pitney & Parker, 2009), researcher's own experience and insider knowledge of the research context (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Liamputtong, 2010), and the acknowledgement of the researcher's bias and potential influence (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Strategies such as asking follow-up questions and creating a supportive and relaxing environment also helped enhance research credibility (Shenton, 2004). Moreover, three pilot interviews and two pilot FGs with different discussion techniques for comparison purposes were conducted (Sections 3.4.3.4 and 3.4.4.5), which also contributed to research credibility (Padgett,

2008). In addition, the interview guide was modified after being piloted twice, and was piloted again in the third pilot interview to ensure research credibility.

During the individual interviews, I used a technique similar to the “synthesized member checking technique” (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016) by asking participants to clarify what they meant and check my interpretation. Whenever there was silence or pauses, or words and concepts that confused me, I would endeavour to solve the issue on the spot to avoid deviating from the interviewees’ intentions. I asked follow-up questions, paraphrased what I heard, and verbalised my understanding to check whether my interpretation was appropriate and correct by using phrases such as “What did you mean by...?” and “I’m sorry, could you explain a bit more...” This technique is particularly helpful when interacting with some students who were shy and less talkative.

Parallel to the external validity of quantitative research, the notion of transferability in qualitative research deals with generalisability, and it refers to the degree to which the findings of a study can be applied or transferred to other contexts and by other researchers (Anney, 2014; Tobin & Begley, 2004). A thorough and thick description of the research context in this chapter and in the following chapters where findings are presented and discussed contribute to establishing the research transferability (Bitsch, 2005; Li, 2004; Shenton, 2004). In addition, as pointed out by Henze and Zhu (2012), the Chinese diaspora in the recent literature can be regarded as a particular group for research concerning international learning and international student experience. The target group in the current study – Chinese postgraduate students – takes a significant proportion of the international student cohort in studies of similar interests. This, together with the purposive sampling strategy, which included typical case sampling and maximum variation sampling, helped generate adequate data and findings and enhanced transferability (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

In order to achieve dependability, which indicates a logical and traceable research process that demonstrates consistency and reliability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004), raw data (interview audios and FGs videos) and transcripts of interviews and FGs were well documented, allowing me to revisit the

data, support research analysis, and demonstrate how results were reached (Nowell et al., 2017). In addition, interviews were re-coded two times after the initial open coding progress. This re-coding process also enhanced the internal consistency or the intra-rater dependability of the current study (Ruel, Wagner III., & Gillespie, 2016).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability deals with researchers' neutrality and objectivity, which suggests findings are data-driven without much influenced by researchers' bias and predisposition. In this study, data were well documented, which allowed the research process to be audited, and I maintained a good degree of reflexivity (see positionality statement in Section 1.4 and researcher's reflection in Section 7.3). Such reflexivity is also embedded in the findings and discussions, fulfilling the objective of confirmability (Shenton, 2004).

It is also worth pointing out that translation between the languages in data collection and the written report can be a potential complexity in cross-language research (Squires, 2009) or multilingual research (Holmes et al., 2013). In this study, trustworthiness in translation was ensured by procedures such as designing the original interview guide and FG guide in English at first and then translating them into Chinese for piloting, followed by modification and several rounds of revision, as explained in Sections 3.4.3.3 and 3.4.4.5. English translations are provided in the main body to support arguments and findings, and participants' original accounts in Chinese were included in Appendices G and I to minimise mistakes and potential bias in data interpretation. A line-by-line approach and a global approach to translation were adopted to ensure participants' meanings were best conveyed. Last but not least, the use of NVivo allowed structured and thorough analysis of the data, and provided evidence and the paper trail of data and analysis that one can easily retrieve, all of which strengthened the rigour of the study (Rambaree, 2007; Stewart, 2012).

3.7 Ethics

Ethical issues were taken into consideration throughout the research project. Overall, the current study posed little threat to the participants, and no vulnerable groups were involved. Prior to data collection, all participants were provided with information sheets, which helped clarify the research purpose, participants' rights, data collection methods, and confidentiality of data collected. All participants were then asked to sign consent forms. Those who took part in the second phase of the study were also given the second consent form prior to FGs. During the data analysis stage and in the final report, pseudonyms were given to the participants to ensure their anonymity. Data were kept in a safe hard drive where only the researcher had access to it for confidentiality. Audio recordings were stored in coded folders in a safe device up to one year after the research was finished. The study followed the school's ethics guidelines in place. UoE research ethics standards were adhered to.

Given the emergent discourse on multilingual research, it is worth mentioning the multilingual dimension of the current study and explaining now using the Chinese language in some stages of this study is an ethical approach, particularly from the perspective of researching multilingually. Holmes et al. (2013) describe researching multilingually as an approach that acknowledges the multilingual nature of research and recognises the possibilities and complexities of including multiple languages in the research process and its dissemination. This approach involves engaging with different languages and cultures, embracing linguistic diversity, and recognising the potential benefits of using multiple languages in research. As pointed out by Holmes, Reynolds and Ganassin (2022), researching multilingually acknowledges the important role of language in research and encourages researchers to adopt a more inclusive approach which reflects the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their participants.

Moreover, the use of Chinese language enabled me to capture the subtleties and nuances of participants' responses, mediate between two linguistic worlds when interpreting data, and accurately represent the results when reporting findings. This approach allowed me to gain richer and more accurate insights compared to working

solely in English. For instance, as elaborated in Section 3.4.3.3, some English concepts were limited in comparison to their synonyms in Chinese. While preserving the essence of the English interview guide, I used certain words and expressions in Chinese which were more familiar and comfortable for native Chinese speakers, thereby better eliciting data. Another example is that, after the initial translation, the pilot interview guide was modified and piloted again to ensure participants' understanding and the effectiveness of the questioning. Similarly, the translated FG guide was modified after being piloted and then piloted again before the main FG to ensure the most appropriate translation. Furthermore, as mentioned in Section 3.4.3.5, some data were produced not in Chinese but in English. Some participants tended to switch between English and Chinese, as they felt most comfortable. This indicates that the international educational experience has impacted participants' linguistic diversity, making them comfortable referring to specific terms in different languages naturally. Interview and FG transcriptions were true to their original utterances to preserve the authenticity and comprehensiveness of the data. Participants' original accounts of the interviews excerpts and FG extracts used in this thesis are presented in Appendix G and Appendix I.

As suggested by Holmes et al. (2013, 2022), and Nemouchi and Holmes (2022), employing the researching multilingual approach ensures inclusivity and respect for participants' language and culture, enhances the accuracy of the collected data, and demonstrates a commitment to ethical research practices. Overall, the deliberate use of the researching multilingually approach in the present study is an ethical practice that acknowledges the significance of the participants' and researcher's language and culture, recognises linguistic diversity and fluidity, promotes inclusivity and respect, and improves the trustworthiness of the research.

3.8 Limitations

Despite the researcher's best effort in planning and conducting the study, some limitations in the current study need to be addressed, which can assist studies on relevant topics in the future.

First, due to the time constraint, it was unfeasible to implement a longitudinal study design with multiple phases of interviews, which could have generated richer data regarding changes in students' needs and other potential intra-personal development (Hou & McDowell, 2014). In order to compensate this limitation, the current study included two groups of students at different levels of study, i.e., Masters and PhD students, and used a sequential design by conducting FGs with participants from the interviews, thereby providing more than a snapshot of the situation under investigation.

The second limitation lies in my potential bias, which is common in studies where the researcher is close to the research context and familiar with the participants (Bryman, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2016). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge my strength in taking an emic stance with the insider knowledge while also acknowledging my lack of knowledge in certain communities of practice, which might hinder the exploration of those disciplinary contexts and students' social lives, as suggested by Liamputtong (2010). Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted with students from 10 different schools in this study to cover a breadth of students. My experience conducting more than 30 interviews in the PTAS projects also helped deepen my understanding of Chinese postgraduate students' experiences at UoE. Thirdly, it is suggested by some researchers that a moderator or note taker is desired for FGs to make sure all the things said by the participants are kept correctly (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In this study, I acted both as the moderator and the note taker, but primarily focused on moderating the discussions. The benefits of such an arrangement, such as minimising the power difference between the researcher and participants, were explained in Section 3.4.4.3. FG discussions were video recorded to capture and store the original information so that an additional note taker was not necessary.

Regarding the size of the study, a total of 23 students participated in the study. Some might argue that more participants could have been better, as qualitative studies are often questioned for lacking generalisability (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Nevertheless, Yin (2014) distinguishes statistical generalisation from analytic generalisation, with the former aiming for the extrapolation of probabilities, and the latter for theory building – in line with the current study. The current study aimed to reach analytic generalisation rather than statistical generalisability.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter explained the research design of this study in detail. It revisited the research aim and questions, described the research context, explained the rationales and advantages of using a qualitative approach, and explained the sequential design of the research, including the research timeline, specific data collection methods and techniques. This chapter also elaborated on how the current study contributes to the methodological development of conducting FGs with the Thinking Hats technique in an intercultural educational context. Furthermore, it explained the thematic data analysis step by step with the assistance of NVivo, and clarified issues regarding research trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations. The next chapter will present the core results from the interviews.

Chapter 4 Interview Results

Following the previous chapter on theoretical underpinnings, data collection and analysis methods adopted by the current study, Chapter 4 presents the most prominent findings from the interview data in response to the first and second research questions (RQ). This chapter starts with an overview of the interview analysis by presenting two thematic frameworks drawn from interviews which aim to address RQ1 and RQ2, respectively. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 will illustrate students' various oral participation (OP) needs (RQ1) in detail. Sections 4.4 to 4.7 will elaborate on different types of factors which influence their willingness for oral participation (WFOP) (RQ2). Challenges identified and ideas proposed by the interviewees relevant to addressing students' OP will also be presented. Relevant information about the interviewees can be found in Appendix F, and interviewees' original accounts in Chinese are presented in Appendix G.

4.1 Overview of interview analysis

20 main interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analysed by adopting the thematic analysis approach, as explained in Section 3.5.1. A set of codes was proposed as the primary basis of the thematic frameworks based on the interview data analysis. As shown in Table 4.1 and 4.2, six salient themes emerged, including various sub-themes, which will be analysed individually in the following sections.

Table 4.1

Thematic Framework Based on Interview Analysis to Address RQ1

No.	Themes	Subthemes
1	Academic oral participation needs	1.1. Oral presentation – speaking without interaction
		1.2. Oral participation requirement in disguise
		1.3. Differences in disciplinary requirements
2	Socio-personal oral participation needs	2.1. Communication at part-time work
		2.2. A lack of needs for oral participation
		2.3. Misbelief in the improvement of oral English

Table 4.2

Thematic Framework Based on Interview Analysis to Address RQ2

1	Linguistic factors – “Doing”	1.1. Struggle with specific speaking skills
		1.1.1 Vocabulary and expressions
		1.1.2 Organisational skills
		1.1.3 Pronunciation
		1.2. Development of overall speaking ability
		1.3. Development of listening comprehension
		1.4. Retrospective views on the IELTS exam
2	Cognitive factors – “Knowing”	2.1. Academic knowledge and competence
		2.2. Non-academic knowledge
		2.2.1 Unfamiliar topics
		2.2.2 Familiar topics
3	Psychological factors – “Feeling”	3.1. Less motivated to improve spoken English
		3.2. More relaxed attitude towards speaking English
		3.3. Diverse and dynamic WFOP
		3.3.1 Perceptions on English-speaking ability
		3.3.2 Interests and oral participation
		3.3.3 Personalities and oral participation
		3.4. Reticence – unwillingness to participate
		3.5. Experience-influenced WFOP
		3.5.1 Virtuous cycle of oral participation
		3.5.2 Vicious cycle of oral participation
4	Social-contextual factors	4.1. Power relations between interlocutors
		4.1.1 Interlocutors’ ethnolinguistic identities
		4.1.2 Dynamic interlocutor relations
		4.2. Communicative settings
		4.3. Exposure to an English-speaking environment
		4.3.1 Institutional constraints
		4.3.2 Student accommodation

Before moving on to the specific themes, it is worth pointing out an overarching theme emerging from the interviews. Although OP had little to do with academic performance for some, it seemed to hold a positive correlation with students' overall overseas experience. It is also worth highlighting that although obtaining a degree certificate was the most direct outcome of students' sojourns, successful graduation did not seem to be a concerning issue for most students, but the "quality" of the overseas experience was.

Data showed a unanimous agreement that little OP was required to pass the basic requirement for obtaining a postgraduate degree, particularly for some programmes in the College of Science and Engineering. On the other hand, all participants stated the importance of OP in order to achieve a satisfactory intercultural experience. It was evident that even though OP was not essential in many areas of students' everyday life, sufficient OP in both academic and socio-personal domains was a desirable component of their overseas experience. As Tian (Edu., PhD) stated, *"If you don't have rich experience speaking with non-Chinese people when you are here, then what's the point of studying abroad?"* This overall positive correlation between OP and quality experience abroad seemed to stem from students' expected engagement in the international context in the UK and their expected enhancement in English communication ability. Moreover, some students considered OP a key component in developing their overall package. As Jinjin (Lit., PGT) commented:

I think oral participation not only improves your language ability, but also enhances your interpersonal communication skills as a whole.

Furthermore, despite the challenges some students experienced, all participants seemed to highly value the experience of English oral communication and the general international atmosphere at the university. The only four participants who expressed a strong sense of disappointment and were somewhat dissatisfied with the overall sojourns were P1, P5, P13 and P15, all of whom were Masters students. Both P1 Xiao (Edu., PGT) and P13 Yong (Eng., PGT) were from the most Chinese-dominant programmes, and their dissatisfaction was mostly due to the overly Chinese environment in their surroundings. Unlike them, P15 Xin's (Info., PGT)

complaint was mostly regarding the lack of a stable class environment in her programme which caused her to lack a sense of belonging throughout her study. P5 Tang's (Law, PGT) problem was rooted in the unhappiness with her academic competence, which led to constant stress and little time for leisure activities. Despite the general satisfaction, there was a sense amongst the interviewees that more authentic and meaningful communication and more opportunities to develop one's intercultural competence (IC) would be greatly appreciated. However, based on the reoccurring responses such as *"Improving English speaking skills is not my priority because I spend more time on reading and writing"* and *"I don't have the constant motivation to engage in English communication"*, OP seemed to be an overlooked aspect in many students' overseas study journeys.

Sections 4.2 and 4.3 will focus on the two types of OP needs, and each subsection will present the prominent themes that emerged from the data.

4.2 Academic oral participation needs

As shown in Table 4.1, two themes emerged in relation to RQ1 regarding the purposes of OP, i.e., academic OP needs and socio-personal OP needs, both of which were identified in every single interview. Three sub-themes of academic OP needs will be explained in the following sections.

4.2.1 Oral presentation – speaking without interaction

Data showed that almost all participants (except P9 and P13) gave at least one academic presentation during their studies at the UoE. One recurring theme from the interviews was that students perceived doing oral presentations as delivering written reports verbally, with a lack of the interactive element, which was different from their expectation. It was particularly the case for the Masters students. They explained that if a presentation was assessed, they would usually prepare in advance, often by writing down the entire script and practicing the script many times until they could almost memorise it. As Xiao (Edu., PGT) stated the following:

Presentations are rather easy. It's similar to preparing for the IELTS speaking test. You just need to prepare your script and practise what you will say until you can say it fluently. Then you just need to go up there and speak for a few minutes.

“Speaking without interaction” was a typical case for Xiao because although she had group work, she was in a Chinese-dominant programme, and all of her group members were also Chinese. As a result, there was little requirement to speak English for her to interact with her peers.

Giving oral presentations can be a new experience for most Chinese students, as it is not a typical pedagogical practice in China. Sheng (Geo., PGT) explained that she was nervous about speaking in public at first because doing a presentation was a new form of task for her. However, she soon found out it was different from what she had expected, *“It's not very interactive so it's like a verbal report, actually easier than writing a paper because you need to use more complex words when you write.”* In addition, even though sometimes there were Q&A sessions at the end of presentations, questions were often addressed to the entire group, and any group member who was good at speaking could take the lead and answer the questions, hence taking the burden off other students.

In addition, students seemed to treat presentations as a form of assessment rather than an opportunity to present one's knowledge and skills to an audience face-to-face. As Tangdou (Law, PGT) commented, *“We have presentations, but they are not important because they are not graded.”* Another example was when Xin (Info., PGT) felt somewhat tricked when she realised that the presentation she had prepared for was not assessed:

I'm sure it was not graded because the teacher was just standing there like he did not even take notes. He just asked us several questions after the presentation, and that was it. The student who had not participated in the group work did not show up for the presentation, and the teacher did not even ask who it was! I'm speechless. Unbelievable!

In comparison, PhD students seemed to hold a more research-focused attitude towards presentations, in that they viewed them to be opportunities to talk about

research and get constructive feedback to better their research. For instance, Hong (Eng., PhD) made the following remark, demonstrating his own transition from an undergraduate student to a PhD student at the same university.

I like to do presentations now, although I was nervous in the beginning. As a PhD student, you are doing the presentations to get people's advice, so that you can do your research better, and I think being able to explain your ideas is also part of your ability as a researcher. I don't like to rely too much on scripts nowadays. I would prefer not to use any if I can, so I look more natural when I speak.

Oral presentations are often seen as a direct form of OP in the academic context. In contrast, other forms of OP may be more important and challenging but rather “indirect” and therefore often overlooked. The following sections will shift the focus to these forms of communication.

4.2.2 Oral participation requirement in disguise

The second pattern emerging from the interviews was that OP might play a vital role in one's success in group work and projects which required much collaborative work, but the importance of OP was often neglected since it was not assessed directly. Data showed that many Masters students (except P5 and P13) participated in group work that required English oral communication. The following quote from Yoyo (ECA, PGT), a film directing student, clearly illustrated the importance of successful OP to her academic performance.

We need to produce some short films for course work, and the teacher only grades the films in the end. But during the filmmaking process, communication with other group members is crucial because we are working in a team, and I am the director. This means the whole team, including the actors, cameramen, and others must follow my direction. It is particularly challenging to make documentaries because the perfect scene usually only appears once, for a short time, and then it's gone. So, if you cannot communicate with others clearly and efficiently, you will just miss the moment.

Yoyo's experience indicated that even though OP in group work or project collaboration may not be graded directly, it might still greatly influence the result of a task. She also shared a counter-example of a classmate who had to introduce another Chinese student with better speaking skills to join them to facilitate collaboration:

He had problems communicating with his group, and in the end, they had to ask another Chinese student, a cameraman, who could speak English better to join them, so that they could function as a team. It's very awkward when the whole team is waiting for your direction, but you can't express yourself clearly.

This finding was echoed by Han (ECA, PhD) in the same school, who also experienced similar intensive needs for OP in order to accomplish his tasks:

I do a lot of website design for clients. Some people might think that I just design, like drawing pictures or using some software. But the thing is, you have to communicate well with the clients about what they want, find out their needs and meet their requirements before and during of the designing process. It's not just about designing, but also about working together with people.

Furthermore, Han pointed out that some Chinese students he tutored had brilliant ideas behind their designs. However, they experienced much trouble when trying to explain their ideas verbally in the one-on-one communication with the lecturer, which made the lecturer question them more to find out whether it was really their own design. "I felt very bad for them. Their grades would have been higher if they could have spoken English better." said Han.

Such experience was also shared by Dai (Biz., PhD), who consulted companies regularly for her research. Other students, particularly the PhD students, also discussed the importance of OP in supervision meetings and group meetings as collaborations towards accomplishing academic tasks. Chang (Geo., PhD) talked about his struggle to communicate with his supervisors:

My communication with my supervisors is not as efficient as I hoped, so I feel like it's been a problem for my thesis writing. For non-native English speakers like us, I think something is often lost in communication, and you can't explain yourself one hundred percent.

In addition to the frequent student-supervisor communication, Wendi (Chem., PGTR) added the student-student communication in her research environment:

Sometimes I need to work with other people in the lab on the same experiment, and it's very important that we have smooth communication. Otherwise, even something dangerous could happen.

These student experiences demonstrated that although their OP might not be assessed directly or needed for the final presentation of their academic work, it could be a valuable part and critical element to their academic success.

Another mismatch between students' expectations and reality often mentioned in the interviews was (not) knowing when to speak in academic settings such as lectures, seminars, tutorials, and workshops, although some were only particular for specific disciplines. This mismatch led to students' uncertainty of when and where to initiate communication, hence the lack of OP in some contexts, as Xiao (Edu., PGT) stated:

At first, I had no idea what exactly the difference was between a lecture, a tutorial, a workshop, and a seminar. The meanings of these words are very similar in Chinese. I was really confused for a while until I got a grasp of it because a lesson is just a lesson in China. So, I'm not always clear about what we are expected to do in a classroom here.

Xiao was certainly not alone in not being able to match such cultural references between the Chinese and British education systems. Similarly, Jinjin (LLC, PGT) made the following comment:

Some teachers told us about their office hours when we could go and ask questions in person, but some did not. So, I don't know if I should ask questions in class or wait until the class is over. Asking questions in class is not that common in China. We usually ask after class if we have any questions. But the teachers here are sometimes nowhere to be found once the class is over.

Therefore, it seems necessary for the course organisers to establish the communication norms at the beginning of the classes, so that students have a clear understanding of when and where they could and were expected to initiate or engage in oral communication.

4.2.3 Differences in disciplinary requirements

Another theme that recurred throughout the interviews was that different disciplines had different requirements for OP and offered different communicative opportunities for students. 13 participants from the main interviews mentioned their OP in relation to the specific nature of their disciplines, and certain academic contexts were subject-specific, such as “clinics” in ECA and “practical” in Geosciences. As illustrated in the above section, both Yoyo (ECA, PGT) and Han (ECA, PhD) discussed the importance of oral communication for their studies and research in the field of arts and design, where assignments were often in the form of projects which required collaboration and negotiation. Similar comments were made by Meiyi (Biz., PGT) and Dai (Biz., PhD) from Business School. Meiyi provided two examples to demonstrate how their course assignments involved frequent oral communication:

We had a group project last semester, and we often needed to Skype with clients in Colombia to make business plans. Our final presentation also included a Skype meeting. We are working with local clients this semester, so we have regular meetings, and they will come to our final presentations.

As students of law, Tangdou (Law, PGT) and Wen (Law, PhD) both discussed the importance of engaging in verbal communication in their programmes, particularly in the seminar-style classroom setting. Furthermore, some students pointed out that the forms of assessment regarding whether speaking was required could shape students’ perceptions of the importance of OP. A lack of requirement on speaking might be a clue for its perceived unimportance. This can also be supported by the counterevidence of students’ active participation to gain the participation grade. As reported by Wen, students were very active in classroom participation when it was graded, regardless of the quality of the contribution.

On the other hand, some students had different experiences. For instance, computer language and visual aids seemed to be the most prevalent in informatics and computer science. Chen (Info., PhD) explained the uniqueness of how communication is in his field:

The language of coding is universally understood. It's the same as what we would use in China. In my area, we communicate with mathematical formulae and computer graphics most effectively. So, actually, there is not a high requirement for high English proficiency, especially oral English.

In the same light, Chang (Geo., PhD) commented on the “international” nature of geoscience and stated that half of the content in his field was delivered through images, models, and graphs. Similarly, Wendi (Chem., PGTR) and Shuai (Chem., PhD) both described the subject of chemistry as an “international language” in itself. Moreover, different programmes required different workstyles, ways of communication, and types of assessments, and they also provided different opportunities for their students. This prominent difference was also noticeable not only between the two Colleges, but also between the Masters students and PhD students in the same school.

It was evident from the data that students engaged in English OP for various communicative purposes academically. Although there seemed to be some general patterns of the forms of assessment in different disciplines, such as exams and reports in the College of Science and Engineering, and essays and presentations in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, the actual forms of assessment also depended on other factors such as teachers’ styles and preferences. In addition, there were also different types of tasks between different courses and programmes within the same school, so it is important not to paint them with the same brush.

4.3 Socio-personal oral participation needs

In addition to OP for academic needs, data showed very different patterns between students' OP for socio-personal needs, ranging from very frequent participation to next to zero engagement. The following sections first present a common purpose for OP in students’ socio-personal lives, and then move on to the issue of lacking OP as compared to their expectation prior to arrival.

4.3.1 Communication at part-time work

Although all of the interview participants said they wanted to take on part-time jobs, not all managed to have such an experience. Only four Masters students had part-time work, with the unexpected heavy workload being the main reason stopping them from seeking work off-campus. Meanwhile, seven PhD students had part-time work, which required a certain level of English communication. Some PhD students had also taken up different types of work at different stages during their studies. Data suggested students had various motivations to take part-time work, such as experience-oriented, financially motivated, or academically motivated.

Some students chose to take on voluntary work that they were interested in and hoped to gain some intercultural experience, which led to some degree of engagement in oral communication. For instance, Hou (SPS, PGT) chose to volunteer in a fund-raising team for Age Scotland, a local charity. She explained that she opted in because she wanted to have opportunities to interact with local people. Although her job mostly only involved helping around the office, she was delighted to be able to see a local workplace, communicate with non-students, and go into stores to explain the purpose of Age Scotland.

Last week, my supervisor asked me to go to some local shops to ask them if we could leave our cans there for fundraising. It was a breakthrough for me on the job because I had never been asked to just go and interact with local people. At first, I was quite worried because I wasn't sure if I could clearly explain what I wanted to do. But I think I did pretty well.

Moreover, since experience-oriented work usually involved incentives such as one's interests, students seemed to have more drive to communicate in such an environment. For instance, Shuai (Chem., PhD), who was the main organiser of the International Club in his school, needed to communicate often with university staff and international students to organise and promote their events. Similarly, Chang (Geo., PhD), who volunteered in a non-government organisation named Doctorate Association, talked about his experience communicating with different people at work:

I've had more opportunities to speak English since joining the Doctorate Association. Whenever you need to organise an event, a seminar for example, you need to interact with a lot of different people, such as the speakers and guests, other organisation bodies like our Scottish partners, the city council, EUSA, the catering company, etc., and you also need to deal with some issues and emergencies.

Surprisingly, those who were financially motivated found out that there seemed to be fewer opportunities to improve spoken English when working in shops and restaurants. One reason behind this was that the primary reason for hiring these students was because they were native Chinese speakers, which fit the needs of the workplaces to communicate with the Chinese customers. Yong (Eng., PGT), who worked in a Chinese restaurant, commented:

I work in a Chinese restaurant mostly because I want to make some money off campus, and I don't want to be home alone all the time. It's expensive to live here, and the area where I study and live is too boring... The restaurant also covers my meals when I work there.

He also explained there was not much English communication with the customers, not only because half of the customers were Chinese but also because the “thoughtful” non-Chinese customers would try to make communication easier by pointing at pictures and numbers on the menu. Tangdou (Law, PGT), who worked in another Chinese restaurant, echoed Yong's experience:

You basically don't need to speak English at all because it's not really needed. For example, the foreigners will just tell you that they want number 1 or number 5 on the menu, so it's straightforward, and you don't have to think about it. If you are on the phone, it can be a bit more difficult, but the conversations are just the basic routine.

Similar responses were also found in students who were selling products in the local souvenir shops and working as tour guides for Chinese tourists, which Tangdou described as “repetitive labour”. Again, most of the communication necessary for this type of work seemed very basic and repetitive, often in Chinese, besides the occasional chats with colleagues and customers. Thus, there was not much room for oral English improvement as one might expect.

The third type of work was academically related, such as course tutors, demonstrators, or research assistants, which also generated income. However, it seemed that development in disciplinary knowledge and professional skills was their primary concern. In addition, these jobs were only for PhD students exclusively. Some of the work also required much OP, as Dai (Biz., PhD) commented:

I like to tutor the undergraduate students because I've been learning through the teaching practice, and it is also an excellent chance for me to practise presentation skills. I used to fear doing presentations because I am naturally very shy, and my voice is very soft. But I think I am getting better at it.

Some students, however, had mixed motivations when choosing part-time work, such as the student warden post taken by Zhuang (Lit., PhD) at university accommodation. This job granted him a 75% discount on his accommodation fee and required him to organise events at the residence hall and attend regular meetings. As a result, not only did he save much money on living costs, but he also had many chances to work with students and staff from different countries and cultures and make friends with a large number of students outside his programme. Zhuang was pleased with the job as he said:

I can live in the student accommodation at such a low price, and I can make international friends. I think it's also an excellent opportunity to learn from others and improve my transferable skills.

Regardless of the type of communication and the amount of communication required of the students, one pattern was clear. All participants stated they greatly appreciated the opportunities to speak and practise English in real-life meaningful conversations, which allowed them to practise skills, gain experience and make money simultaneously. This finding also links to the overarching theme of English OP and satisfaction of the overseas journey mentioned in Section 4.1.

4.3.2 A lack of needs for oral participation

One recurrent theme in the interviews was a collective sense that there was a lack of opportunities to speak English. Accessibility to the Chinese community was one of the most important contributing factors. 19 participants stated it was relatively easy for them to find other Chinese students either at school or home. This seemed to reinforce students to stay in their comfort zone, particularly those who were not strongly motivated to engage in English communication. In addition, a few students mentioned the convenience of living abroad nowadays due to the development of technology which requires little OP.

Out of the 20 main participants, six seemed to have little communication in English off campus, and 12 engaged in the moderate OP for various reasons. Only one student Dai (Biz., PhD), who joined a Kyudo society, had regular weekly meetings and follow-up gatherings with the other members of the society. It is worth mentioning that out of the six students who had little OP, four were Masters students. Only a few students said that they had a relatively balanced Chinese and non-Chinese social network, while most reported socialising more with Chinese students. Among the few who socialised with non-Chinese students, they were mostly classmates, colleagues, or flatmates who were not seen as close friends. Therefore, it was clear that their OP in English in these social situations tended to remain superficial. The previous section mentioned that certain part-time jobs that students took also did not provide many chances for oral communication. Data indicated that most participants wanted more regular communicative opportunities since most of their current OP were either irregular or insufficient, and their interaction and overall connection with non-Chinese people remained at a superficial level.

Sufficient evidence in the interviews exemplified students' love-hate mixed feelings about not having to communicate as much as they had expected. On one hand, they clearly expressed appreciation of the comfort that the big Chinese community provided as well as the convenience in life in general, such as Chinese stores and restaurants, together with the various fast developing mobile applications for everyday use, and more means to manage things which did not rely on face-to-

face communication in English. On the other hand, they raised the issues of not having enough opportunities to practise spoken English. For instance, Xiao (Edu., PGT) made the following comment with great frustration:

I don't even dare to tell my parents because my family in China must think I'm speaking English here every day, but my friends and I really think there are only limited opportunities to speak English. Like, if you go to TESCO, you can use the self-checkout, unless you bump into someone, and then you can say "Sorry!"

Zhuang (LLC, PhD) also made a comment on the same issue and gave a range of examples of the convenient lifestyle without needing to speak English:

I think many students can finish their studies without really interacting with any foreigners. It's just really convenient here. If you want to buy something, there are Chinese stores. Even if you go to other stores, you don't really interact with anyone anyway. Maybe they just ask, "Do you need a bag?" If you want to get a haircut, you can go to a Chinese barber. If you want to eat out, you can go to a Chinese restaurant. Some students just hang out with other Chinese students. After all, there are a lot of Chinese people in Edinburgh.

To summarise, it seems that the growing Chinese community in the university and Edinburgh, coupled with modern technology and more convenient services, have made it very easy for Chinese students to live in the city without much English communication, which led to a general sense of lacking OP as compared to what they had expected.

4.3.3 Misbelief in the improvement of oral English

Another subtheme also came up following the discussion of the previous theme. 14 students talked about the same “myth-busting” experience during their study in the UK. The “myth” here refers to the general belief held among Chinese people that once you have studied and lived in an English-speaking country for some time, your English proficiency, particularly spoken English, will automatically improve significantly. However, based on the 14 students’ own experience and

observation of people around them, they discredited such a correlation which people seemed to assume in China.

Dai (Biz., PhD) pointed out her reading ability had highly improved since she started her PhD, whereas in terms of speaking, she said, “*In comparison, my English-speaking skill hasn’t changed that much.*” Wen (Law, PhD) suggested the large Chinese community was a major factor for some students’ lack of OP in English, as explained in the previous section. She also pointed out individual differences among students:

My classmates and parents in China usually think that if you’ve studied abroad, your English will be excellent by the time you go back. But I think it’s a misunderstanding because it totally depends on the individuals. For example, some Chinese students in the UK only socialise with other Chinese people, and they speak Chinese way more than English here.

Concurring with Wen, other students also mentioned the common belief in one’s spoken English development and how the reality did not match their expectations. Hou (SPS, PGT) said:

I’ve been warning my friends in China who want to study abroad, especially in the UK, that they must think carefully and prepare well before doing so. Because you may find the programme much harder than you’ve expected, and you won’t have time to go out and explore the local culture. You will also find out that your English may not improve as much as you hope or as fast as you want.

Besides the large Chinese community comfort zone, more than half of the interviewees suggested that Chinese students and some other Asian students tended to have a general reservation when socialising with other cultural groups, especially in initiating communication with non-Chinese people. Moreover, Xin (Info., PGT) pointed out that Chinese students’ lacked the initiatives and learning autonomy when direct incentives were not provided:

No matter how busy you are, there must be some time for you to socialise if you want, but I think many Chinese students may feel that it is not necessary. More importantly, Chinese people are usually shyer and less active compared to Westerners. So, unless you are

pushing them to do something, they probably will not take the initiative to do it, especially when there is no instant gain.

As shown in the evidence presented, participants' similar experiences and observations revealed a mismatch between their expectations and reality regarding the improvement of their spoken English ability during studying in the UK. This calls for better practices for preparing prospective students, particularly in setting up appropriate expectations with regard to their use of English.

4.4 Linguistic factors – “Doing”

The following four sections will address RQ2 through the linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and social-contextual lenses. The thematic framework on these four types of factors was presented in Table 4.2.

The current investigation centred on students' OP through a process where the English language is the means for communication. Students' language ability was discussed extensively during the interviews in relation to their OP. Thus, relevant themes will be presented first. Overall, data suggested that students' oral skills – listening and speaking skills were much more relevant to their OP than their literacy skills – reading and writing skills.

4.4.1 Struggle with specific speaking skills

4.4.1.1 Vocabulary and expressions

The accuracy, appropriateness, and diversity of vocabulary and expressions were identified as some of the major struggles students faced, which hindered their OP. It was evident that the interviewees had a common desire to expand their English vocabulary for both academic and general purposes. More importantly, a mismatch between what students knew and what they could actually say was discovered, in that simply understanding the words in English did not mean knowing how to use them

effectively and appropriately in real communication. Despite their rich lexical recourses, many self-criticised the simplicity of their own choices of words when speaking, which was preferred to keep up with the conversations and therefore, they tended to focus more on delivering the key messages while sacrificing the complexity and diversity of word choices. For instance, Sheng (Geo., PGT) made the comment below:

I feel like I'm using most of the vocabulary I learned before university. My writing has improved significantly, but somehow the words I use in spoken English are still very simple and plain.

The habit of using such “plain” vocabulary was also echoed by other participants, which seemed to lead to some frustration. Shuai (Chem., PhD) stated:

When I talk about my negative emotions, I always use words like “unhappy” and “upset”, but they sound quite “low”. I mean, I do know better words like “frustrated” and “anxious”, but I don't seem to say those words when I am having a conversation in English.

In addition, some students reported the gap between knowing different English phrases and expressions but not being able to think of idiomatic and colloquial expressions, or having quick access to formulaic language when speaking. Yoyo (ECA, PGT), for instance, habitually resorted to direct translation:

The way I speak English is very similar to how I speak Chinese. When my friends say things like “No way” or “That's crazy”, I totally understand them. But I don't know why whenever it's my turn, I can only think of “I don't believe you,” which is not very native-like.

Yoyo was not alone in feeling frustrated by not being able to sound more idiomatic. Sheng (Geo., PGT) shared similar experience:

Sometimes after I've said something, I then realised I could have used a better phrase, but I always seem to speak intuitively in a way that is more similar to Chinese. I remember I once told my group member, “I don't want to disappoint you”. Then the other day, I heard “I won't let you down”, and I was like, why didn't I think of using this phrase? It's so much more native-like.

Possible reasons for such problems were suggested by participants, including grammar translation as a learning strategy, over reliance on Chinese subtitles, and

limited experience of engagement in authentic English communication, which might be a result of the imbalanced English language education in China on the development of different linguistic skills. Moreover, many participants pointed out the difference between speaking and writing, in that writing allows the time and freedom to check the use of language. In contrast, speaking relies more on immediate response and there is less cognitive processing time, hence presenting more challenges for students. However, although most participants showed awareness of their current issues with vocabulary and expressions and stated a desire for improvement, only a few students (P17 Sheng, P18 Chang, and P20 Shuai) seemed to have made an effort to work on it consciously and continuously.

4.4.1.2 Organisational skills

Another aspect of linguistic competence discussed extensively during the interviews was organisational skills, such as fluency, grammar and sentence structure, transition between English and Chinese, and immediate response. This is also the aspect that students seemed to have developed the most, compared to areas such as vocabulary and pronunciation.

As briefly mentioned above, direct translation was a phenomenon many students related to, where they tended to express their thoughts by translating them from Chinese to English directly, sometimes even word by word. This might be a result of the grammar-translation method of learning English as a habit or due to a lack of experience in English communication. Moreover, given the time pressure in oral communication, where verbal exchanges are expected to happen immediately, it could be rather difficult to give well-thought and fast responses in English. Consequently, some students went for the plain and old-fashioned direct translation, which sometimes did not work, as in the example provided by Yoyo's (ECA, PGT):

One day, I was waiting for my friend outside, and a classmate was passing by. She was very friendly and asked me about the progress of the film I was directing. Honestly, I didn't even think twice, like, I just wanted her to know it was going okay and there was nothing to worry about. So, I said, "It is okay. You can go now." I felt very wrong

immediately after I said it. She gave me a strange look. I knew it sounded rude, but I was trying to tell her it was going well. It would sound perfectly normal and much nicer in Chinese.

This incident demonstrates very well how direct translation can be inappropriate or embarrassing, and how intercultural communication can break down when one speaker does not share the cultural knowledge of another speaker. Yoyo was correct in that the direct translation of what she said would have made sense in Chinese in this context. “You can go now” (你好走了) is acceptable among Chinese friends because it can be interpreted as “I got this, mate”, which indicates things are going well. It can be used when reassuring or comforting someone that you are confident in dealing with a situation rather than trying to get rid of them or asking them to leave immediately. Yoyo’s “rudeness” in Chinese would act as an in-group marker, indicating her good relationship with the classmate. Nevertheless, that would require a mutual understanding of the Chinese language and culture. Unfortunately, this meaning was clearly lost in translation. This example illustrated the issues of pragmatics and what more than half of the participants referred to as a “way of thinking” when talking about their English OP experience. Jinjin (Lit., PGT) pointed out that although she paid attention to the different ways of thinking between Chinese and English, speaking was much more challenging than writing, not only because it does not allow sufficient time to think, but also for limited access to additional tools such as the internet and dictionaries.

Another point worth noting is students’ concern about grammar. Given the extensive grammar-focused exercise in English education in China, none of the students seemed particularly keen on grammar, but they also felt constrained by grammar rules in spoken English. Wen (Law, PhD) said,

When I speak English, especially when I first came here, I can't help myself but worry about if I'm making grammatical mistakes. It's like a post-exam disorder.

It is speculated that this kind of worry can also lead to students’ being self-critical and overthinking when they are trying to engage in English communication.

But, gladly, like Wen, most participants became more relaxed with grammar over time.

The problems identified in these two sections suggested that many students lacked lexical recourses and sufficient organisational skills, which hindered their ability to synchronise their thoughts and words. This further suggests the need for students to develop pragmatic competence in oral communication.

4.4.1.3 Pronunciation

One area of improvement that students desired to improve was pronunciation in spoken English, and many interviewees were concerned about their accents in spoken English. For instance, Shuai (Chem., PhD) was very aware of his poor pronunciation at the beginning of his PhD, which he believed was due to the poor English educational resources in his hometown.

I didn't have a very good English foundation, especially my spoken English. Unlike those who grew up in the big cities, I grew up in a village. I never watched any English shows until maybe university. I learnt English from my teachers, but they were not very good, and their oral English was very weak. They spoke with a very strong Chinese accent, and some words were pronounced wrong when I learnt the first time. The ability of English teachers in small cities is a real and serious problem.

Wen's (Law, PhD) strong accent was pointed out by others when she first came to the UK for her Masters study, which made her somewhat self-conscious in this regard.

I was told once by a foreigner that I had a distinctive Cantonese accent, which made me more aware of my oral English. Sometimes I am afraid that others don't understand me because of my accent. So yeah, I try to pay attention to it.

However, although some students said that pronunciation was a big obstacle at first, it was a stress point predominantly coming from themselves. It was the fear that someone else might not understand them and they might make a fool of

themselves in public, hence losing face. However, such a worry gradually declined over time, as they became more exposed to a variety of accents, especially when they realised that speaking English fluently with a so-called standard accent was not a necessity for academic excellence. For instance, as Wen continued,

Your pronunciation is not the most important thing in communication. People here speak with all kinds of accents, people from abroad, as well as British people. So, I think maybe they are not that judgemental, and they are used to different accents. When you are talking about your research or just sharing your thoughts in general, it's less about how well you speak English but more about what you are saying.

Nevertheless, it is interesting that although some students expressed the concern of having poor pronunciation, which might hinder successful communication, data showed little evidence of their persistent effort to improve pronunciation during their studies in the UK.

4.4.2 Development of overall speaking ability

This theme captured participants' self-evaluated improvement of their overall speaking ability over time. Although 16 participants described their speaking ability as less than satisfactory and had relatively low confidence in their spoken English in general, data suggested an overall positive development regarding their speaking ability during their studies in the UK. The reason for this somewhat contradictory finding could lie in the high expectation of students, as mentioned in Section 4.3.3, as well as different understandings of what speaking ability entails. English-speaking ability here loosely refers to the overall linguistic, psychological and (socio-)strategic aspects when someone speaks English, while the interpretation mentioned above appeared to have a narrow focus on linguistic skills, such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

When commenting on their English-speaking ability, most participants referred to their IELTS speaking score as an indicator. For instance, Huang (SPS, PhD) used her IELTS score attained three years ago and said:

I haven't taken an IELTS exam lately, so it's just based on my own perception. I think my English has improved, like, I can feel it. But there is nothing tangible like a new test result to prove it.

However, some students seemed uncertain about their development due to a lack of measurement for assessing speaking ability and a lack of reflection on this issue. Yoyo's (ECA, PGT) made a somewhat self-contradictory comment:

I don't think my speaking skill has improved much. But, well, I do think I am getting used to speaking to foreigners, so it's getting easier to some extent. But I can't really point out which area I've improved exactly at this very moment.

Several indicators emerged in the interviews, which suggested students' development in spoken English. First, improvement in fluency was the most common indicator, which was mentioned by 13 interviewees, and it is in line with the more relaxed attitude towards speaking (to be explained in Section 4.6.2). Second, there was an improvement in the speed of response and development in the cognitive process of organising thoughts into English. Seven participants reported the initial habit of translating everything they heard into Chinese and translating their thoughts into English, but all of them commented that they started to move away from this practice, which led to their quicker and more fluent response in English. Furthermore, many participants shared changes not only in their behaviours but also in their emotions. Meiyi (Biz., PGT) explained how she realised her improvement:

When I first came here, my speaking was really terrible. But after just less than a year, I can now communicate in English more naturally and comfortably. I am no longer anxious or afraid. I used to just listen to others, but now I also talk to them, and they will also speak more to me. Overall, I definitely feel more involved in English conversations.

Interestingly, Sheng (Geo., PGT) and Shuai (Chem., PhD) mentioned that while they were unaware of their own improvement, it was their peers who pointed out such changes, as Sheng said:

One of my foreign classmates told me, "I think your English is much better this semester. Have you noticed that?" I said I hadn't. But he told me that he thinks my speaking is much more fluent, and I use words more precisely and appropriately. Maybe he had noticed I used to say words that were not very suitable for some contexts.

Furthermore, one's speaking ability may be developing along with other skills and competence, experience, and confidence, as well as a person's overall growth, but such changes and development may not be directly reflected in their oral communication competence. This will be further explained in Section 4.5. In addition, data also suggested that students had employed a range of sociolinguistic strategies, particularly the compensatory communicative strategies, such as circumlocution, approximation, and using all-purpose words. These sociolinguistic skills, which fit within the broader model of CC (see Section 2.2.4), were cultivated mostly based on their individual experience rather than formally learnt at school.

However, there were two outliers, Xiao (Edu., PGT) and Yong (Eng., PGT), who "complained" about having made little improvement in their speaking ability. Both of them were from the most Chinese-dominant programmes. They reported that the overall unnecessary of speaking English in their daily lives made them question if their speaking skills were even worse than before arrival. Both of them adopted a very exam-oriented approach to preparing for the IELTS speaking test, which according to them, was not put into use since they started their studies in the UK.

4.4.3 Development of listening comprehension

Besides speaking, participants also discussed listening skills extensively, which was described as the "first step in oral communication". One main concern regarding listening was understanding various accents. 11 participants reported having problems understanding the accents of people from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Nevertheless, most of them described it as only part of the initial transition period, and they were able to adjust to different accents relatively successfully as they progressed to the second semester. Xin (Info., PGT) explained that this unfamiliarity was most likely due to a lack of exposure to the varieties of English when she was learning English in China:

I've basically only heard the standard British English and American English, as well as speaking English with a Chinese accent. So, I haven't really heard any authentic English spoken with other accents.

Oh, I've heard some Australian English during the IELTS exam preparation. So, it felt quite odd to listen to other accents at first.

Evidence showed that not only did students like Xin adjust to the various English accents, but they also found strategies that enabled them to understand much better, such as summarising the features of certain accents. Like Xin, 11 students (mostly Masters students) said that they realised how little they had heard non-native English speakers (NNEs) from different countries speaking prior to coming to the UK.

Another emerging subtheme was the discovery of non-standard accents held by the so-called native English speakers (NESs). The only participant who had regular contact with local British students, Wendi (Chem., PGTR), pointed out differences among her British colleagues from different regions within the UK. She found it particularly difficult to understand her colleagues from York and Liverpool. Naturally, it would be wrong to overgeneralise an accent of a region based on interactions with one person, but this theme of local English speakers' diverse accents also echoed other students' experiences, as Huang (SPS, PhD) stated:

When we watch English TV shows in China, we always watch the prepared and trained actors' English, but maybe it's not that common. Like, I watch Downton Abbey, and they all talk very clearly and elegantly, at least the upstairs people. But in reality, many people don't talk like that.

In addition, Hong (Eng., PhD) related this diversity to the variety of the Chinese language:

I think the local accent here is really hard to understand at first, but now it's easier. Actually, I don't really communicate with Scottish people very often. But I mean, I am from China, and in China, you know, we also have many Chinese dialects, so it's normal for English, too. It's just the Scottish accent is so different, ha-ha. When my friends who study in London came here for a visit, they didn't understand the restaurant staff at all. It was very funny. And even in London, they told me very few people around them speak like those people on TV.

For some, finding out their listening skill in real-life communication was a "reality check" experience. Yoyo (ECA, PGT) pointed out that her inability to

understand others significantly hindered her ability to participate in the discussions in class, and it was a major setback for her, which crashed her initial confidence:

I didn't realise that I was so dependent on subtitles before coming to the UK. Our teachers often play films and ask us to discuss the films in class, and usually, there aren't subtitles. I think it impedes my understanding because I often cannot get the main point immediately without the subtitles. If they play films from non-English speaking countries with English subtitles, then I am super happy. I'm terrified without subtitles because I feel like I'm half guessing most of the time.

Similar comments about the over-reliance on subtitles were also made by Chen (Info., PhD):

I got a membership card at the cinema because I like to see movies. But unfortunately, there aren't subtitles. I like the action effects, but I feel that I missed some of the storylines every time and, of course, jokes and slang, too. So sometimes I will watch them again at home with subtitles.

Although the issue of having trouble understanding different accents was brought up by half of the participants, it did not appear to be a long-lasting problem. The good news is that more than half of the participants thought their listening comprehension improved during their experience in the UK. A key indicator was the noticeable transition from needing to pay full attention in listening to a more relaxed manner in listening, and perhaps being able to not only follow the communication but also join in the conversations. Han (ECA, PhD) shared the moment how he found out that his listening clearly improved after spending three years in the UK:

I saved some IELTS listening materials on my phone when I was preparing for the exam. One day, when I was freeing up space on my phone, I pressed the play button, and I thought, wow, the speakers spoke so slowly and clearly with such a standard accent! When I was taking the exam three years ago, I thought they were speaking very fast on the tape, and I found the exam quite difficult. Now I think they speak so slowly that feels unnatural.

Han's realisation was a great example of using the same material to evaluate and prove students' development in listening comprehension. The next section turns to a theme specifically on the IELTS exam that all the participants needed to take as a key requirement for enrolling in postgraduate programmes in the UK.

4.4.4 Retrospective views on the IELTS exam

Although the interviewee cohort had very different IELTS scores and different experiences of taking the IELTS exams, they held very similar views on some issues regarding IELTS.

Firstly, every interviewee agreed upon the importance of having an English proficiency exam as a requirement for their respective programme. Besides seeing the IELTS exam as an essential gatekeeper, they held the consensus that having the IELTS exam was not to select students with high proficiency in English but to avoid recruiting students whose English was not good enough. Five interviewees also pointed out that this was actually in the best interest of the students themselves, e.g., Meiyi (Biz., PGT) commented:

I don't think IELTS shows your English competence accurately, but I think if you are good enough, you will meet the language requirement without much difficulty. If you can't even meet the IELTS requirement, I don't think you can do well here. You will definitely struggle a lot.

Han (ECA, PhD) also made a similar remark, pointing out that such language requirements provided prospective students with motivations and potential contexts for using the English language in their future studies overseas.

First of all, you need to prove you have the capability to study in the UK, and your IELTS score is one way to demonstrate your ability. I think it's very important, without which many people have no idea what they will be facing. At least IELTS gives you a basic idea of the level of difficulty in the language area.

Another agreement that all the students also reached was that there was no precise positive correlation between IELTS scores and one's actual English proficiency. Huang (SPS, PhD) made the following comment:

I think IELTS as an exam can evaluate students' English competence to some extent, but of course, it's not perfect. For instance, it doesn't reflect a lot of the daily communication we have here, and I know some native English speakers can't get very high scores on the IELTS exam. There are problems with these exams, but I think they make sense maybe on a large scale.

In accordance with Huang, Wen (Law, PhD) also referred to her supervisor, who held similar views that IELTS has limited predictability in students' academic success:

My supervisor told me that the IELTS score is just to prove that you English is good enough to study here. Of course, the higher, the better, but a high score doesn't mean that your academic ability is strong.

In short, there was a common view among students that a satisfying IELTS result should not be overrated in relation to one's academic performance in the UK, but it is essential for quality assurance and providing the incentives for students to develop their English language ability.

Secondly, 12 students highlighted Chinese students' exam-oriented attitude and learning approach towards the IELTS exams. Therefore, the IELTS exam preparation classes were criticised for training one's test-taking skills rather than developing overall language competence. Interestingly, more than half of the main interviewees had taken such lessons. Jinjin (Lit., PGT) talked about her experience:

Since IELTS is an exam, there are certain strategies for scoring higher. A good teacher in the IELTS preparation class can teach you those strategies.

Agreeing with Jinjin, Xin (Info., PGT) also learnt quite a few strategies to help her score an 8.0 in the reading section, but she soon found out that she was not a "real 8.0" when it came to the reading materials in her programme:

I'm just really good at taking the exam, especially the reading section, but it doesn't reflect my real ability. I am just skilled at finding the clues and answering the questions. But even if I get all the answers correct, it doesn't mean I understand what the article really is about.

A relatively extreme case of the washback effect was seen in Yong (Eng., PGT), who had recited more than 50 scripts in response to the topics in the IELTS speaking test:

I was so familiar with the topics in the IELTS database that I could just fluently recite a whole script for any topic that I got. But when I was taking the exam, I had to pause and pretend that I was thinking.

Xiao (Edu., PGT) also had almost identical methods to prepare specific answers for topics in the “database” prior to the exam. Moreover, she also had worked as an IELTS teacher in China previously, passing on the test-taking strategies to other students. Such an approach is similar to what was mentioned in Section 4.2.1 regarding students’ frequent approach to presentations.

In addition to the emphasis on exam strategies when taking the IELTS exams, 13 out of 20 participants revealed that oral communication in real life was challenging and complex, which involved much more thinking than the language exam. Tian (Edu., PhD), who used to teach IELTS in China, also said:

Many students think IELTS is difficult when they are preparing for it in China, but after you come to the UK, you will find out that IELTS is very basic. Real English communication is much more complex and unpredictable.

In addition to Han’s (ECA, PhD) reflection mentioned in the previous section, he also pointed out factors such as the speakers’ accents and speed of speaking, which were beyond one’s control in real-life communication:

When you take the exam, it is mostly just you doing the talking. The examiners in the speaking part are all native speakers, and they ask you a few questions slowly with a standard English accent. You don’t have to worry about how fast they speak or their accents. But it’s totally different in real-life communication.

Nevertheless, the style of preparation for IELTS speaking did not necessarily lead to students’ negative evaluation of their effort, as Huang (SPS, PhD) pointed out:

I believe there is a big difference between before and after preparing for the IELTS exam. Although the real-life encounters with English communication can be quite different from the exams, your speaking ability could even be worse without such preparation.

Overall, data showed that students experienced clear gaps between speaking for the IELTS exam and real OP experience. In addition, it is worth pointing out that English speaking skill was not listed separately as an enrolment requirement in any programme, while writing skill was listed for some programmes, indicating less attention paid to speaking skills by programmes in the university.

4.5 Cognitive factors – “Knowing”

The second type of factors which can influence students’ OP is cognitive factors, which broadly refer to one’s content knowledge (what they know on a given topic) and what they can perform in English oral communication. A general consensus among the interviewees was that students’ knowledge of a given topic, including both academic and non-academic areas, could greatly influence their decisions to participate in certain conversations as well as their OP performance. Since the participants’ main roles were students, the theme relevant to academic study is presented separately rather than lumped with other types of content knowledge.

4.5.1 Academic knowledge and competence

Interview data showed that academic knowledge and competence were important factors affecting Chinese students’ WFOP. 14 students expressed that their academic competence played a major part in determining whether they thought they had the place to join a conversation. Insufficient knowledge of the discipline could lead to students’ frustration in their studies and inability to participate in discussions as desired. A positive and a negative example are illustrated below.

Hou (SPS, PGT), who studied public policy, reported that her lack of understanding regarding policies of the Scottish government and the British government significantly kept her from engaging in classroom discussion or making the most use of the classes. She felt deeply regretful for choosing a subject area in which she had not been very well prepared.

Many guest speakers came to our classes to talk about government policies, but I basically wasted all the opportunities. We had many three-hour classes last semester, and they were very interactive. But I really didn’t know what they were referring to most of the time. I was completely lost in the discussions, and I just felt it was a waste of time and money. But I guess it must be a wonderful learning experience for the other students.

Hou’s reflection suggested that besides English competence, students’ prior subject knowledge could be a major determiner in their active contribution in class

discussion. According to Hou, she failed to pass that first step of making sense of the content knowledge and consequently failed to learn effectively. Perhaps it is also worth pointing out that it is not uncommon for Chinese students to change their disciplinary subjects when progressing from undergraduate to postgraduate level. Some even choose a particular programme precipitately due to career prospects, a shift of interest, or programme availability. Therefore, the challenge for them is not only the English language but also disciplinary knowledge. This can result in further academic challenges since the usual duration of a Masters programme in the UK is only one year. As indicated in Hou's experience, this gap also impacted her confidence in viewing her position as less "qualified" to participate in classroom discussion, resulting in her sitting quietly, absorbing the content, and listening to others' opinions.

Moreover, students' academic competence does not always remain unchanged, and it is perceived and evaluated by themselves in comparison to their peers. The more knowledgeable about the discipline and more academically competent they are, the more likely they would feel confident to engage in communication, share their ideas and even challenge others' views. For instance, Yong (Eng., PGT), a hardworking student who was at the top of his class, stated:

My classmates don't usually ask questions, but I am one of the few who do. I only speak in class because I'm sure if I don't understand something, most of the other students would have the same question.

Furthermore, students seemed to be highly self-critical and would not speak their minds unless they were certain about their answers. Repeating comments such as "*I won't speak up in class unless I am very sure and satisfied with what I want to say and know how to say it in English*" by Jinjin (Lit., PGT) summarised the importance of both the "what" and "how" conditions for students to feel comfortable to participate. These accounts indicated that one's academic knowledge and competence were to some extent considered self-assurance for speaking up, particularly given the "face culture" in Chinese society, which was explained in Section 2.3.3.2 and will be discussed further in Section 4.6.4.

This finding was also supported by the evidence-based comparison between the PhD and Masters students in the same school, including an intra-person comparison of the same student. For instance, Han (ECA, PhD) compared his own experience between doing a Masters and a PhD at the same university:

During my Masters study, I didn't know much about my field, so I was mostly just learning and receiving knowledge. But since I started my PhD, I've become more confident in myself and my research ability, and I'm more willing to communicate with others. People also seem to take me more seriously now that I am doing a PhD.

His transition from being a listener to a more competent speaker best illustrated the finding that one's development in knowledge and academic expertise can lead to more WFOP. This concurred with another PhD student, Hong (Eng., PhD), who did his undergraduate study at UoE, too. As Hong's language competence, content knowledge and other skills improved, his WFOP also increased:

In the past, when I didn't understand something that other people said, I just smiled and pretended that I understood. But now maybe I will ask them to explain or clarify for me because if I'm interested, I'd like to know everything they've said and perhaps discuss more.

This shift from “avoidance” to active “questioning” suggested a noticeable improvement in Hong's communicative competence, specifically in his communicative strategies. Wen (Law, PhD) summarised this virtuous cycle, “*When your academic competence develops, you will be more willing to communicate with other people because you are more confident.*”

Moreover, one's work experience can also contribute to the development of academic competence and, therefore, WFOP. For example, Tangdou (Law, PGT) thought her classmate who was very active in class was partly because of his experience in practising law, even though his spoken English was not perceived as very good:

I think because he practised law for many years before coming here, he could relate very well to many things the teachers were talking about. But for me, it's mostly just new knowledge.

4.5.2 Non-academic knowledge

Similar to how academic knowledge was found important for students to engage in academic discussions, knowledge on specific topics was vital for them to engage in other non-academic conversations. This theme consists of two subthemes: unfamiliar topics and familiar topics. Among the 16 participants who discussed this theme, 14 identified that the most prominent issue was the lack of cultural references, which hindered them from joining discussions, not to mention carrying out meaningful and deep conversations.

4.5.2.1 Unfamiliar topics

Firstly, jokes which entail cultural references or specific content knowledge were pointed out by five students as tricky to follow, whether they were jokes told in class by a lecturer or between friends. Sheng (Geo., PGT) shared her frustration, *“If a teacher tells a joke to lighten the mood in class, I feel that I can’t always laugh at it with my peers. I just don’t get what the funny part is.”*

Hong (Eng., PhD) had a similar experience when he first arrived, and he developed a coping mechanism for this situation:

You can just observe other people. Laugh when they laugh, even though you might not understand the humour. To deal with this type of English communication which involves cultural knowledge, 30 percent depends on your listening ability, and the rest 70 percent relies on your acting skill.

Moreover, participants pointed out that cultural references were also more difficult to learn because they required both cultural insights and an understanding of the nuances in the English language. This was an obstacle mentioned by six students, despite their effort to learn English and familiarise themselves with the local culture. Being the only Asian student in her lab, Wendi (Chem, PGTR) shared her experience talking with her colleagues, who were predominantly British males, who often talked about things that did not interest her:

There are things we can talk about, but there are also topics that I don’t think I will ever be able to discuss with them in English, like,

when they talk about rugby. It's popular here, but nobody plays rugby in China, so I don't know anything about it, and I don't care about it.

Besides sports, other topics mentioned by the participants included non-Chinese celebrities, movies and TV shows, political issues, types of alcoholic drinks, cities in the UK and British history, to name but a few. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that this lack of knowledge should not be seen only as a weakness or disadvantage for these students. As evident in the interviews, seven students stated that these topics could be things they would never be interested in, regardless of where they were and what language they spoke.

4.5.2.2 Familiar topics

The second type of topics were those that students were knowledgeable about, including topics they had strong interests in, which provided a natural drive for them to engage in such discussions. However, one of the most frustrating experiences shared by the interviewees was the inability to engage in meaningful conversations in English about something that they liked and knew. For example, despite having been a Harry Potter fan for a long time, Yoyo (ECA, PGT) found it very difficult to discuss Harry Potter in English because she only read the translated version in Chinese. She also talked about her frustration of not being able to talk extensively about foreign movies she enjoyed because of her over-reliance on Chinese subtitles as mentioned in Section 4.4.3, and consequently not knowing many specific words and concepts from movies in English. Similarly, Jinjin (Lit., PGT) sensed it challenging to have in-depth discussions about well-known literature in English:

We translate the names and titles to Chinese when we introduce non-Chinese literature and movies to China. So, I often need to think really hard if other people are talking about something I've read or seen. As for Chinese literature, I think very few foreigners really know about it, at least not as much as we know about Western literature. There is definitely a barrier.

What is important is that the students already possessed such knowledge, but it was the process of transferring it into English that had failed, which to some students might be even more frustrating than not knowing about the topics at all. This

kind of frustration is different from the negative feeling resulting from a lack of interest in talking about specific topics, in which case the students voluntarily opted out of the conversation. Another example was shared by Chen (Info., PhD). Different from Wendi, who did not care about rugby, as mentioned in the previous section, Chen loved watching football and was very keen on the football culture in the UK. However, his lack of English vocabulary, especially regarding the football terminology, led to his frustration in communication.

Confronted with the same problem, Chang (Geo., PhD) chose to avoid discussing politics with international students, especially with NESs. Based on his previous discouraging experience of discussing the American presidential election with an American student, and the fact that the American student could speak much more fluently when referring to the candidates' arguments and discussing statistics, he felt his own arguments were very weak:

You can't follow their arguments and reach the same level of depth because they are familiar with the issues, and English is their first language. Although I am interested in these political issues, and I do want to know about American students' perspectives, I don't know many of the political terms in English, so it slows down the discussion. I don't want to appear stupid. It just makes me want to stay away from these topics, especially when they talk very fast and get aggressive.

Furthermore, Tian (Edu., PhD) and Huang (SPS, PhD) both mentioned that ordering familiar food in English could be difficult for Chinese students. They reported that they knew the Japanese and Korean dishes on a Chinese menu but did not recognise their "English names" on local menus. Tangdou (Law, PGT) also talked about learning the English names of Chinese dishes in the restaurant where she worked, which was a fresh experience for her. Tian observed that cuisines such as Thai, Indian, Malaysian, Middle Eastern, Mexican, and Greek food were not familiar to Chinese people in general, but they seemed to be quite familiar to the locals.

4.6 Psychological factors – “Feeling”

The third category of factors focused on students’ psychological status in relation to WFOP in English communication. The following sections look at students’ OP through the lenses of two general tendencies and multiple facets of their WFOP.

4.6.1 Less motivated to improve spoken English

Students’ losing motivation to improve spoken English or engage in English discussion emerged as a major theme. However, a distinction needs to be made between these two concepts, in that the former refers to the linguistic proficiency only, while the latter focuses more on the action of OP. Although almost everyone clearly expressed that they had very high motivation to develop English skills before coming to the UK and a few mentioned that UK being a native English-speaking country was one of the pulling factors in deciding their overseas study destinations, almost all students witnessed a decline in their motivation over time. This change could be explained by the overwhelming agreement among interviewees on their instrumental and extrinsic motivations for learning English rather than integrative or intrinsic motivations.

All participants agreed that English was first and foremost perceived as an essential yardstick during their university applications, a means for academic study and potential merit in their employability. However, given that there were no more English exams following a successful application, the focus of language learning naturally declined, since the integrative motivation was not strong in the first place. Dai (Biz., PhD) commented:

Regardless of whether they like it or not, most Chinese students learn English to pass the exams in China and pass the English requirement if they want to study abroad. Once that pressure is gone, I don’t think many students will continue to have a strong drive to learn English simply for their interest in the language.

Second, while the English language was seen as a means to study in the UK, spoken English did not seem to be emphasised or required in some programmes, as discussed in Section 4.2.3, which also contributed to the decreasing motivation.

Thirdly, most participants stated that they would most likely return to China after their studies. Although some students acknowledged that good spoken English might be helpful for their competitiveness in the job market, half of them didn't consider it a priority for most positions, as Yong (Eng., PGT) commented:

English may be important for people who work in specific fields, like international relations, teaching English, or maybe in international companies. But generally, I don't think it's very important, especially your spoken English, because maybe much of the communication will be done in writing, like through emails.

Moreover, as was explained in Section 4.3.2, many students discovered the unnecessary of speaking English in their everyday life, plus the accessible Chinese community and the cultural comfort with Chinese people, which provided them with even less extrinsic motivation for improving their spoken English. Hong (Eng., PhD), who had been in the UK for three years, described his transition in socialisation, i.e., from more international to more Chinese-centred:

I hung out with foreigners more frequently at first, but now I spend more time socialising with Chinese people. It's not like I can't communicate well with people from other countries, but I just feel that I have more fun, and I share cultural understandings with fellow Chinese friends. I noticed it's the case for many Chinese people.

Concurring with Hong, Tian (Edu., PhD), who had spent four years abroad, also had similar feelings and experiences. He was very excited about the multicultural universities in Europe during his Masters study and later was drawn closer to the local Chinese communities and friends.

Furthermore, a few participants attributed their losing motivation to peer influence. For example, Xiao (Edu., PGT) explained that she lost her motivation to practise spoken English because of her friends' change of mind:

In the beginning, we would try to speak English as much as possible and practise English with each other. But you need a partner to do this. If your partner doesn't have the enthusiasm anymore, it's very hard for you to continue alone.

Xin (Info., PGT) also commented that Chinese students' collective cultural characteristics made them want to find partners to do things together. A partner might increase their interest and motivation while lacking or losing a partner might demotivate them. Despite the decrease in students' motivation to develop the linguistic aspects of English competence, they might still have a continuous WFOP to communicate for research, friendship, and professional development.

4.6.2 More relaxed attitude towards speaking English

Another response with high occurrences was students' more relaxed attitude towards speaking in English over time, as they were more familiar with the surroundings, made more friends and moved on from the initial transitional phase.

More than half of the students reported that they did not need to speak perfect or even "correct" English to make themselves understood. As explained in the previous section, given their instrumental rather than integrative motivation for learning English, getting the message across was the priority in conversations for them. 19 students stated that they would not be professionals in the field of English language education, and thus English was viewed as a means of communication for their study abroad rather than the goal of study. Phrases such as "*as long as they can understand me*" and "*we managed to communicate*" were uttered frequently, indicating that with the increasing exposure to authentic use of Global Englishes, students realised that successful oral communication did not require perfect grammar or sophisticated vocabulary, which was described as a source of stress initially. Other accounts such as "*foreigners can understand me just fine*" and "*we are bilinguals in Chinese and English*" exemplified less pressure from the native-speakerism mindset. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that this more relaxed attitude should not be seen as the same as an increase in communicative competence. The former refers to the psychological comfort and ease, while the latter focuses more on one's self-assessed spoken English competence, which according to many students, did not improve as much as they had hoped (see Section 4.3.3).

Interestingly, the relaxed attitude not only came from their own successful communication experience but also from the “flaws” they identified in other speakers. This discovery lowered the bar of their expectation of English used in oral communication, which consequently made them feel more relaxed in the communication process. 15 out of the 20 interviewees talked about students from other countries also made grammar mistakes when they spoke, they had various foreign accents, and they did not seem to use sophisticated words in spoken English, which they could relate to as NNEs. Non-British European students were mentioned in particular because they were conventionally considered by Chinese students as proficient English speakers, almost like NESs. Han (ECA, PhD) commented, “*Their spoken English isn’t as good as I thought.*” Chen (Info., PhD), who studied in a very international environment, said:

Before I came here, I was really looking forward to speaking to people who would speak fluently with a standard English accent. I wanted to speak better English, and I was anxious about my own speaking ability. But Edinburgh is very international, and I’ve met many foreigners with different accents, including my boss. I’m no longer worried about my English anymore.

This sub-theme is also relevant to the theme presented in 4.4.1.3. Other similar comments included noticeable changes from “*I would always check the grammar before I speak*” to “*I just say what I want to say now*”. Moreover, a common feeling among the interviewees was the comfort and relaxation when speaking with other NNEs, while there seemed to be some degree of intimidation and pressure when talking with NESs.

Having said that, there were two outliers who experienced the opposite. Interestingly, both participants were considered to be “very good at English” when they were in China. Xiao (Edu., PGT) had English teaching experience in China but found herself unable to join in conversations with the locals. She admitted that although her strength in taking English exams gave her much confidence at first, she often found herself anxious in authentic communication.

I was actually very confident in my spoken English back in China, but that was mostly because I was always prepared. In real

communication, you don't have much time to prepare for the topics, and I feel like I'm often caught off guard, like I can't speak as well as I want to. I don't have many chances to speak to foreigners, and this feeling kind of crushed my confidence, which has made me rather anxious about speaking.

Another outlier was Hou (SPS, PGT), the only Chinese student in her programme, surrounded by mostly European students. Upon arrival, the intensive English-speaking environment was overwhelming and challenging for her, and the lack of fellow Chinese students in her circle made her distressed. It seemed that students who came to the UK with high expectations of their successful communication with the locals and peers were more likely to be disappointed or intimidated by the authentic English communication in various contexts, particularly when comparing themselves to highly proficient English speakers or NESs.

4.6.3 Diverse and dynamic willingness for oral participation

Interview data revealed students' various motivations and WFOP throughout the trajectory of their overseas journeys, which was eventually shown in their agency to participate in oral communication. When asked about their agency in OP, 11 interviewees stated they had agency, while the other nine admitted they had little agency. However, among the students who claimed to have agency, only two students stated that they had consistent agency, while the majority reported a shared experience of losing agency, which was in line with their declining motivation, as mentioned in Section 4.6.1. The following sections intend to present the multiple facets influencing their diverse and dynamic WFOP.

4.6.3.1 Perceptions on English-speaking ability

Interviewees' perceptions differed regarding the importance of English proficiency and OP. While some believed that English proficiency, particularly the ability to communicate effectively, was greatly advantageous for their personal development, such as job opportunities and chances to connect with the rest of the

world, others held different views. Eight students pointed out that spoken English competence was not essential or required for their future line of work, as briefly mentioned in Section 4.6.1. 12 students stated they had difficulties seeing themselves engage in English communication for professional or personal purposes in the future. For instance, Hou (SPS, PGT) stated,

Maybe I will need to use English for my work, like, if I am in an international environment somewhere in China, but probably not.

Two consensuses were that English-speaking ability is an essential instrument for successful intercultural communication, and OP in the UK is highly desired and valued. 13 interviewees commented that people tended to associate one's English-speaking skills with one's overall English competence, especially in China. Interview data also suggested that many Chinese people believed that good English-speaking skills could add much value to a person's overall image of being smart and well-educated. Meiyi's (Biz., PGT) comment illustrated this point:

If you speak English fluently, clearly, and confidently, others probably think you are very smart and come from a very good educational background.

Six interviewees also shared an agreement that if someone's speaking skill is excellent, it can help them be more international, have more opportunities in life, and be potentially more successful in life. As Hong (Eng., PhD) stated:

Maybe good English language skills are not essential for your work, but as China becomes more international, there will be many opportunities for Chinese people to do business or work with people and companies from other countries. You need to make sure that when the opportunity presents itself, your boss will think of you first, and you will be ready.

This uncertainty of how English would matter to their future life and the differentiation in perceptions of the importance of English potentially led to different WFOP and a decrease in learner agency.

Another sub-theme was regarding the short-term goal of overseas study. Almost all participants commented that they felt their speaking competence had reached the level of "enough", which suggested they had no further strong

motivation to develop speaking ability. Zhuang (Lit., PhD) explained his stance regarding this issue:

There is definitely room to improve my speaking ability, but in the meantime, I am pretty content with my current proficiency, so I don't feel the need to spend extra time working on it.

In line with Zhuang's opinion, Chen (Info., PhD) explained how he would have been more motivated if his problems in oral communication had created more barriers in his research:

If I have a major problem communicating with my supervisors, or if they ask me to work on my speaking, I will probably feel very nervous and work harder to improve my speaking. Although it's far from perfect, we communicate just fine so far, and we also have all the tools to assist our communication.

Like other PhD students, Chen seemed to prioritise his professional role in the UK as a researcher and viewed English as only one means to communicate, not a priority worth additional effort. Nevertheless, later in the same interview, Zhuang (Lit., PhD) also showed some degree of frustration for the inability to have in-depth conversations with NESs on a wide range of topics after learning English for over a decade.

4.6.3.2 Interests and oral participation

Personal interest was discovered as another factor in relation to students' OP. Half of the interviewees reported that besides completing their academic workload, they would prefer to spend time on things that interested them rather than doing things or socialising with people they did not care about. Therefore, given the interviewees' individualities, it was understandable how some were interested in joining or creating a network for themselves, engaging in conversations to satisfy their curiosity or discuss their passions, while others were not keen to communicate with people around them at all. For instance, the quote from Wendi (Chem., PGTR) in Section 4.5.2.1 was an example of her opting out of conversations with her

colleagues on the topic of sports, which she did not understand and would not be interested in finding out more about. In the meantime, she was much keener to join conversations related to travelling and issues regarding China:

Whenever they talk about their trips somewhere, even though I may not know where it is, I will listen to their interesting stories and ask them about the scenes and food in that area. If I don't understand something, I will definitely ask.

Moreover, according to a few other students, some managed to find groups of people who shared interests and made connections with such social groups. For instance, Shuai (Chem., PhD) started an internationalisation programme where he was very active in a group of students engaging in different intercultural events:

Our group members and participants come from many different countries. We all share an interest in making the most use of this international environment, getting to know different cultures through the people from those cultures, and enhancing our intercultural communication experience.

This concurred with Dai (Biz., PhD), who joined the Kyudo society where she had regular training with other members, and they went to pubs to socialise afterwards. Such interest-led communities also provided a familiar and comfortable environment for the students to engage in meaningful and interesting conversations:

We meet every week, so we are quite familiar with each other. They are the non-Chinese people I associate with most often, and I feel comfortable with this group. Of course, we talk about a lot of other things besides Kyudo.

In addition to Shuai and Dai, Tian (Edu., PhD) was a member of a whiskey society where he regularly met with other members and chatted over whiskey tasting. However, not all students who joined societies based on their interests could get these communicative opportunities. Xiao (Edu., PGT) joined a salsa dancing society which presented a different communicative environment:

I joined salsa dancing because I wanted to try something new and fun, and I also wanted to make some friends. But we pretty much just dance and then leave, so I don't know other people there. Perhaps some familiar faces, but that's it. We also don't have fixed dancing

partners because we constantly change partners. So, although it's been fun, unfortunately, I didn't really talk to anyone or make any friends there.

Tangdou (Law, PGT), who joined a table tennis society, and Xin (Info., PGT), who joined a badminton society, echoed Xiao's experience.

In the meantime, it is also worth noting that interests and personalities are not unchanged. For instance, Dai did not practise Kyudo until she came to the UK, and Chang (Geo., PhD) also cultivated his new interest since he came to the UK:

People here like to work out a lot, so I started running. I've been a member of a jogging club for a long time, so I know the members well, and I am comfortable talking to them.

The overall sense among the interviewees was that they did not need to push themselves to do things they had no interest in for the purposes of enhancing their oral engagement. Instead, individual interests seemed to be given priority rather than blindly pursuing oral communication during their sojourns in the UK.

4.6.3.3 Personalities and oral participation

Speakers' personalities were also suggested to affect their OP. Five participants identified themselves as extroverts and active in OP regardless of being in the UK or China, while six identified themselves as introverts. For instance, Jinjin (Lit., PGT) stated, "*Some students are just more active than me in general. I am the kinda person who likes to spend time by myself at home.*" In contrast, Shuai (Chem., PhD) described himself as an extrovert with "thick skin". Such a distinction was also present between those who liked to socialise with a larger number of people and those preferring to hang out with a small and close group. For example, Meiyi (Biz., PGT) stated:

I like to talk to other people in a small and intimate environment, so I prefer one on one or with no more than three people. I get very nervous somehow when I speak to a bigger group.

However, a problem emerged because one's natural personality might not be successfully "translated" to English, as Xiao (Edu., PGT) complained, "*I told my foreign friend that you would never know how outgoing and clever I am when I am speaking Chinese.*"

As explained in Section 4.6.2, Xiao was one of the only two participants who suffered a loss of confidence after arriving in the UK. Such disorientation seemed to lead to greater frustration and made her want to socialise in her Chinese-speaking comfort zone. The other outlier, Hou (SPS, PGT), could also relate to the difference in personality change. She described herself as being well-protected and confident in China, but she experienced a deep sense of inferiority and insecurity when she compared herself to her European counterparts in class. Different from Xiao, who had a Chinese community around her, Hou was the only Chinese student in her class:

I often felt very down, especially in the beginning, and I didn't know what to do. Everyone else seemed to be doing alright and I just felt so insecure, and I didn't feel like socialising with anyone and exposing my weakness. I was actually very active in my previous university, you know, leading different student societies. But here, I just want to be left alone sometimes.

Shuai (Chem., PhD) also talked about how English speaking was a major barrier for his personality to shine at first. He described himself as having a good sense of humour, but he was anxious about his speaking ability, which made him reluctant to "be himself" for some time. Luckily for Shuai, as a PhD student, he had a longer period to develop his speaking skills, and he had made massive improvements over the past four years in the UK.

Furthermore, personality could also influence one's preferred learning styles, in that some students preferred to learn by themselves while others liked to improve through interaction. For example, the interview with Wendi (Chem., PGTR) suggested her high level of learning autonomy and agency, consistent with her highly independent personality, as well as her learning style:

I don't think speaking with other people in English is the only way to improve your speaking. I think if you are motivated, you can improve

on your own. I just talk to myself after watching TV shows in English and imitate how the actors speak. I think it worked for me.

Different from others who actively engage in OP to improve overall speaking competence, Wendi seemed to participate for her interests and practical purposes, such as discussing her research, which she emphasised as her primary focus in the UK:

I don't care about what they think of me. I am here to learn, so of course, I will seek out the most effective and efficient way to learn. I will leave here after I finish my study, and I am here to learn from others, the best. Why waste the opportunity? My face and ego mean very little in this case.

In addition, one's personality also affected the social circles they created for themselves. While some stayed in the environment created for them by the university at random, others made the most use of their environment and expanded their networks by participating in activities and joining societies. Furthermore, a few students mentioned that Chinese people shared a certain collective "cultural personality" or characteristics, such as being reserved and less likely to start conversations in public. Nevertheless, not everyone agreed with such a cultural stereotype. For example, while Yong (Eng., PGT) commented, "*Foreigners think we Chinese are not very good at English communication anyway*", Tian (Edu, PhD) said:

I think more Chinese students need to break this stereotypical impression because we are fun and we are different from the previous generations. In my case, I've been quite vocal and active since I started studying in the West. This is a way to develop my own communicative competence, and also an effort to change foreigners' impressions of us.

This idea of cultural stereotype leads to the next theme regarding the face culture in China and how it links to Chinese students' WFOP.

4.6.4 Reticence – unwillingness to participate

Another theme revealed from the interview in relation to the dynamic WFOP was reticence, which was likely to be a result of the complex interplay of various factors, such as a strategy to avoid losing face, a politeness strategy in communication, a learning strategy, lacking motivation, personalities, and cultural differences in learning and communication. Given that reticence mostly co-occurred with students' talking about the notion of "face", this section primarily focuses on this issue. As explained in Section 2.3.3.2, the concept of "face" is a collective social-psychological pattern deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Almost all interviewees addressed the stereotype that Chinese students do not seem to actively participate in class or group discussion as compared to their counterparts.

The commonly self-identified linguistic challenges, particularly regarding speaking, and their lack of topical knowledge were discussed in relation to the themes in Sections 4.4.1 and 4.5, respectively. Reticence or avoidance was used as a communicative strategy to avoid losing face due to various communicative apprehension, since some students were worried about making mistakes in speaking while showing their linguistic or intellectual weaknesses. In addition to what was presented, data also showed that Chinese students seemed to be overly self-critical to maintain their faces, while the teachers and other students might mistake their self-criticism as a lack of contribution and academic incompetence. The end of Section 4.5.1 briefly illustrated students' reluctance to speak in class when they were not sure about the correctness of their utterances. Chang (Geo., PhD) added,

Most Chinese students are worried about saying something wrong or stupid in class, because maybe it shows that you aren't smart enough to keep up with the class or you haven't worked hard enough. And if your English is not very good, you may not be able to question what others have said, which is also embarrassing.

This idea of correctness was also revealed in Xiao's comments (Edu., PGT), where she seemed to look down upon the action of some other students:

I don't understand how some people can ask things so obvious, like, they ask very stupid questions. The answer is sometimes in the

reading materials, so they could have figured it out by themselves. I think some people just want to speak for the sake of speaking English.

Her words perhaps exemplified what Sheng (Geo., PGT) referred to as the judgemental attitude of other Chinese students.

Some Chinese students may not value oral participation in class. They see it as someone seeking attention and claiming their sense of presence unless they actually say something brilliant that can contribute to the class and benefit other students' learning.

Although students like Sheng gave credit to those who did raise valuable questions and could hold meaningful and intellectual conversations with the teachers and other students, many emphasised the “quality” rather than the “quantity” of the OP in class. It seemed that only good responses and questions were valued and worthy of the time in the classroom setting. Otherwise, it could be viewed as a waste of time. This kind of attitude might demotivate some students to speak up, particularly in public and formal settings. Tian (Edu., PhD) attributed this to the cultural differences in pedagogical practices:

Discussion is valued more here than in China because people here think knowledge is created through exchanges, which is very different from how we teach and learn in China. Back in China, there is usually a person with authority to teach and pass on the knowledge to you.

Despite many students who did not want to lose face, evidence also showed that not all students adopted this strategy. Wendi (Chem., PGTR) was such an outlier. She said, “*I am surrounded by people who are more knowledgeable and experienced than me. I'd like to ask them questions whenever and wherever.*” In response to the question of why she would choose this approach, which is different from the conventionally face-saving strategy, her response was presented in Section 4.6.3.3., suggesting her strong and independent personality, as well as her research-focused attituded, played a major role in her active OP. Nevertheless, Wendi was a special case in that she was a research student, different from the other Masters students, and she exhibited more similarities with the PhD students. Similar to Wendi, who stated her ego and face were not the priority for her compared to her academic competence, Shuai (Chem., PhD) also stated that he was happy to sacrifice “face” to develop his

speaking competence. He also attributed his noticeable improvement in speaking ability to such a “thick skin” approach:

I remember I was so nervous the first time I did a presentation. I asked my colleagues to listen to me speak prior to the formal presentation, and it was, oh my god, really terrible...Speaking English was a big problem for me, but I was ready to tackle it. They gave me a lot of advice, and I tried to practise accordingly. Then, when it came to the actual presentation, my colleagues also attended, and they told me that “It’s so much better”. So, I feel that I can really improve if I try, and losing some face is totally worth it because they won’t care about it later, but I have benefited a lot.

Furthermore, the linguistic difficulty and perceived academic competence challenge also led to reticence as a learning strategy. Masters students, in particular, talked about their shared experience of being able to understand everything in class and needing much more time to try to organise thoughts in English, as exemplified in Section 4.4.1.2. Moreover, Xin, Hou, Tangdou, Yoyo, and Sheng described the speed of discussion in class or group as very fast, which did not allow sufficient time for them to prepare what they wanted to say. Dai (Biz., PhD) pointed out:

Oral participation in class, whether in front of the whole class or in group discussion, requires listening comprehension, speaking skills, as well as analytical, logical, and critical thinking skills at the same time. It can be very challenging, so if you want to take in as much as possible, it’s a good idea to just concentrate on listening to the others.

Therefore, it is clear that less speaking and more listening was sometimes employed as a learning strategy on purpose.

4.6.5 Experience-influenced willingness for oral participation

Furthermore, interviews also revealed two types of cycles in relation to students’ experience and their WFOP. Some experiences shared by the participants were not only direct reflections of their own personal stories but also based on their extended observation of their peers.

4.6.5.1 Virtuous cycle of oral participation

Half of the interviewees discussed the pattern of a virtuous cycle of OP in English. Following the positive outcome mentioned in the previous section on Shuai's (Chem., PhD) active engagement to improve his speaking skills and IC, his effort and confidence led to a such a virtuous circle:

In our third year, we needed to do a presentation in front of the whole school. There were about ten student presenters, and I was the only one who was interacting with the audience by telling a joke. Even the host appraised me for that!

Shuai's experience was an example of receiving constructive feedback, practising and working on his weakness, achieving improvement, receiving praises and increasing confidence, and becoming more willing to communicate and participate, as illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 4.1

An Example of Virtuous Cycle of Oral Participation



It is important to point out that Shuai took the initiative to seek help from fellow PhD students and held a humble attitude towards others' feedback. Other students also demonstrated that people who experienced the virtuous cycles tended to be more reflective and resilient, and become more confident in their English competence and intercultural communication experience over time. Hong (Eng., PhD) shared his strategy of reflecting on his speaking:

I used to record my presentations, and I would re-watch them and think about what problems I had, and how I could improve my speaking. For example, I think I used to speak really fast, and sometimes my pronunciation was not very clear, especially towards the end of a sentence. So now, I would try to slow things down and think about if I'm speaking clearly.

The virtuous cycle can take various forms. In Tian's (Edu., PhD) case, he started from an early age when he was told by teachers and friends that his English was very good, which motivated him more in English learning. His experience in hosting events, participating in public speaking contests, as well as being an English teacher all contributed to his confidence. He saw speaking English as his strength, became more interested in this area and was willing to put in the extra effort. Echoing Tian's experience, Huang (SPS, PhD) pointed out that her good speaking ability was a confidence booster and helped her attract more international friends to her social network.

Based on these students' descriptions of positive cycles, it is evident that despite their starting points, their improvement was recognised not only by themselves but also by others, which provided external validation of their effort and growth and had a positive impact on their WFOP.

4.6.5.2 Vicious cycle of oral participation

Ten participants also discussed the vicious cycle of OP in their experience. Similar to the virtuous cycle, vicious cycles also take various forms. For instance, Xiao (Edu., PGT) had an experience of "self-loathing" in her English ability and loss of confidence in English, particularly because she had been an English teacher prior to coming to the UK:

I hate the feeling that I am not as good as other people in comparison, and I hate that I can't speak as well as I want to. After a while, I just don't feel like talking at all, and I feel that I am getting worse. I'm really upset when I hear myself speak English.

Despite her desire to have more social interactions with non-Chinese people, Xiao's low self-confidence in her perceived speaking ability further impeded her participation in intercultural communication:

I really want to socialise, but it's upsetting that I don't know how to say many things in English. It is a vicious cycle because if I go to an event or something, and I don't have a good conversation with someone, or I feel like my vocabulary is very poor, I just don't feel like going to another one.

In addition, Xiao also mentioned another contributing factor in the cycle, which is her lack of initiatives or agency:

I'm not the type of person who would approach others to start a conversation. It's a bit of a dilemma because I do hope someone will talk to me first.

Xiao was not alone in feeling this way, as other students echoed her feelings. Data also suggested that low English proficiency tended to lead to a slow start in communication, plus insufficient knowledge of certain topics or the lack of preparation can also lead to one's failure to catch up. This then made them seen as making little contribution to the class or their groups, making them less confident and less willing to participate.

Moreover, unlike the virtuous cycles where the external validation of one's ability and proficiency in English communication was encouraging, the one common stress in the vicious cycles seemed to be from the students themselves. Tangdou (Law, PGT) reported:

I don't speak in class, even though my classmates tell me that I'm doing well, not that bad. But I always think I'm terrible, and I'm anxious that I'm clearly at the bottom of the class. Maybe I'm expecting too much of myself. But I've never felt like that in China. The adjustment process is painful.

Moreover, as discussed in Section 4.3, the unnecessary of speaking English also contributed to the vicious cycle. Additionally, other variables also contributed to students' WFOP, such as imbalanced power relations between speakers and being talked down by others, which will be explained in the next section.

4.7 Social-contextual factors

In addition to the internal factors mentioned in Sections 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6, some external social-contextual factors were found to influence students' OP. In this study, such factors refer to social and contextual variables that tend to be beyond the speakers' control, similar to the situational factors in the WTC literature and environmental constraints in the needs analysis literature (see Chapter 2). Given the prominence of some relevant themes and differences from what was mentioned previously, this section will briefly shed light on these factors.

4.7.1 Power relations between interlocutors

4.7.1.1 Interlocutors' ethnolinguistic identities

As presented in Section 4.6, students' psychological status could change based on the communication circumstances. As evident from the data, the interlocutors' ethnolinguistic backgrounds, i.e., NESs or NNEs, played an important role in Chinese students' intercultural communication experiences, and such backgrounds also created assumed cultures of learning and communicating styles.

A recurring theme emerged among the participants: when facing NESs, they tended to pay more attention to grammar and pronunciation in their own spoken English. Four students mentioned that they were somewhat intimidated by the NESs' presence, especially at the beginning of communication, while five students indicated they enjoyed speaking with authentic NESs. For example, Wen (Law, PhD) stated that she thought it was easier to communicate with NESs because they tended to understand what she was saying. In contrast, Xiao (Edu., PGT) stated the opposite, in that she did not like speaking with NESs because it was easier to expose her problems in spoken English in their presence. However, in Xiao's follow-up explanation, it was clear that none of the NESs she interacted with made negative comments on her spoken English explicitly, but it was herself who was more conscious about her spoken English ability under such circumstances. Such a self-

critical attitude was also shared by Tangdou (Law, PGT), as was presented in the previous section.

A similar emotional experience was also shared by Hou (SSP, PGT), except that her NES group member tended to dominate the group discussions, leaving very little time for her and other Asian students in the group to contribute. She also added that the tone of that NES student was particularly impatient and intimidating. Whether some of these negative feelings were solely self-inflicted was hard to decide from the interviews, but it was clear that some students were more nervous at the presence of NESs when it came to OP. Furthermore, a few students also pointed out that many NESs speak with various accents which are not “standard”, such as the Scottish accent. But as Hong (Eng., PhD) pointed out (see Section 4.4.3), it should not be a surprise nor should people be judgemental of the so-called accents, as there are many different dialects and accents for native Chinese speakers, too. Although some accents were not considered “standard” and were less desirable, the participants remained that these NESs spoke “correct” English because of their native-speaker identity.

In contrast, when speaking with NNEs, which all participants have experienced, most described it as more relaxing, although sometimes difficult to comprehend each other. However, on the issue of accent, it was interesting that more than half of the participants talked about their unexpected experience of speaking with Westerners who they had assumed would speak English fluently and native-like. Yet, the reality did not live up to their assumption. For instance, Tangdou (Law, PGT) made the following comment:

Before I came here, I was under the impression that all foreigners, especially white people, must speak English very fluently. But now I've realised it's not the case. Some other non-native English speakers, hmm, they also speak with very strong accents, ha-ha.

Nevertheless, six participants commented that non-Asian students seemed more willing to speak English in public than their Chinese peers, despite their obvious non-native accents. Furthermore, almost all students talked about how speaking English with non-Chinese students in the UK enriched their experience of

using English as a lingua franca in authentic contexts, which was quite different from their English-speaking experience in China. They also pointed out the implicit yet friendly sense of high tolerance of ambiguity and patience when communicating with other NNEs. Yoyo (ECA, PGT) even said that it felt non-threatening and helpful when a Thai student corrected her word choice because she knew that student was not acting more superior or being judgemental of her English. Finally, when asked about who they would like to practise English with, some students said they would like to practise with NESs, while others chose Chinese students or other NNEs.

Although individuals' reactions towards interlocutors from different backgrounds differed, it was clear that students at the Masters' level were more likely to be intimidated by the presence of NESs. However, such feelings tended to fade away as they progressed their study and became more experienced in intercultural communication. There were also signs that some participants were becoming more interculturally competent and confident bilinguals. For instance, Hong (Eng., PhD) said, *"I think they should be happy that we are speaking their language. I will be very proud and friendly if foreigners try to speak to me in my mother tongue."* Tian (Edu., PhD) also felt the same way, *"We are speaking a foreign language after all. I think it's okay to be imperfect."*

A further point worth exploring is the re-occurring yet blurred notion of "native speakers". It is interesting that students used the notion of NESs loosely and often incorrectly. Responses from the participants also revealed that some students did not make a clear distinction between people whose native language is English and those who are proficient users of English. The term "foreigner" was often an alternative way of saying Westerners, Europeans, white people, the locals, NESs, or proficient English speakers. Students across different interviews would often first identify speakers by region and then specify the language proficiency of the people they have encountered in their overseas experience, e.g., a student, a teacher, a flatmate, etc. This simple reflection enabled students to draw from their own experiences, break stereotypes, and reflect on their world views. For instance, in clarifying what they meant by NESs, a few students realised that English was also used as the first language or an official language in some Asian countries, as in

Meiyi's (Biz., PGT) comment, "*I didn't realise that English is also the official language in some Asian countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia.*"

Last but not least, it seems that students were much more comfortable with speaking English with NESs or as a lingua franca, but not with fellow Chinese students, although all but one agreed that it was acceptable in the academic settings. As many interviewees pointed out, the problem of speaking English to another Chinese student is that not only was it considered awkward and strange, but they also seemed to think they could not reach the same level of in-depth discussion or express themselves efficiently and effectively in English. Meanwhile, most of them considered it helpful and understandable if Chinese students switched back to Chinese occasionally or even entirely for better clarity and efficiency in communication. It was very clear from the interview data that all students agreed that it is understandable to speak English in the presence of non-Chinese people, particularly when the non-Chinese people are also in the conversational context. Nevertheless, it was considered unnecessary, unnatural, or even showing-off to stick to speaking English to fellow Chinese students outside the academic settings where no other non-Chinese people are present, as indicated in Xiao's (Edu., PGT) comment:

I think there is something wrong with these people, like, total show-offs. What's the point of speaking English with Chinese people after class when there are no foreigners around?

4.7.1.2 Dynamic interlocutor relations

In addition to the aforementioned ethnolinguistic identities, other types of interlocutors' personal and professional identities were also mentioned by the participants, which contributed to establishing different relations between interlocutors.

Evidently, the power difference between students and teachers was a contributing factor to some students' reticence to speak English in the academic settings, but this also differed based on how familiar the students were with their

tutors or supervisors. For instance, Hong's supervisor went to the student office every afternoon for tea and checked on their work. Therefore, he saw his supervisor almost daily, which according to him, enabled him to establish a less formal relationship with his supervisor. This was similar to what other students said about how the increasing familiarity with other students contributed to more natural and relaxed communication. Notably, when communicating with someone such as lecturers and personal tutors, participants, the Masters students, in particular, showed more reluctance, compared with their PhD counterparts, possibly due to the power and hierarchal difference in such teacher-student relations.

Despite students' and teachers' effort to create a friendly study and work environment in general, not all supervisors or other people in the authoritative positions seemed to care about maintaining such harmonious relations with students. One student shared a supervisor's comments from their previous conversations, which was truly astonishing, "*He said to me, YOU FUCKING CHILD.*" (This student is further anonymised for data protection purpose. Therefore, some of this participants' original accounts are removed from Appendix G.) As the interviewer, I was surprised by this participant's calmness when they said this, and it was obvious that this participant was not interested in pursuing a good relationship with that particular teacher. They said, "*This is what I need to put up with. It's crazy. But I'm gonna leave here as soon as I finish my study. I won't need to deal with him ever again.*" Fortunately, this kind of highly unprofessional behaviour seems to be a rare incident, and it does not represent the overall staff cohort.

This student's case was unique, interesting and worthy of attention. Different from some other students who were surrounded by fellow Chinese students, this participant was in the opposite situation because they were in a very European-centric research group. Factors such the predominant in-group culture seemed to influence students' interests and "talking points" in their study and workplace, too. This participant also felt somewhat disadvantaged and biased towards themselves by their European colleagues, and this made them more motivated to change their colleagues' negative stereotypes of Chinese culture, even though their colleagues did not seem to care about it:

I don't think they know about or care about Chinese culture. I also think they have a lot of misunderstandings and stereotypes. For example, they seem to think all Chinese people like to eat rice. I don't. I feel that I have to do something to break such stereotypes...The Western media also seem to like to report a lot of negative things about China, so maybe people who were raised here and have never been to China are brainwashed by the media, and think China is still very underdeveloped. They also seem to think Chinese people are all workaholics and we are not fun, which is not true.

Personality definitely played a role here because not everyone would rise to the occasion. Nevertheless, being misunderstood by the local students made this participant more motivated to work harder. They argued that it was up to Chinese people to challenge and change others' stereotypes and their outdated impressions of China. Despite their continuous effort, this participant also explained the challenges:

China is simply too big to be explained in a few sentences. Of course, there are some really underdeveloped places, but there are also cities that I think are 50 years ahead of many places in the UK.

Moreover, based on their follow-up accounts, it seemed that this student sensed a deep contempt toward certain cultures from their colleagues, who seemed to distance an African exchange student for no obvious reasons, “*They didn't like that African student and made fun of him behind his back.*” Additionally, they also described low-quality journals as “African journals”:

Say, I want to publish my paper in a journal. If it's a good journal, they will congratulate me. If it's not a good journal, they'd call it an African journal, even though it's a European journal. They just use the word to describe something that's not good or negative.

Although this might be an individual case, it is important to raise the local British and perhaps European students' awareness of some questionable behaviours, be outward looking and interculturally competent, and participate in the positive intercultural exchange. In comparison, Shuai's (Chem., PhD) research group was much more international and diverse in ethnolinguistic backgrounds, including students from the UK, the US, France, Italy, the Czech Republic, Germany, Canada, Japan, and China. He was the only Chinese student in the group, and his colleagues

seemed to be more interested in intercultural exchanges, in that they were more willing to ask him about news regarding China and Chinese culture.

Another relevant yet small point regarding interlocutor relations also emerged. Some students found it much easier to initiate and maintain friendships with other Chinese students, even after losing touch for some time. In contrast, most students who had non-Chinese friends for some time found it more challenging to maintain such relationships, partly due to language barriers. Chang (Geo., PhD) summarised his experience, “*Maybe you’ve made many foreign friends, but the ones you will have true and deep connections with are almost exclusively Chinese.*” Tangdou (Law, PGT) added a similar comment, “*If the non-Chinese students haven’t shown a strong interest to be friends with you, it is very difficult to make international friendships.*” This point further illustrates that communication is a two-way street, and successful intercultural communication requires synergy between different parties.

4.7.2 Communicative settings

Another theme worth mentioning is the communicative settings, which seemed to influence students’ WFOP, even for the same interlocutors. Formal communicative settings such as in-class discussion, speaking in front of the class, speaking with supervisors, and academic conferences seemed to put more pressure on students’ oral English performance as they needed to process their thoughts while paying attention to the English language, as well as thinking about appropriate registers. In the meantime, more than half of the participants found it easier to engage in intercultural interactions outside the formal classroom settings, such as cafes and common rooms. They also appreciated such interactions in informal settings, which enriched their international experience on a personal level.

However, Meiyi (Biz., PGT) expressed concerns that the NESs could be even more dominant in conversations which made her unable to participate under these circumstances, “*The NESs speak even faster when they are just talking to each other, so it’s very difficult for me to join them.*” On the other hand, Wendi (Chem., PGTR)

seemed to hold a different perspective, “*Even though I don’t understand everything they say, I don’t mind just listening.*” In addition, Meiyi (Biz., PGT) mentioned that the number of people involved in a conversation was important to her when she spoke English, which was to do with one’s personality and preferences, as was discussed in Section 4.6.3.3. She liked to have in-depth communication with one or two people who would allow the time and space for her to contemplate and speak, rather than speaking in bigger groups where turn-taking can be more chaotic which would make her feel less important and less comfortable.

When it comes to social space, it was interesting that seven students mentioned the “drinking culture” in the UK and they had different perceptions on this matter. Some expressed their surprise and unease about it. Jinjin (Lit., PGT) said:

I am not interested in going to pubs or drinking. It’s probably a cultural difference. I prefer having dinner with my friends at home or in a restaurant, and maybe we do karaoke, where alcohol is not involved.

Different from Jinjin, Huang (SPS, PhD) seemed to have more non-Chinese friends, and she adapted her ways of socialising with different cultural groups:

I usually have hotpots and maybe play board games with my Chinese friends, and if I am with my foreign friends, we usually go out for a drink, watch a movie or something. I think it’s just different ways of socialising based on different cultural norms, and I try to adjust to both.

Interestingly, although Shuai (Chem., PhD) did not like to drink alcohol, he loved to attend social events with non-Chinese friends. His strategy for alcohol-specific socialisation in the UK was to order non-alcoholic fizzy drinks. He found this informal socialisation in pubs an excellent opportunity to improve his social and English language skills. He stressed that it is important not to turn down invitations, “*You should join them often. Make yourself available, so people will invite you again next time.*”

Nevertheless, it seemed that not everyone liked the idea of socialising where they needed to spend much money, as Xin (Info., PGT) explained:

I don't socialise very much because it's not cheap to go out. You can easily spend £20 every time on food, drinks and other things like transport, but my budget is a bit tight.

In brief, it seemed that a more affordable, student-friendly intercultural environment would be greatly appreciated by students to provide them with a comfortable, relaxing, and safe space to socialise as an international community.

4.7.3 Exposure to an English-speaking environment

4.7.3.1 Institutional constraints

As students' exposure to English-speaking settings differed, the intensity and frequency of using English in academic and social settings varied, and this was often not up to the students themselves. As I conducted more interviews, it became clearer that different programmes could have a very different outlook regarding students' ethnolinguistic backgrounds and the surrounding language environment, as mentioned in previous sections. This, in turn, made a difference in their perceptions and attitudes towards speaking English. To a large extent, how much exposure students had to an English-speaking environment was not decided by them. In addition, they tended to prioritise the programme that interested them before other influencing factors such as the number of students and nationalities of students in the programme, which is information beyond their access.

Moreover, due to the design of course structures and schedules, even though some students were allocated to programmes where there were many non-Chinese speakers, they still had few chances to interact with or even know who their classmates were. For instance, Xin (Info., PGT) pointed out that having lectures with students from other programmes made her very confused and caused her to lose a sense of belonging to her own programme. *"I don't know what's the point of even choosing a programme if we are having classes with students from other programmes all the time"*, she said. It seems that the lack of constant and consistent interaction with other students from her programme made her feel very lonely during her stay, especially because she also did not live in a student accommodation site but

lived with two other PhD students in a private flat to save money. Given the different lifestyles, routines and interests, she did not become close friends with her flatmates and she was stuck with a plain “school or home” lifestyle, with very limited social activities. She highly suggested the schools organise classes into smaller sizes, and she hoped to have more group work where she could be assigned to a group and given a chance to get to know someone without her trying very hard to step out of her comfort zone.

Furthermore, different programmes required different work styles and ways of communication – a point raised in Section 4.2.3. This indirectly imposed a programme-specific conventional communication style onto the students, making it more difficult for them to create opportunities to engage in communicative situations that were not provided. Within the same level of study, especially at the PhD level, it was clear that certain programmes shared more similarities in terms of their forms of assessment and communication. For instance, PhD students in the School of Informatics, Engineering, Geosciences, and Chemistry were all members of a specific research group. Although they each had their own PhD projects, these students had very regular weekly meetings with the supervisors and other group members to report their work progress and discuss recent papers and other issues. Therefore, there was frequent communication at the workplace, including chats about everyday life in offices, labs, or common rooms. These students all mentioned how the research groups were strong communities, not only academically but also socially. In addition to their nine-to-five schedule, Hong (Eng., PhD) said that the groups in the School of Engineering, for instance, held a tradition of having regular Friday Night Pub events and other forms of social activities, which created a consistent informal environment for its members to connect:

Our group has a Friday Night Pub event. We go for a drink at the pub in Kings Buildings, chit-chatting, you know. No crazy drinking whatsoever, just relaxing and talking.

As was discussed in Section 4.7.1.1, such frequent communication could enhance the familiarity and relationships between interlocutors, which could further facilitate students’ WFOP.

On the other hand, things were rather different for students from the other six schools in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. First of all, all but one of them were self-funded, which is very common among the PhD students in these schools. There were no research groups in their programmes, and the frequency of meeting with supervisors was significantly lower, approximately once a month. They also tended to have a more flexible workspace, in that they did not need to “check-in” their offices or even go to offices at all. Therefore, the sense of colleagues and community seemed much looser, and their research seemed to require more individuality and autonomy. In addition, social activities tended to be more Chinese-centric for these students. If there were specific school-organised events, these students, especially the Masters students, liked to hang out with other Chinese students. Therefore, peer familiarity among the Masters students was weaker, although some relatively smaller programmes, e.g., MSc Geographical Information Science, also had the Friday Library Bar event or equivalent social every week.

It is also worth pointing out that interviewees often referred to the “personality” of a programme and its relation to students’ social activities. For instance, Chen (Info., PhD) said, *“I think people in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences are more active, and they are better at socialising, compared to people in my school.”* Hong (Eng., PhD) commented that he is relatively active and good at interacting with girls, which is a trait different from most of his peers, indicating another kind of stereotype of people in science and engineering.

4.7.3.2 Student accommodation

Student accommodation was another subtheme. Data revealed that it was simply by chance whether students would be exposed to the English language at home unless they had chosen their flatmates purposefully. Eight out of 20 students chose to live in private flats, and all of these flats were only occupied by Chinese tenants with mostly Chinese landlords. Most “first-timers” of the overseas study tended to choose student accommodation provided by the university for convenience

and safety reasons. PhD students who had more experience overseas tended to appear more confident and comfortable knowing what type of accommodation they wanted.

Data showed that some students preferred to live with fellow Chinese students for presumed similar living habits, such as cooking habits. This preference was clearly manifested in students who chose to live in private accommodation. Two participants expressed that they enjoyed socialising with non-Chinese students but did not necessarily want to extend such friendships to home. Wen (Law, PhD), who had lived with students from various countries during her Masters study in London, shared her unpleasant experience with non-Chinese flatmates with whom she could not communicate efficiently to solve problems, which had caused her great frustration and anxiety at home:

For some reason, a girl was just very mean to us Chinese people. She didn't do the dishes and left her shampoo and stuff everywhere, just beyond my tolerance. They also drank a lot and made much noise at night. I think Chinese students are quieter and better behaved. If we ask someone to come over for dinner, we will clean up afterwards. Some of my previous non-Chinese flatmates had bizarre habits. My Chinese flatmates and I would tidy up our things next to the kitchen sink, but the non-Chinese flatmates not only used our cookware and utensils but also didn't even care to clean up. I was sick of worrying about these things every day, and I couldn't straighten things out because it was very difficult to communicate with them.

Wen firmly believed that her home life would be much “easier” with other co-nationals because of their established common way of living, and in times of conflict, issues would be resolved quickly. What is interesting is that Wen, like some other participants, often seemed to generalise the Chinese cohort and carried a “us vs. them” perspective. Moreover, some students were happy to be with other Chinese students during the initial transition period, but by the time they settled down, it was challenging for them to form new circles or break out of their comfort zones. Xiao (Edu., PGT) shared her emotional transition from being very happy to feeling left out.

I was nervous when I first arrived, so I wanted to hang out with Chinese students, and I thought it was great that all my flatmates were Chinese. But I really didn't expect so many Chinese people in class. When I wanted to go find some other non-Chinese friends, they all formed their circles, and it would be very hard for me to join them.

It seems that for students who did not tend to socialise with non-Chinese students, if they did not actively seek opportunities for English communication, very little English was needed beyond the classroom. This means many English communication scenarios can be easily avoided, such as self-checkout at grocery shopping and email communication with the university staff instead of direct oral communication. Such a lack of OP needs was explained in Section 4.3.2.

In the meantime, others preferred to meet students from other cultures and use the accommodation environment as an opportunity for intercultural experience. Nevertheless, not everyone could live where they wanted to. Moreover, for some students who did live with international students, it turned out that they could have very different interests, habits, and routines, so the frequency and intensity of English communication also differed based on the relationships between the Chinese students and their non-Chinese flatmates. While some students were included in group activities such as watching sports and taking short trips together, it was more often the case that they only held somewhat superficial conversations rather than having meaningful connections, as demonstrated in Sheng's (Geo., PGT) words:

I have flatmates who are studying business and psychology, but I don't think they are as busy as I am. I have one deadline after another. So even though we meet in the kitchen sometimes, we don't really spend our free time together hanging out. Our conversations remain basic and superficial.

4.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the results from the thematic analysis of interviews by addressing the RQ1 and RQ2 in detail. It explained students' various academic and socio-personal OP needs, as well as the different types of factors influencing their OP, including linguistic factors, cognitive factors, psychological factors, and social-contextual factors. The next chapter will turn to the results drawn from the focus groups in response to RQ3.

Chapter 5 Focus Group Results

While the interviews provided rich and detailed student experience and perceptions regarding their oral participation (OP) needs during their stay in the UK, the focus groups (FGs) were intended to explore the participants' perspectives by discussing a series of ideas on how to address and meet their OP needs – RQ3. In addition, FG was used to examine how attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts regarding a specific topic were co-constructed. Extracts that illustrate how opinions were formed will be provided with contexts. (See original extracts in Appendix I). As explained in Chapter 3, one Masters FG and one PhD FG were held, and all participants had taken part in the previous interviews. A double-layer FG design was adopted (Krueger & Casey, 2015), in that two FGs were held to generate as much information as possible and to compare and contrast the perceptions between students.

The following sections will elaborate on the most salient themes by presenting the consensuses reached by the groups and the disputes during the discussions. These FG topics were ideas put forward by the participants themselves during the interviews (see Appendix E for the FG guide). Suggestions were proposed for different stakeholders in consideration of various challenges and constraints. The integration of the two research methods offered rich insights into the research context and provided greater accuracy and depth into the research topic.

5.1 Overview of focus group analysis

As explained in Section 3.5.1, FG data were analysed with an inductive thematic analysis approach, including intra-group analysis based on students' evaluation of the seven FG topics, followed by an inter-group analysis. Based on the extensiveness, intensity, and specificity of students' comments, salient themes emerged from the FG data (see Table 5.1), which will be discussed later in this chapter. Some FG findings are similar to what emerged from the interviews, so they will be mentioned briefly in connection with the previous chapter.

Table 5.1

Thematic Framework Based on Focus Group Analysis to Address RQ3

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
1. Various types of support from the university	1.1 More opportunities for meaningful engagement	1.1.1 Targeted and specific English language support
		1.1.2 Transferable skills-based language support
		1.1.3 A shift from English ability to intercultural ability
		1.1.4 Support intrinsic to the academic contexts
	1.2 Support in other areas	1.2.1 Environmental support
		1.2.2 Pre-arrival online support
2. More learner agency from the students	2.1 More learner proactivity	
	2.2 Increase self-reflexivity	
3. Raising intercultural awareness for all	3.1 Chinese students	
	3.2 Local students and other international students	
	3.3 Teachers	

5.2 Various types of support from the university

The following sub-sections will elaborate on the criticisms, challenges, and suggestions put forward by the participants regarding a variety of support the university could provide to develop students' OP skills. A substantial part of the FG discussions focused on one issue – support, which kept reoccurring in each topical discussion. Here, support refers to more opportunities for meaningful engagement to address students' OP needs, with an emphasis on the different types of opportunities

both inside and outside the usual classroom settings, and meaningful intercultural communication opportunities where students can practise their English-speaking skills and enhance their overall ability.

A shift in students' attitudes towards university support was noteworthy. FG participants were divided at first over the usefulness of university support, but later they shifted the focus to finding practical solutions. Extract 1 below illustrates the PhD students' initial intuitive responses.

Extract 1 – PhD FG

Chang	Aren't there already some activities like this? But I doubt the effectiveness , so I am sceptical about it.
Han	I think it's too general . We need to think it through, differentiating different types of activities for different purposes.
Wen	Maybe the university has some societies about intercultural communication. I think if there is one about spoken English, that can be interesting. But it's difficult to say. I am not sure .
Hong	I think it really depends on the individuals , plus the way they're organised . I like the idea, but I doubt how it can be well implemented.
Tian	I'm not sure who the target groups are, but I don't think I'm interested in activities that just focus on improving English.

During the discussions, participants were able to explore ways to address students' OP needs by first identifying the reasons for their scepticism and building upon the original idea. They pointed out the problems of some of the current support available and put forward suggestions in consideration of potential constraints, which will be expanded in detail in the following sections.

5.2.1 More opportunities for meaningful engagement

The first type of support refers to an increase in the volume of opportunities for students to engage in meaningful engagement. Meaningful engagement here is twofold. First, it refers to the content of communication being important, relevant,

and interesting to the students, which facilitates their prolonged engagement rather than temporary and superficial conversations. The second aspect refers to the process and outcome of communication, with a shift from an emphasis on improving only English ability to improving intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as a whole. The aim of creating these opportunities for meaningful engagement is ultimately to facilitate students' motivation for intercultural communication and WFOP. Accordingly, four types of opportunities were proposed as follows.

5.2.1.1 Targeted and specific English language support

Participants identified that the university currently had academic writing support, but there seemed to be a lack of support for oral English. They suspected the reasons were: 1) limited financial resources, 2) a shortage of qualified tutors, and 3) less importance put on English-speaking ability compared to writing ability since the latter is seen as directly connected to academic assessments. Therefore, both groups advocated for more focused support for spoken English, providing specific suggestions for improvement in flexible formats based on students' different preferences and learning styles.

Regarding the proposed "peer-support system" from the interviews (see Appendix E), both groups considered it a promising idea, yet they also saw many potential problems. As illustrated in the extract below, one big concern was the difficulty of maintaining such an imbalanced relationship, in that one student could be interested in receiving English language support but it might be hard to identify what they could offer to attract the helpers in return. This type of activity was also criticised for overly promoting the expectation of international friendships, as a buddy relationship might terminate if there was a lack of common interest between the pair, especially with an absence of attractive incentives. As the excerpt below shows, a lack of commitment could be expected if the pair did not get along or one lost interest in the process, which would threaten the sustainability of the system.

Extract 2 – Masters FG

- Xin I think some Chinese people talk to foreigners **simply for the purpose of practising English, not to make friends.**
- Xiao We **shouldn't let foreigners think we only want to approach them because we want to practise English with them**, rather than having a **genuine interest in making friends with them.** If they are there to help us with spoken English, **then they should be paid.**
- Wendi Right, the buddy system is good for non-native speakers, but **what do native speakers gain from this?** Maybe they think it's **interesting at first**, but I think it can be **quite boring, so they may just quit anytime.**

Furthermore, students pointed out that people who do not have experience tutoring a language may not have the appropriate means to help improve others' speaking abilities. The following excerpt revealed this concern following Han's experience with TANDEM, a student-led programme in the university where students who were fluent in different languages could exchange language skills in groups or pairs, including English and other languages.

Extract 3 – PhD FG

- Han ... I've tried it, but **it's not very good.** Because the students are **not professional** language teachers after all, and there **aren't any materials**, so it's **quite hard for us**, like, we **didn't know where to begin.** I think most of the languages there are other European languages that **I'm not interested in.** To improve English there means you need to find a **native English speaker who is also interested in learning Chinese.** Quite **limited options.**
- Tian And local people also speak with **different English accents, not necessarily standard.**
- Chang Ha-ha, maybe you will end up with a Scottish accent.
- Wen The event you are talking about, **I don't think there is a guarantee in the long run.** It really **depends on if the two of you get along.** If you don't like each other, you can quit anytime. It can be quite awkward.
- Hong **It's as hard as successful blind dates!**
- Others (Giggling)

The analogy between pairing students up to going on blind dates humorously indicated the challenge here, which the other participants also agreed with.

In response to the mentioned challenges, participants made the following suggestions. First, where the purpose of improving spoken English ability was the primary concern, they seemed to prefer small tutorial settings with relatively experienced English language tutors to provide specific and targeted practice support. If it was in a group or workshop, there needed to be at least one tutor who was a proficient English speaker. Given that recruiting such tutors might be challenging, they also welcomed proficient NNEs students in addition to NNEs, although their lack of interest in volunteering might be a problem. Secondly, both FGs supported differentiating material incentives from friendships rather than mixing the two concepts. It was suggested that the university could pay these proficient English-speaking students to participate in playing the role of modelling and facilitating the communication process. Thirdly, the Masters students suggested that a questionnaire could be given to native/proficient English speakers to ask what they expected out of these activities, and what incentives would be appreciated by them.

Students also suggested that since these buddies were not there to tutor academic subjects but to help create more communicative opportunities and practise English in general, they did not have to be from the same schools as the Chinese students or at the same level of study. Therefore, mixing the student population across the university could help expand the pool of students available for this programme. In addition, the researcher also believes that such a mix can help students of all academic backgrounds to get a glimpse of other students' lives and gain a bigger picture of the student experience in the university, as compared to some of the current Chinese students' seemingly closed communities, which was revealed from the interview results.

Both FGs also agreed it was highly important to make the topics and content of each activity exciting and relevant to students to increase their motivation to participate. Providing guidance such as materials and preparation topics in advance seemed to be welcomed by students who were genuinely interested in enhancing their English-speaking ability, echoing the themes (cognitive factors) discussed in Section 4.5. Another noteworthy consensus reached by the Masters FG was that departments such as the English Language Education/Centre for Open Learning

(ELE/COL) and student societies could organise sessions or workshops to facilitate students' engagement in oral English communication, free for all students to attend. They suggested that participation should not be compulsory, and the opportunity should be considered as a means to increase students' WFOP rather than discouraging them by adding additional pressure. Attendees of these workshops were suggested to be awarded certificates issued by the organiser after certain effort and time commitment, similar to the Edinburgh Award run by the UoE, which Meiyi (Biz., PGT) had experienced, as shown in the following excerpt.

Extract 4 – Masters FG

Yong	Yes, yes. I think the university, like some societies or the English centre, can organise workshops , once a week or once every two weeks. Whoever wants to come can come for free , and it's important to make sure it's voluntary . They need to think about how to design the topics , and how to organise the activities better . If you want to organise them well, you can award the attendees something to make it more formal . For example, if a student attends every week and is very active, they can get a certificate , and I think most people would be quite happy to get one. It doesn't need to be a requirement for graduation, and there shouldn't be any tests .
Meiyi	Right, I think it's a great idea. Because we have something like this in the Business School called the Edinburgh Award . I attended two classes every week and I got an award in the end. I think it's a precious experience , and it's great that I can get the university's acknowledgement on paper .
Wendi	I also think it's a good idea... I think if this certificate can be used in the job market in China, like if it's useful when you are seeking jobs , that would be better. After all, so many Chinese students study in the UK, but not everyone can graduate with other certificates. So if you have one, it would be something to show your other abilities and make you stand out , making you more competitive .

This exchange is also an example that demonstrated how the FG participants reflected on their own thoughts compared to others in the group, scaffolded each other and drew on each other's opinions, which often led to more fully articulated accounts than individual interviews.

A certificate issued by the authority was considered a strong incentive by both FGs, because it can represent the university's acknowledgement of students' effort and be seen as a potentially useful document in the job market to complement

their English exam results and prove extracurricular work. More importantly, this idea took students' oral communication needs into account, offering some flexibility while providing positive pressure. In addition, arranging regular meetings was considered important to ensure the effectiveness and continuity of such events. PhD students also suggested that buddies or tutors needed to have certain time commitment before receiving any reward to acknowledge their effort. FGs specified that Institute for Academic Development (IAD), ELE/COL, and even individual schools should spend some budget on facilitating such beneficial events.

In addition, Wendi (Chem., PGTR) also pointed out that British-born Chinese people were ideal for such programmes for their proficiency both in English and Chinese, as well as familiarity with both cultures. This suggested that not only language proficiency, but also cultural insights were valued by students when receiving support. However, given the scale of the university and the number of British-born Chinese students, this ideal model was challenging to achieve. Nevertheless, Wendi's point led to the group's further discussion and the participants' agreement that both language proficiency as well as knowledge and respect regarding different cultures were important qualities to facilitate successful intercultural communication.

Having said that, the needs of those students who desire to improve their spoken English should not be overgeneralised or projected to a larger population by default, as pointed out multiple times by both FGs, and exemplified in this excerpt.

Extract 5 – PhD FG

Hong	Some people just want to come here and get a degree. English development is not their goal , at least not an important goal. You can't really judge them on that.
Wen	Indeed, everyone is different . Some Chinese students are perfectly happy socialising with other Chinese people , although I think it's a waste of opportunity when studying abroad.
Tian	Yeah, I think Chinese students, in general, have the need to improve their English-speaking ability, and the university should make an effort to support them, but it cannot be made compulsory .

Last but not least, there were two more reasons for this type of spoken English-focused support. The first was to provide students who did not have enough opportunities to speak English with more chances to practise speaking English in their daily lives. As explained in the previous chapter, some students lacked the surrounding language environment, and some were too reserved to seek opportunities outside their comfort zones. Secondly, these activities could help identify potential weaknesses in their English skills and provide specific methods or advice on how they could improve. This was to address the problem pointed out by both groups that although some students desired to improve their spoken English, they might not have the right tool or strategies to practise.

5.2.1.2 Transferable skills-based language support

Transferable skills-based language support, which refers to a combination of transferable skills training and English language support, emerged from the PhD group discussion on their final topic as a desired type of university support.

Their initial feelings towards this proposal were a mix of scepticism with one assertive voice, as captured in the excerpt below. Although Tian (Edu., PhD) was the only participant who supported the idea from the beginning, he strongly argued that compared to their Western counterparts, Chinese students were generally weaker at presentations, public speaking, group work, and other tasks that required good communication skills. Therefore, he emphasised that improving oral communication skills was not only for language development but also for improving one's overall transferable skills. Tian's perspectives may have stemmed from his extensive experience in Western universities and interactions with Chinese and Western students from his academic and teaching experience.

Extract 6 – PhD FG

Tian	I think communication is a transferable skill . It's not only about your ability to speak English but also a comprehensive ability . It's great to have someone coach you on how to do presentations or communicate better in teamwork, but I think there is more . This kind of transferable skill is what

many Chinese students lack. Public speaking and presentation skills overall are neglected in our education system. Children here practise presentations **since their childhood**, which is a way to **develop their confidence**. In China, we tend to have the teacher leading students' learning, which is different from here...I think we need to **practise not only in English, but also in Chinese** because the environment where we grew up doesn't emphasise this important skill.

All (Nodding) Yes, yes.

As a result of Tian's pitch, Wen (Law, PhD) moved from her initial scepticism to sharing her experience of learning from a series of workshops on presentation skills.

Extract 7 – PhD FG

Wen After listening to him, I remember taking the workshops on **how to do presentations**. I think there're also workshops on **how to be a better tutor**. These workshops are **effective because you are developing specific skills**. Before our first-year progression board, Law School asked all of us to attend the presentation skill workshop. Many students really considered it **very useful**, and **they were all foreigners, including local students**. I realised **there's much room for my improvement**. I think **it makes great sense to develop communicative ability with some skills for specific contexts**.

According to Wen, not only did she benefit from the sessions, but also her NES colleagues appreciated these workshops. Therefore, it is evident that this type of support is not just limited to benefit international students but also home students as well. Her experience provided the FG with an example in the academic context where some communication skills could be trained and learnt, which switched the group's overall attitude to brainstorm the positive aspects of such a proposal. Tian further stressed that PhD students needed to pay more attention to these life skills given that they were perceived by the public in general as better educated and more capable, and they represented the image of prestigious UK universities, which was agreed by the whole group. It is worth noting that the key point here is that OP in English is required as a part of skills training but not the only goal of the activity, which will be further illustrated in the next section.

5.2.1.3 A shift from English ability to intercultural ability

Participants from both FGs overwhelmingly regarded English as a means to communicate in the target context. The emphasis on English-speaking ability improvement, although desired by some, seemed to imply some kind of innate weakness of NNEs. According to the participants, activities and events highlighting English enhancement can indicate NNEs as disadvantaged, which would create a psychological barrier for some students to participate. Instead, it was suggested that the focus be shifted to embrace a wider audience and enhance the ability to engage in meaningful intercultural communication.

The idea of organising more intercultural events was initially received with both welcoming and concerning voices. It seemed to be preferred by some students because it was a platform for communication without requesting much long-term time commitment, which offered an informal and relaxing environment. However, one problem identified by the participants regarding some events they attended in the past was that they tended to promote intercultural communication without much room for actual in-depth interpersonal communication among the attendees. Some students shared their own experiences going to these events where the attendees were mostly NNEs, who were relatively weak in spoken English in the first place and were less willing to initiate communication. Members in both FGs echoed the experience of going to social events in the hope of interacting with people from other cultures but failing to achieve the goal in the end, as revealed in the extract below.

Extract 8 – Masters FG

Wendi	I think the biggest problem is that people who go to these events are not very good at English.
Xiao	Yes! I've also been to these so-called international events. You will most likely just stay with the people you go to the event with.
Meiyi	It's difficult to initiate communication in these situations. Maybe you will greet a few non-Chinese students and chat about something superficial , but it's very difficult to have in-depth conversations.
Yong	Yeah, it's kinda awkward.

The content and organisation of activities were also raised as issues for consideration, which should intrigue participants' interests and facilitate their WFOP. It was made clear from the FGs that an event would be unpopular if students were expected to engage in conversations on topics they did not care about or know much about. Popular social issues in the news, debatable topics concerning the UK and China, as well as personal experiences sharing in the form of relaxing discussion seemed to be preferred by the participants. Topics relevant to university students' age group were suggested to be considered to best match their interests.

For these activities to work effectively, participants suggested that it was essential to avoid having too many students from one nation going to the activity together at once. Otherwise, it might lead them to speak in their first language, against their initial motivation. Smaller groups were considered more effective in eliciting meaningful and rich communication. The Masters group highlighted that the size of the activities should be monitored and best to be kept around six people, with students from a minimum of two different countries, to make sure each group member could be noticed and given some time to interact with others. Both groups agreed that in a relatively small group setting, it only took the presence of one non-Chinese person to motivate the group to speak English, based on the mutually understood rule that they must try to speak English in the presence of people who do not understand Chinese. Given the demographic of the students at the postgraduate level in UoE where there are more non-local students than local students, it seems difficult for Chinese students to interact with local British students. However, data also showed that both FGs highly valued the experience of interacting with a wide group of people from different backgrounds, not necessarily just with the locals.

Although individuals or student organisations can initiate these interactive opportunities, it was suggested by both FGs that departments of the university would be the preferred organisers, considering their authoritative roles and students' trust in them. Similar to the ideas mentioned in the previous section, to make these events more attractive, perhaps students would be appealed to by certificate-like incentives issued by the university to indicate their rewarding social experience. Again, ELE/COL and IAD were nominated by students to take the lead in organising these

events, together with Edinburgh Global and Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA). Furthermore, students sensed that financial support and investment was a big concern in implementing such continuous activities. Both groups suggested if there was any participation fee applied to the activities, they hoped that such events could be organised or supported by the aforementioned university departments rather than student-led societies, which would seem more official and trustworthy, as indicated in the excerpt below.

Extract 9 – Masters FG

Yong	If they need to charge a fee for participation, it's better to be officially organised by the university .
Xin	I think so, too. Especially for international students like us, we would trust the university more than other organisers .
Meiyi	Yeah, students are probably more motivated if the events are organised by the university departments , and they will also appreciate that the university is providing all sorts of interesting events .

To solve the funding issue, Yong (Eng., PGT) came up with a creative idea by suggesting the university charge students a small fee included in the tuition fee in advance, for the purpose of intercultural communication development, which could be used to support these in-session activities and events. Payment and participation in these events should be made optional, but he believed that students and parents would be more likely to pay such additional costs together with the tuition fee prior to students' enrolment rather than afterwards. This idea was warmly supported by the other group members.

In addition, the Masters FG thought promoting events that represent the university's interest in international communication enhancement rather than the sole focus on English ability could be more appealing to students. The extract below captures an example of this opinion.

Extract 10 – Masters FG

Xiao	I've participated in an event I found on Facebook, and it was about making kites with the locals and other international people. The event had nothing to do with English development , but I think I actually developed my

speaking ability in the process. I think this is **a good way** to do it. I mean, you **don't need to advertise English improvement**, but you need to **have an interesting focus** so that participants feel that **they've gained something out of it** afterwards.

The Masters FG held the view that shifting the focus from primarily on English language skills to intercultural communication skills was more profound and meaningful. This point concurred with the PhD group, who also commented that they would be more interested in activities where English language improvement was the “by-product” but not the main focus, as exemplified in the following experience.

Extract 11 – PhD FG

Han I like to play **board games**. I think you can actually **learn a lot from this process, especially in communication**, because you need to **talk about the rules, explain things, negotiate, and sometimes have teamwork**.

All the PhD students agreed that board games and other similar activities could create a friendly and relaxing atmosphere for intercultural communication while practising communication skills such as arguing, reasoning, negotiating, explaining, and describing. However, only those that require a fair amount of oral communication should be selected. Both FGs seemed to like the task-based approach to improving intercultural communication in English, which can be considered a “one stone, two birds” strategy.

Another point that the Masters participants seemed to agree upon was that it would be much appreciated if students were provided with more opportunities to communicate with people from other cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, to discuss non-academic issues and broaden the scope of the overall overseas experience. The extract below highlights the importance of students' intercultural OP in their overseas study experience.

Extract 12 – Masters FG

Xiao You don't need to physically attend some lectures because some lecture videos are available online, but the real human interaction is different.

Meiyi I think this kind of **intercultural communication is a precious experience**, no matter in class or outside class. If there are opportunities, the **everyday**

communication in student societies and accommodation is also very good.

Xin Yeah. After all, we are paying so much to study in the UK. Part of the fee is for study, and **the other part is for the expected intercultural experience.**

Xiao Right. Many students will soon **forget about what they've learnt in class** during their studies in the UK, but most will **always remember the interactions they've had with people from other cultural backgrounds.**

All (Nodding) Yes, yes.

The one-year overseas experience for Masters students was suggested to be insufficient for them to improve spoken English drastically, hence the realisation of the unrealistic goal of improving English throughout the relatively short overseas sojourn. However, the following excerpt argued that one year could also be fruitful in improving one's intercultural communicative ability.

Extract 13 – Masters FG

Meiyi Perhaps your **English accent is still the same**, and your **vocabulary hasn't expanded much**. But if you think you can **speak much more fluently and confidently** when you talk with people from other countries, I think it's **a great progress in the enhancement of your language ability.**

As explained in Section 3.4.4, one merit of FG is its flexibility for spontaneous responses, which enable participants to guide the discussions and pose interesting questions to each other. One example of such spontaneous discussions was regarding whether the university should take on the role of providing these activities, where there was an initial disagreement in the PhD group. This point then led to the discussion on the value of a PhD from a (prestigious) UK university, and whether the university was responsible for making sure its graduates were proficient in English communication. Three PhD members advocated for a higher requirement for IELTS score to ensure the teaching and learning quality, but the group also acknowledged that raising the entry requirement could possibly conflict with the university's financial interest. The group speculated that the university might rely more on international students' fees post-Brexit, and some programmes might even lower their entry requirement for IELTS to maintain or expand recruitment, which led to their worry about educational quality. Below is a glimpse of this discussion.

Extract 14 – PhD FG

- Chang I think the students who are accepted by the UoE **should be very good at English**. You are **supposed to be good** at it.
- Han Not necessarily. So, would you suggest some programmes **raise the entry requirement for IELTS**?
- Tian What does it mean by a **prestigious university**? It means **high educational quality**. I think **raising the bar is a good thing**. You need good students to **achieve the academic expectations**.
- Hong But IELTS results **can't guarantee their actual English ability in real life**.
- Wen At least it's **a useful standard**. My **worry** is that raising the bar may **cut off some income** for the university.

Different from the other members, Tian (Edu, PhD), who was from the School of Education, asserted that the university had a responsibility to support international students' communicative experience on campus to maintain its world-class reputation of educational quality. Furthermore, he criticised the current seemingly income-driven recruitment style and imbalanced distribution of Chinese students in different disciplines, particularly in some PGT programmes. His passionate and persistent argument (see below) eventually convinced his peers.

Extract 15 – PhD FG

- Tian But, I think **the university has some responsibility** because they've **opened the international market and recruited many Chinese students to make money**. So, **is the standard getting lower? Has the university reflected on the influences of this change?** Take the pre-sessional English language course, for example. IELTS is honestly not that difficult compared to the real use of English in the UK. These students **did not meet the entry requirement**, but they **could attend this super expensive programme**. Isn't that a different way of **making money and lowering the standard**? Maybe I'm being a bit critical here, but **shouldn't the university reflect on recent changes in the language environment given the recruitment strategy?** We know there are **programmes full of Chinese students**, especially in some PGT programmes. They have **no foreign classmates**. Isn't it the **university's responsibility to make sure the students have plenty of opportunities to improve English**, so that when they return to China, they won't give others the impression that they can't speak English well after studying in the UK? Otherwise, **it will damage the university's reputation in the long run**.
- Hong Yeah, it makes sense.
- Others (Nodding) Agree.

Following Tian, Chang (Geo., PhD) reminded the group that some Chinese students would prioritise attaining a degree from a UK university, and they might not be interested in developing their English proficiency anymore once they started their programmes. Having acknowledged that, the group finally reached the agreement that the university had the responsibility to provide support, but it did not have the responsibility to make sure all students utilise such support, which should be based on learners' autonomy and preferences.

5.2.1.4 Support intrinsic to the academic contexts

FG data revealed that different programmes had different demographic outlooks, communication patterns, norms of assessment, and expectations of OP, which influenced students' perceptions of the importance of OP in class and their general academic settings.

The sixth FG topic, which suggests that students can choose to join either an English-speaking or a Chinese-speaking group in class, caused a clear disagreement among the Masters students, firmly rejected by three and favoured by two students. Interesting, the two students in favour of this happened to be in Chinese-dominant programmes – Xiao (Edu., PGT) and Yong (Eng., PGT). Initially, Xiao and Yong agreed with the proposal and claimed it was a good way to enhance learning efficiency. However, they both considered the efficiency of academic work should be given more priority than using the classroom as a chance to practise speaking English, especially if it was practising with fellow Chinese students. Their comments also revealed that such a division was mostly likely caused by frustration of these programmes where most students were Chinese, which is different from many people's expectations of an overseas study environment. On the other hand, Meiyi (Biz., PGT) argued that the ability to engage in intercultural communication verbally was highly important, particularly for her programme. She considered speaking Chinese for efficiency not only unfair for other international NNEST students who do not have co-nationals to speak their first language with, but also impolite, violating the norm of communication in class. However, the three students who were against

this proposal commented that they could completely empathise with students in Chinese-dominant classes for wanting a more English-speaking environment.

One suggestion supported by the whole Masters FG was that the teachers could “set the tone” at the beginning of the course to highlight that the medium of communication in class should be English, and they could encourage students to speak English as much as possible, as seen in the Extract below. Yong (Eng., PGT) also commented that although there was a natural temptation to speak Chinese in a Chinese-dominant environment, some students were still keen to speak English in the academic setting. I speculate that if there was an unspoken rule to allow students to not speak English in class, those who try to speak English actively might be viewed as different, strange, or even show-offs by other Chinese students. Furthermore, it was agreed in the Masters group that although teachers could emphasise such an “English only” rule as a general suggestion, they should also allow some leeway for international students and tolerate occasional slips or code-switching back to their first language. Meanwhile, the group insisted on only applying this rule in the classroom setting, while group work or discussion after class should be entirely up to the students.

Extract 16 – Masters FG

Yong	If we are told that we are supposed to speak English in class, even though I may change back to speaking Chinese for a bit, I will think that I shouldn't really do that and switch right back to English.
Xiao	Right. I think there can be a general policy , so people who do stick to speaking English will not be judged.
Xin	And if it's too difficult, occasional use of Chinese should be allowed.
All	(Nodding) Yes.

The purpose of teachers making such statements in class is to help set students' expectations, create a fair environment, and encourage participation from those who desire to speak English but feel less comfortable speaking English with fellow Chinese students. It seems that this practice would make a difference because if teachers (the authoritative figures) encourage students to try their best to speak

English and reassure them that the substance of their thoughts would be valued rather than the proficiency of their spoken English, Chinese students will be more willing to participate despite their insecurity of English-speaking skills, and they will believe that they should speak English in the academic contexts.

Both FGs raised another issue of OP needs in specific disciplines. They specified the differences between disciplines regarding the expectation of students studying in specific fields, e.g., Law students and Education students are expected to be better at verbal communication due to the nature of their work. On the other hand, participants in the field of science seemed to consider speaking English for academic purposes less demanding, although they also saw OP as a useful tool for discussing academic issues. This point was addressed in Section 4.2 and, therefore, will not be expanded here.

All PhD students noted that they had relatively frequent opportunities and needs to engage in oral English communication. As a group, they suggested that Masters programmes include more formative assignments which require communication in the process, such as group projects. Although current assessments such as presentations or group collaborations could provide students with the chance to speak English in public or with other students, both FGs advocated for an increase in the requirement of oral communication throughout students' study experience. Both FGs strongly opposed adopting an exam-oriented approach which leads to the washback effect to motivate students, as prompted in the second FG topic for discussion. Almost all participants thought it would potentially de-motivate students by linking such requirements to their degree completion. The Masters FG was more inclined to take an alternative task-based approach, such as frequent group work which would lead to a product or something tangible periodically, e.g., performance or a presentation. A more speaking-based formative assessment was recommended as constant external motivation for students to engage in oral communication. Keeping the intercultural communication natural, authentic, and meaningful was highlighted by both FGs.

Furthermore, it is also worth pointing out that the occasional “clashes” of opinions among FG participants seemed primarily due to their limited insights into other programmes or schools as well as their own experience and default imagination. It was especially evident when discussing issues such as the language environment in class and different academic assessments that the five participants in each FG saw their different international student experience from one another while being at the same university. Having realised that, participants began to say words such as “At least this is what it is like in our school”, “I can only speak for my school”, and “Maybe it’s different for their programmes”.

5.2.2 Support in other areas

In addition to providing opportunities for meaningful engagement, other types of desired support from the university also emerged.

5.2.2.1 Environmental support

One sub-theme of support in other areas was environmental support. All PhD students except for Han (ECA, PhD) commented that most of their colleagues were non-Chinese, so they would either engage in all sorts of conversations in English or listen to their colleagues talking to each other in English. The PhD FG suggested the university create more common rooms on campus where colleagues could relax and enjoy conversations with others freely without worrying about disturbing the others in the office or having to stand in the hallway for a long time to have a nice conversation. Han, the only one who did not have a fixed workplace during his PhD, especially concurred with this point, for his experience of lacking a connection with other PhD colleagues during his past three years at UoE, which was hard to believe for Hong from the School of Engineering.

Extract 17 – PhD FG

Han	It’s nice what you guys have. We don’t have a fixed workplace , and my supervisor also has other students. So we basically just work by ourselves individually . I rarely meet other students or colleagues.

Hong Really? You rarely meet your colleagues?

Han Yeah. Although we have a study space in the ECA building, **there isn't a specific room or office allocated to us for work**. So, we **don't really know each other** because we work on different things.

Following Han's sharing, the PhD group also mentioned the "hot desk" arrangement for some PhD students in other schools, which also led to these students lacking a stable and consistent work environment. The suggestion for environmental support seems to not only offer space for people who tend to talk to each other, but also create more opportunities for people to engage in small talks in the international work environment. This point was also raised in the Masters FG, where they complained about not having enough opportunities to talk to their peers once the class was over. One idea was suggested and was supported by the rest of the group, which was that the course organiser could make a classroom available for some extra time before and after a lesson, so that if students want to arrive early or stay behind for discussions, they can have a convenient and available space without worrying about booking study rooms or being rushed to leave the classrooms.

Furthermore, many Chinese students do not have sufficient opportunities to engage in English communication in their daily life, as indicated in the extract below, which was also addressed in Section 4.3.2. Even though this issue might not apply to every participant, it was acknowledged across both FGs, which calls for the need to create more environment support.

Extract 18 – PhD FG

Wen I think it's very important to **provide a platform** for people who are interested. **Provide a way, a channel for them to improve**. I've met some Chinese students who're **surrounded by Chinese students in class**, and they're **surrounded by Chinese flatmates at home**. They **only go out with Chinese students, too**. So, they feel like they are **speaking Chinese every day in the UK**. I mean, they have **few chances to speak English**.

As for the weekly International Student Café – a university event, Wen (Law, PhD) only went there once and decided not to go again, because it was mostly undergraduate American students talking about their "own things", which she found

exclusive and somewhat intimidating, echoing the point of the dynamic power relationships between interlocutors (see Section 4.7.1).

Extract 19 – PhD FG

Wen	But there are some opportunities, like university societies. Maybe some students haven't fully used such opportunities, but honestly, some events need to be more inclusive , such as not having just native speakers , which is intimidating for non-native English speakers to participate .

Wen's comments offered one way to better organise the existing activities in the university to make them more appealing to international (NNES) students.

5.2.2.2 Pre-arrival online support

FG results also suggested that university support was not only needed during students' term time but also prior to arrival. Both FGs advised the university to offer some video recordings of previous courses to help prospective students establish an expectation by providing an accurate picture of some typical academic contexts. It was highlighted that authentic textbooks and real classroom videos could be helpful to familiarise students with the English language related to their fields of study.

Interestingly, the fifth topic (see Appendix E) on providing short videos about English for learning and living purposes (ELLP) online received little support from the PhD group but was favoured by the Masters group. The main reason for PhD students' concern was its cost-effectiveness, in that this might be a costly project with a potentially extensive range of topics to cover. In addition, making the videos would require much effort, while the videos are likely to overlap with many pre-existing videos available online. They also worried that it could be challenging to attract students to watch these videos. Therefore, they did not believe this would be a project worth investing in, and both groups thought these videos being "too available" could even make the students "lazier". Overall, the Masters group seemed to hold a very positive attitude towards any additional support from the university. In contrast,

the PhD group seemed to think that the combination of good self-discipline and strong motivation was more useful than university's videos.

Despite the differences, both FGs built upon the original proposal and suggested that maybe students would find videos that reflect life in UoE and in the UK most interesting and useful, and the videos should be made available for new students before arrival. They considered the videos a good start for prospective students to prepare and get through the initial transition period. They proposed that the university could interview some current students and staff to share their experiences. Students also suggested the university or even current students make a series of introduction videos and interviews in places, such as different university campuses, libraries, student accommodation, labs, classrooms, gyms, student union buildings, and other popular places for future UoE students. These short videos could also introduce different sites' functions, structures, and histories.

In addition, the Masters group also proposed that it would be audience-friendly and unique to include something local and "Scottish" in the videos, given that many similar videos about studying in the UK available online tend to be about life in England at the moment. The PhD participants all agreed that these videos should be put on Learn (UoE's online learning system) and maybe even on Chinese social media platforms. Such a series of UoE and Edinburgh-focused videos, similar to the form of video blogging, can be viewed as promotional videos to attract more international students. These suggestions linked coherently to what was brought up in the first discussion, which fundamentally aimed at helping new students get an overall picture of study and everyday life on campus, and establish a realistic expectation rather than finding inspiration from TV shows or movies. Moreover, the Masters group suggested that the university or individual schools organise some sessions for recent graduates who are still at the university to share their experience with new students at the beginning of new academic years.

5.3 More learner agency from the students

The second salient theme emerging from the FG data was that more learner agency was needed from Chinese students, which entails more learner proactivity, as well as an increase in student's reflexivity.

5.3.1 More learner proactivity

First of all, it was unanimously agreed that Chinese students need to be more proactive in engaging in English communication in general, such as initiating verbal communication without being told so, taking the lead in conversations, voicing opinions more confidently, making the most of the opportunities provided, and seeking resources to address their needs. Both FGs stated that improving oral English requires continuous effort and students' strong motivation and self-discipline, especially because there were no more English exams after enrolment. Maintaining students' motivation to engage in OP seems to be the key, as suggested in the following extract.

Extract 20 – Masters FG

Xin	If there is no requirement to speak English, it doesn't matter if you speak English or not. But if you think it's important or interesting to you, then it's up to you to stay motivated.
Yong	Right, it's not like someone else is always talking to you in English here. You often don't have anyone to speak English with, especially in programmes like mine. So, keeping yourself motivated is very important.

Data indicated one area where proactivity was especially required, i.e., the pre-arrival phase, which suggested that prospective students, particularly those who had not studied abroad before, could prepare themselves better before embarking on the overseas journey. Both groups highlighted that the key issue for pre-arrival preparation for English language was to establish a clear expectation of what they may encounter in the UK, raise awareness of difficulties in intercultural communication, and familiarise themselves with speaking English for academic and general purposes. The following excerpt captures such an interaction:

Extract 21 – Masters FG

- Wendi It's to help you **adjust in advance**, so that you **won't feel totally lost** when you first arrive.
- Meiyi Yes, I think so too, to **adjust faster**. Language is something that you need to **practise and accumulate**. If you start early, you can **save time during the first semester and also prepare for the future**.
- Yong Right. I agree. I think it's better to **arrive well-prepared** because you don't know what will happen. If you've thought about things and prepared in advance, you will probably **remain calm when something happens**.
- Xin They've said what's on my mind. I agree with them.
- Xiao I agree with them as well, and I want to add something because I used to teach English in China. I think it's important to **work on a language database focusing on your weakness** before leaving China, especially **on topics relevant to overseas study**. I think it's **imperative**.

Data also suggested students' belief in the essential role of individual effort in improving their English ability. It was pointed out that some Chinese students who had never studied abroad could be poor at oral English compared to those who had, but they could manage to make noticeable improvements through their own effort even before coming overseas, which indicated the power of learner agency. The following extract provided an example of participants' learning strategies.

Extract 22 – Masters FG

- Wendi I **watched English TV shows every day for two months before I came to the UK**. I **covered the subtitles** when I watched the episodes, and I **tried to figure out every sentence**. I think it really helped me get used to listening to English.
- Xiao Sounds like a good student!
- Meiyi Yes. I think the university can provide support, but at the end of the day, **it's up to students' own autonomy**.

However, proactivity might be challenging to Chinese students given the lack of emphasis during their educational experience in China, as mentioned in the literature review chapter. The extract below captured another good example of the FG's co-constructing views and solutions.

Tian	To be proactive in learning may be challenging for Chinese students because this is not emphasised enough in our education system . We are usually very good at following instructions , like completing the curriculum step by step, but not exploring new things or challenging authorities .
Hong	Yeah, we don't really think about "What do I need?"
Wen	Maybe PhD students are a bit better because we need to take the lead in our research.
Han	Right. I think maybe the university doesn't need to create more events on purpose but focus on what they are doing now and make them better . If they are doing something well, they can do it more frequently and promote its visibility among Chinese students. Some people don't go to the events because they don't know about them.
Tian	... I think we Chinese students sometimes are just used to other people telling us what is good, where to find it, and then you would do something . But I think Western education asks you to think by yourself and find resources by yourself, which requires a person taking the initiative . So, I think it's one reason so many Chinese students can't improve their English communication ability, because their learning and thinking styles haven't changed . But, if you have this ability, then it's easy to improve English speaking ability in the UK.
All	(Nodding) Agree.

Despite the tendency to overgeneralise Chinese students and their educational experience in China, the conversation above proposed a good suggestion, that rather than coming up with new activities, the university can run existing successful activities more frequently and make them more visible to the Chinese audience. It seems that more promotion of the events and exposure to such promotions is needed to encourage Chinese students to participate, as they were pointed out to lack the initiatives to explore new events for social interactions. For instance, the researcher mentioned to the FGs about the Global Buddies Scheme, run by EUSA, which aimed to connect international visiting students and full-degree students at UoE. However, although all FG participants were eligible to apply, none of them had even heard about it. Likewise, another example was when the researcher asked the PhD group about the International Student Café every week, nine participants had never heard of it. This suggested that more promotion of such existing events is needed, and Chinese postgraduate students need to pay more attention to such university-led events, which are advertised on the university official and EUSA websites.

Similarly, the need to be proactive in learning was also indicated in Masters students' criticism and self-reflection on their laziness and not bothering to seek resources to address their own needs, as shown in the following extract.

Extract 24 – Masters FG

Xiao	I think some people are just lazy , including me. Perhaps some people don't know where to look for this information, but you can find it if you really want to .
Xin	I agree. Sometimes you just give in to the comfort at home and don't bother to go out or look for these opportunities .
Yong	Students may be very tired because their workload can be quite heavy . So perhaps they just want to rest when they are not studying.
Wendi	That's possible. But still, most Chinese students just prefer to be given things. We hope the university will tell us what we need and where to find the services .
Xiao	Yes. There are actually many local activities advertised on Facebook, not just the university. But you have to find them by yourself .
Meiyi	Right. You can go volunteer in different local programmes. But many Chinese students don't use Facebook .

The tendency to follow instructions and others' advice also suggests that more agency is needed from Chinese students to facilitate learning, especially regarding communication skills, which are subtitle and often overlooked.

Regarding specific strategies to enhance spoken English, firstly, both groups suggested that students watch English-speaking shows and news channels when they are still in China to familiarise themselves with popular topics in the UK, get used to the British accent, and learn some local use of language. Below are examples of two students' efforts.

Extract 25 – PhD FG

Han	I learnt the word "cheers" before I came here. You know, "cheers" is commonly used as "thanks" in the UK, but most Chinese people only use this word when making a toast. When I was binge-watching British shows , I heard this word a few times and I thought it was interesting, so I looked it up and learnt the other meaning . People really say "cheers" a lot here.

Tian As for me, I like to **keep up with the news**. I was always listening to BBC and other programmes before I came here. I think it's **important to know what's going on where you live**.

The Masters group also suggested it was important not only for students to be exposed to more English language but also to make a conscious effort to improve English communication skills. This was mostly because students reported that the initial exposure to the English-speaking environment could be quite daunting and overwhelming. This is perhaps particular the case for an international environment such as the UoE, where students and staff speak English with various accents, which may not be familiar to the new students who are mostly only used to the standard English accent. The Masters group suggested that future students practise listening skills with strategies such as covering subtitles when watching English-speaking shows and writing down new words or phrases as they expand their vocabulary.

Interestingly, the issue of various English accents was only raised by the Masters group but not the PhD group, which left the researcher to speculate that maybe it was because all the PhD participants had prior overseas study experience. As they had gone through the transition period a few years ago, they might not see various accents as a problem anymore. But on a similar note, the PhD group mentioned that new students need to raise awareness regarding the reality of speaking English in the UK, which could be different from their previous English learning experience, and understand that standard English tests such as IELTS can be quite different from the “authentic” use of English.

Notably, both groups commented that improving English ability was not a goal that can be overgeneralised to most students, and a key to pre-departure preparation was to focus on what they could do by themselves rather than relying on preparation classes such as IELTS exam preparation lessons. Participants' reactions to the prompt that language institutions in China should start non-standard English test language preparation courses seemed to be divided at first, but eventually, they came to the consensus that much as the idea was appealing, it was unpractical. Similarly, the suggestion that universities in China should provide English language

support was also considered very challenging to implement. The following extract captured the dilemma and consensus.

Extract 26 – Masters FG

Meiyi I think it's a **good idea**, but it's **very unlikely to be implemented**.

Wendi Yes, because once the students graduate, they are **not the Chinese universities' concern anymore**. So why would the universities invest in improving their English ability? The same goes for the language preparation schools. There is just **too little profit**. Maybe it's important for the students themselves, but no institutions in China would want to do it.

Yong I agree. That's why IELTS lessons are so popular, but we rarely see any lessons that are designed for overseas study preparation because most people think it's **unnecessary**, or at least **not willing to pay a lot of money** for it.

Xiao Yeah, if it's that important, it would have been very popular already.

Xiao (Edu., PGT) continued suggesting that new students talk to some non-Chinese people before arrival, if there were any in their surroundings, or even on chatting applications which are becoming very popular in China. However, this suggestion is highly subject to one's social environment and attitude towards talking to strangers online, as pointed out by the other members in the FG.

5.3.2 Increase self-reflexivity

Another subtheme of learner agency is in relation to learners' self-reflexivity, which entails self-awareness and reflexivity. Although only one participant in each FG raised it, it soon gained popularity among the whole group. Self-awareness here refers to students' understanding of their own needs, weaknesses, and strengths relevant to learning. For example, it is evident that although some students claimed to want to improve their spoken English abilities, they did not seem to make an effort, partly because they did not know how to approach the matter. Being reflexive means students need to be more aware of what they would like to achieve during their study overseas, their priorities, and be mindful of their progress. This point is particularly relevant to the target students, as advanced English learners can find it

challenging to figure out what improvements they have made, what they want to improve, and how they can improve any further, as illustrated below.

Extract 27 – PhD FG

- Wen When your English has reached a certain level, it's **difficult to pinpoint** what you have improved over a period of time.
- Chang And there **are no exams to assess the improvement**.
- Tian Even if there is any improvement, I'm **not sure if they will show in exams**.

The PhD group concluded that such self-reflections were essential for individual students to better understand their English communication needs, their strengths and weaknesses, and their (lack of) development in oral communication abilities. Both FGs suggested mindful self-reflection was also important to track their development over time, as exemplified in Chang's (Geo., PhD) experience.

Extract 28 – PhD FG

- Chang I've been trying to **develop my vocabulary for a long time**. I **keep notes of new vocabulary**... Even if I just learn one new English word or phrase each time from an event, I'll be very happy. I'll feel that I've gained something out of the experience, and I am improving myself.
- Tian Wow, it's a great habit. I've tried before, but it's **very hard to keep doing it**.
- Hong Totally.

FG results also revealed that different students might have different needs, as captured in the example below. While some wanted more academic-related OP, others desired more communication in everyday encounters, which calls for more learners' self-awareness and reflexivity.

Extract 29 – PhD FG

- Han Some students may **prioritise their overseas living experience over their learning experience**, so they may have a stronger desire to speak English for socio-personal purposes.
- Wen Yeah, **everyone is different**. When I first came here, I really wanted to speak English with foreigners, **but not anymore**. Maybe you really want to speak English at first, or maybe you become more interested after getting used to the life here. My point is that **your desires can change**.

Although participants from different disciplines and experiences expressed their diverse individual needs, both groups agreed that individual students needed to spend some time thinking about their needs and priorities, and what they would like to participate in and achieve during their experience in the UK.

Given the observed pattern that many Chinese students did not seem to be able to join many conversations with non-Chinese people, learner agency also refers to an active effort to cultivate new interests and learn new knowledge to be able to carry out conversations on a broad range of topics. For example, the PhD group recommended that students learn different areas of knowledge about British society. They asserted the importance of learning about local cultures and interests, such as sport, festivals, the pub culture, and recent political and social events, which was believed to help students create talking points and establish common grounds when communicating with different people. In addition, Tian (Edu., PhD) added that many English jokes and phrases contain and reflect cultural and social references. This point was further discussed by the PhD group. They argued that Chinese postgraduate students should not only learn to talk to other international students about British culture and world affairs but also strengthen their abilities to discuss China and different aspects of the Chinese culture, as they reflected on the challenges for them to discuss topics regarding their own culture.

Extract 30 – PhD FG

Wen It's **very embarrassing** if a foreigner really wants to know something about China, and I find it **very difficult to explain or translate what I know**. Sometimes it's a **problem with my language**, but sometimes it's **something I haven't really thought about by myself**.

Hong I can understand what you mean. If you ask me something about Chinese literature, even the Four Great Classical Novels, I'm **not sure if I know the correct translation of their names in English**. I think it can be quite **difficult to explain** their main themes in English. **I don't even know if I can explain clearly in Chinese**, to be honest. It is a **problem**.

Chang The Four Great Classical Novels... Ah, I **also don't know their names in English**.

All (Giggling)

Regarding some students' comments on not knowing the local culture or sharing common interests with other students, Hong (Eng., PhD) replied that students could also try to cultivate new interests to better connect with more people instead of treating knowledge and interests as unchanged or holding the belief that other people do not share interests with them. He talked about his own experience of obtaining a UK driver's licence and purchasing a new car recently, which made him interested in automobiles, and subsequently watched various shows and YouTube videos about cars. He held many conversations with his non-Chinese colleagues about their choices and preferences of cars, different traffic systems, driving experiences in different countries, and other relevant topics. Coincidentally, Chang (Geo., PhD) also recently obtained his driver's license and shared a very similar experience.

In addition, Hong mentioned that he used to record his own presentations and realised that he tended to speak too fast when he was passionate, making it difficult to understand him sometimes. Based on his recordings, he worked on his weakness in doing presentations by trying to put himself in the audience's shoes to improve his pronunciation. This approach was applauded by other group members. Two other students also shared the experience of recording their meetings with supervisors and found their speaking in the audio recordings less satisfying than they had expected, as indicated in the extract below.

Extract 31 – PhD FG

Wen I also record my supervision meetings, and I **don't like listening to myself speak English**, ha-ha. I know I often **speak with incorrect sentence structures and poor grammar**.

Chang Yeah, I know. It's **strange to hear your own voice recorded**, right? I was **surprised** at first. I think **the intonation of my spoken English is not very good, rather flat**.

Last but not least, both groups advised prospective students to ask for tips from recent graduates regarding difficulties and suggestions in communication in English, which would help them to prepare and establish a clearer expectation of the journey abroad.

5.4 Raising intercultural awareness for all

In addition to the previous two themes, a third theme also merged, which indicated a need to raise intercultural awareness for all students and teachers.

5.4.1 Chinese students

To begin with, both FGs pointed out the need for Chinese students to step out of their comfort zone and try to adjust their learning and communication styles in an international educational setting. The following discussion showed Masters students' inner-group consensus on this issue, which was similar to PhD students' responses.

Extract 32 – Masters FG

Meiyi	Many Chinese students have never been abroad until their Masters' study . I don't mean just travelling. They may have an imagination of what living in the UK is like from TV shows, but maybe they have the wrong idea of what it's really like . I think it's important to try to understand how to interact with non-Chinese people , not just with native English speakers, because you may meet many non-native English speakers here from all over the world .
Xiao	Yeah, I think we Chinese students need to be more open-minded and courageous . I feel that many Chinese students still hang out with only Chinese people because we are most comfortable with it. But I know many are also eager to have intercultural friendships, but they don't make an effort . And many think they can't do it because they are not very good at speaking English. But it's just in their minds .
Wendi	I agree. Actually, many Chinese students still watch Chinese TV shows when they are abroad. It's strange. I think you need to step out there, make international friends, learn about different cultures, and actually talk to different people . The more you see, the more you realise you don't know.

Both groups advocated that Chinese students should take more initiative to learn about the ways of learning and teaching in the target context, rather than holding onto how they felt most comfortable. For instance, the PhD group concluded five main reasons to explain Chinese students' low level of OP. First, Chinese students come from a more exam-oriented education system where spoken English is not emphasised as much and therefore less practised. Second, Chinese students are

not culturally encouraged to be direct and outspoken, even less when speaking in a second language. Third, Chinese students are culturally less likely to challenge teachers in class and are used to absorbing knowledge before speaking or questioning. Fourth, listening is an important and legitimate part of learning in the Chinese educational tradition, and personal speaking time can be sacrificed for better study efficiency. Fifth, students may not be confident in their academic competence and therefore are interested in learning from others rather than participating and saying something they are not sure to be correct. However, this cultural-related way of communication and learning sometimes can be misunderstood by other people who do not have prior knowledge or with very different backgrounds. In addition, the PhD group stressed that silence does not mean a lack of desire to speak, nor does it mean a deficiency in English-speaking ability, as shown in the following excerpt.

Extract 33 – PhD FG

Tian	They think Chinese students don't contribute in class. But I think it's not just a language issue , but more about the culture of learning and different habits in class . Chinese universities are used to teaching students and giving knowledge . But here, knowledge is generated through discussion, not top-down or hierarchical .
All	(Nodding) Right.
Tian	It's a very complex issue, not only about language . I think we should let the students know that discussion is part of learning, not only to fulfil a process . I think some Chinese students don't even pay attention to what other students are saying because they may think that is not knowledge, and only what the teacher says is knowledge .
All	(Nodding) Yes, yes.
Tian	So it's an overall change of mindset .
Wen	I think he's very right. Honestly, if you have to ask a Chinese student to answer a question in class, I am sure the majority would be able to answer or say something , but they habitually choose not to talk, regardless of whether in English or Chinese .

The PhD group concluded these potential reasons because they were experienced international students who had spent a few years abroad, including doing their previous degrees in the UK, having witnessed and experienced many

intercultural interactions first-hand. Despite covering the same ground, the PhD group made a suggestion slightly different from the Masters FG.

Extract 34 – PhD FG

Chang	Although I agree that Chinese students need to understand the Western way of learning, I think it's also important to find out how you learn best .
All	(Nodding) Yeah, yeah.
Wen	There are many different learning styles . You can try other people's styles, but I think at the end of the day, you know yourself best .
Hong	Yeah, that's true. I also know foreign people who are not very active contributors , but they are very smart and quiet , like Chinese people.
Tian	I agree. You can say here knowledge is generated from discussions, but people are also encouraged to do individual independent thinking , like, you can't just talk, you also need to do a lot of reading and experimenting, you know, learning by yourself .

It seemed that some PhD students took a more assertive stance, advocating that Chinese students should raise awareness of potential differences in intercultural communication. They also considered that Chinese students should take control of their own learning and find the most interculturally appropriate and comfortable way to learn. Both groups argued for the importance of enriching Chinese students' knowledge of cultural diversity and viewing things through different cultural lenses. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that the inclination to generalise characteristics of Chinese learners is evident in the remarks made by FG members, as previously indicated in the extracted data.

5.4.2 Local students and other international students

In addition to Chinese students raising intercultural awareness, it was also highlighted by both FGs that local British students and other international students need to raise their intercultural awareness as well. It was suggested that more conversations on intercultural communication need be held between local and

international students to build a bridge between students from various ethnolinguistic backgrounds, as awareness of cultural differences can benefit intercultural communication.

For instance, regarding the potential causes for the phenomenon of Chinese students' tendency of reticence when speaking English, as explained in the previous section, the PhD group believed that this is information worth explaining to others who may not understand it. They highly suggested that all students and teaching staff raise awareness regarding the potential mismatches of communication expectations in class and learning in general due to cultural differences and try to adapt to others' communication styles. Similarly, the Masters group also suggested that all students, including local students, make an effort to embrace different ways of learning. Moreover, they pointed out that it took the synergy of both Chinese students and other students around them to create a space to have good communication in an English-speaking environment.

Extract 35 – Masters FG

Meiyi	Actually, students can try to experience this kind of discussion-based learning style . After all, you're studying abroad now , and I think you should have this positive attitude to try to study in different ways .
Xin	Yes, of course, you should try . But if your spoken English is not fluent enough, it is quite annoying because I can't make myself clear.
Meiyi	Practice makes perfect. Speaking more can help improve your fluency.
Yong	You need people around you who are also willing to speak with you in English . Otherwise, you will look stupid.

Nevertheless, the researcher reckons the fact that some programmes have an overwhelming number of Chinese students might also hinder their international learning experience because students might not be fully aware of the different learning styles in a very mixed culture environment, hence less willing and motivated to make a change.

Another issue similar to the interview findings also emerged from the FG discussions. Both FGs pointed out that many non-Chinese people seemed to hold

some outdated or biased impressions about China, and there seemed to be a general lack of interest from the local students to know more about other cultures, coupled with a sense of superiority, as indicated in the two extracts below.

Extract 36 – Masters FG

Wendi	Many foreigners are still under the impression of old China . They don't know about modern China , and they don't know about our culture.
Meiyi	Yeah, I feel that China is misunderstood a lot here . They think of Chinese people in a certain way, and it's very hard to explain that they are wrong .
Yong	So maybe they are also brainwashed .
All	(Chuckle)
Xiao	Yes, but I get the feeling, like the local people don't really care about many other cultures . They think they are so great because people come to the UK, but I think many people who come here also bring their great cultural legacy .
All	(Nodding)

Furthermore, it was also mentioned by the PhD group that local students need to recognise the importance of international students who are contributing much to the society's economic and intellectual development, and NESs students should see incoming NNEs as bilinguals who bring interesting and distinctive cultures rather than being incompetent English speakers. The PhD FG even argued that in the era of globalisation, local students might be disadvantaged compared to the Chinese students who have the courage to travel abroad and know much more about the Western cultures than many local students can say about other cultures. They believed that individuals could gain human capital by studying and working abroad and learning other languages.

Extract 37 – PhD FG

Wen	I think many foreigners around me have an outdated image of China . At least they don't know about us as much as we know about them .
Hong	They probably don't really care .

Han Yes. But I think it's actually **not very good for them** because it is **an era of globalisation**. Compared to us who travel this far to see Europe, I think the local people need to go out more and also **develop an interest and updated understanding of other cultures**.

Chang I agree. Some native speakers think English is our disadvantage, but **at least we are bilinguals**.

More social activities were suggested to be organised to bridge the gap between students or people from different backgrounds and break the communicative barriers and cultural stereotypes between them. Both FGs talked about the phenomenon that Chinese students tended to hang out with other Chinese students, while Western students did not seem keen on socialising with them. Therefore, they suggested that local people cultivate an interest in learning more about other cultures and develop more accurate and updated understandings of the background of people from various cultures.

With regard to speaking in specific, all students, including NESs and NNEs were advised to be interculturally sensitive and tolerant towards NNEs' errors in spoken English. Both NES and NNE students were suggested to speak more intelligibly, such as speaking slowly, articulating clearly, and avoiding jargon and expressions with specific cultural references less likely known to outsiders. The extract below illustrates a part of the discussion.

Extract 38 – Masters FG

Xin Many **foreigners speak so fast, with such thick accents**. They somehow seem very confident.

Yong Yeah, I think if a Chinese student doesn't think their English is very good, they will speak slowly. But **students from many other countries, especially the West, speak so fast**.

Meiyi And **South America**.

Xiao And **India**.

Yong Yeah, **Indian accent, so hard to understand**.

Wendi And **native speakers, too**. They sometimes **speak so fast and use expressions unfamiliar to non-native speakers**.

All (Nodding)

Meiyi I know people all have speaking habits, and it's hard to change. But I think we should all **try to make an effort in intercultural communication** when there are people who speak different first languages.

In addition, both groups expressed the need to have some guidelines to address cultural differences in communication available for international students, home students, and staff members. They would also like to receive tips for better engagement in intercultural communication, such as the dos and don'ts. Perhaps one way to help students is to learn through reviewing examples of misunderstandings, mistakes, and confusion in intercultural communication. Although this point was not discussed in depth by the Masters FG, Xiao (Edu., PGT) shared an example of a negative encounter with a NES student who was very rude to her.

Extract 39 – Masters FG

Xiao ... He said, "**When can you speak proper English? I don't know how you could become an English teacher in China.**" I was **so mad**! They may show some patience at first, but after some time, they will be **very annoyed**. But my English is not that bad, okay? I used to teach English. It was **very hurtful** he should say that to me!

Yong That is **not nice**. Like, **we would never make fun of other people who try to speak Chinese to us.**

Xiao said that she laughed it off at the time to overcome the awkwardness, but she was very hurt by such rude comments and later became very careful and somewhat nervous when speaking in the presence of NESs. The other students in the group echoed that international NNEs students could be sensitive to criticism regarding their English language ability. This concurs with what interviewees said about being intimidated by NESs, as reported in Section 4.7.1.1. It seems that unskilful criticism or jokes can sometimes be taken more seriously than intended. Therefore, in addition to the arguments made above, the notion of mutual respect in intercultural communication should be communicated to the student cohort as a whole, including both the international students and local students, NESs and NNEs.

5.4.3 Teachers

Similar to the points raised in the previous section, teachers in UK universities are suggested to raise awareness of different cultural practices of their students, especially regarding different communication styles and ways of learning, as they are in the position to create an inclusive and supportive environment in class for students from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Both FGs strongly advocated that teachers respect Chinese students and other students' culturally accustomed reticence, treating it as a difference but not a deficiency. As indicated in the excerpt below, encouragement, demonstration, clarification, and respect were highly advised.

Extract 40 – Masters FG

Meiyi	I think teachers can encourage us to speak up . For example, give us more chances to try and maybe demonstrate how to do it first because we are not familiar with this type of communication before.
Xiao	Yeah, like if there is a task, maybe they can explain it more clearly with examples because maybe they think it's very common and easy to understand, but we aren't sure what to do .
Xin	Yeah, sometimes some teachers and tutors don't seem to be very clear about the instructions, either .
Wendi	Yeah, but in the meantime, they shouldn't force us to like, completely change ourselves. If I'm happy the way I am, then it's also none of their business.
All	(Nodding) Yeah.

Academic tasks which tutors may consider common sense may not be familiar to international students. Therefore, instructions need to be given more explicitly for students to comprehend. With regard to speech intelligibility, the PhD students also suggested that teachers take into consideration of their audience's English ability and try to speak more clearly, similar to the point raised in the previous section. As shown below, students believed that it should be a mutual effort for teachers and students to adjust their ways of communication.

Extract 41 – PhD FG

Tian	Also, I think some teachers can try to speak more clearly , because some have thick accents or speak so fast . Maybe they are just used to how they speak, but in such an international environment , they need to consider that not everyone can understand them easily .
Han	The effort should be mutual, both ways . We try our best to speak English, and they should also try to accommodate to students.
All	(Nodding) Yeah.

Another issue raised was regarding the size of the group discussion. Although it was not explored in depth, it resembled a similarity to the discussion on how to better organise intercultural events, which was presented in Section 5.2.1.3. A comment from Meiyi (Biz., PGT) indicated that students were more likely to engage in meaningful OP in smaller group discussions rather than in large groups or whole-class discussion. This is especially relevant to tutors who work with students from diverse backgrounds.

Extract 42 – Masters FG

Meiyi	I think students are much more interested in speaking in small groups than to the whole class because there is less pressure .
All	(Nodding) Yes, yes.

In conclusion, echoing the previous theme, there need to be more conversations on cultivating ICC on campus and sharing good practices, not just for international students but also for home students and staff from various backgrounds, who are immersed in this international and intercultural environment. The researcher calls for intercultural reflexivity of all students and staff to be more mindful in intercultural communication, in terms of having more cultural sensitivity and empathy for cultural outsiders, being more critical towards one's pre-existing knowledge regarding people from different cultures, and learning to communicate in a more cultural-friendly and effective way.

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the FG results by synthesising the group discussions on the seven suggestions emerging from the interviews in a thematic order. The FG discussions exhibited much dynamic and in-depth thinking regarding addressing students' needs for OP in English communication. Through evaluating the practicality and plausibility of each proposed idea, participants identified the potential constraints that could hinder the implementation of the ideas and put forward new suggestions for different stakeholders. In conclusion, FG discussions suggested that the university create more opportunities for students to engage in meaningful intercultural communication, which aims to increase their WFOP and maintain their interests in OP. Furthermore, they encouraged Chinese students to improve learner agency and constantly reflect on their own progress and development. FGs also urged different stakeholders including Chinese students and other international students, local students, teaching staff, and the institutions to raise awareness of the merits of and problems in international communication.

The next chapter will integrate interview and FG results, interpret findings from the current study in relation to the literature, and provide suggestions for implementation for different stakeholders.

Chapter 6 Discussion and Implications

The previous two findings chapters showed that Chinese postgraduate students share many similar needs in oral participation (OP), while diverse needs are also clearly present among this cohort in both the academic and socio-personal domains, which are influenced by a range of factors. This chapter aims to evaluate the findings in relation to the existing literature, which will be used to contextualise and give meaning to the findings. This chapter is organised in the order of addressing the three research questions (RQs), respectively. Section 6.1 will address the RQ1 focusing on viewing Chinese students' OP needs from a rounded and neo-essentialist perspective. Section 6.2 will answer RQ2 by explaining the dynamic and complex factors influencing students' OP through a proposed theoretical model. Finally, suggestions for implementation, including pedagogical implications, are offered in Section 6.3 for all members involved in the international universities.

6.1 A rounded view of Chinese students' needs

The first RQ of this study aimed to identify the OP needs of Chinese postgraduate students in English during their experience at a UK university. The findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 revealed not only common experiences but also diversity among the students, including differences in lifestyles, interests, social networks, work and learning experiences, as well as multiple transformative stages in their overseas journey. Previous literature has also addressed the generalization and diversity of Chinese students studying overseas (see Sections 2.1 and 2.3). These collective and individual differences are closely related to the students' needs to engage in oral English communication in different contexts. The study found that students have different kinds of academic and socio-personal OP needs because English is used for various purposes in different situations during their stay (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3). These findings align with previous literature on the complexity of students' lives abroad, such as the three domains of academic life, contact with people, and daily life, as suggested by Spencer-Oatey (2012).

Regarding Chinese students' adjustment and adaptation in the UK, the study's findings concur with what Holliday (2012) constructed as "neo-essentialism," as explained in Section 2.1.2. According to Holliday (2012), neo-essentialism acknowledges the differences within a particular cultural group, while some aspects of that cultural group are shared and consistent. This study found that Chinese students, as a group, shared certain traits and similarities regarding their OP needs. However, the study also revealed that these Chinese students identified themselves as members of different communities, such as programmes and disciplines, levels of study, societies, and accommodation sites, which transcend their collective linguistic and cultural identities. Given the shared and dynamic student experience, a rounded and non-essentialist view is suggested to understand Chinese students' OP needs in the target context. The following sections will elaborate on the findings through the lens of the shared experience regarding Chinese students' OP needs and the differences within this group.

6.1.1 Similar oral participation needs between Chinese students

Findings suggest some common experiences of Chinese students in the UK regarding their OP in English communication based on their own lived experience and their observation of their fellow Chinese students.

6.1.1.1 From English learners to English users

First, a shift in students' L2 identity in the overseas study context was highlighted in the results. Contrary to many students' expected enhancement of English ability during their study in the UK, as mentioned both in the current study and in previous literature, e.g., Gong and Huybers (2015), many participants reported little improvement in their English linguistic abilities, particularly regarding their spoken English. However, a seemingly contradicting point is that most students reported an increase in confidence in intercultural communication, concurring with the findings from previous research, e.g., Hennebry et al. (2012). Participants in this

study identified a shift from being English learners to English users, indicating a pragmatic approach to L2 learning, which takes account of their own overseas experience and stronger ownership of their identities as English speakers.

The shift in international students' perceptions of their relationship with the English language was also seen in previous studies. For instance, Brown and Holloway's (2008) study on international one-year Masters students (including Chinese students) found that students experienced "language shock" when encountering "real" English, especially at the beginning of their UK academic journey. According to Liu (2013), who investigated the changes and challenges experienced by Chinese students in the UK, students attempted to adjust the way they used English to the new learning and living context "through language use, translation, and conceptual development" (p. 137), while experiencing challenges in using English for academic purposes, accompanied with academic culture shock. In Zheng's (2013) study which investigated Chinese students' self-images as English learners, students in Chinese universities were reported to hold unrealistic and unattainable self-images as English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, given the deeply rooted native-speaker belief and the exportation of native English-related cultural goods.

From a theoretical perspective, this shift in students' L2 self-identity in the UK is consistent with the sociocultural theory which perceives language learners' use of the target language, i.e., English, both as an instrument for facilitating learning in the target context and a goal to be acquired (Liu, 2013). These results confirm the close association between language use and language learning, a key notion based on the sociocultural view of L2 acquisition (Lantolf, 2006; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In the context of studying abroad, a "language learner" becomes a fluid concept. A relevant note regarding the shift of perceptions is English ability to intercultural ability and a more comprehensive understanding of English language competence. Although data in this study demonstrated students' overall positive attitude towards their improvement in English, it seems that they are still under the traditional influence of the proficiency exams like IELTS, viewing them as a standard

measurement of their English ability, and somewhat uncertain about their communicative competence (CC) in English.

Another way to understand such a shift is through the phenomenon of “shared non-nativeness” (Galloway, 2011), together with students’ growing ownership of English. The shared perception is that although it is desirable to speak “standard” English and it would perhaps be easier to communicate with native English speakers (NESs), students actually tend to feel more at ease when speaking with other non-native English speakers (NNEs) regarding their own oral English performance. Similar to Galloway’s (2011) study, which found the “shared non-nativeness” in the Japanese context, this study also found it to be relevant to Chinese students, who tend to experience less communication anxiety and have an “equal” power relation when speaking with other NNEs, a finding consistent with Liddicoat (2016). In addition, some participants also mentioned “co-construction” of meanings in English communication when talking to other NNEs, which is in line with Matsumoto’s (2014) findings that English as a lingua franca (ELF) speakers collaboratively construct humorous integrations. ELF here refers to English being the language of choice between speakers who do not share the same native language (Jenkins, 2009; Matsumoto, 2014). Although such co-construction of meanings was also shown between NNEs and NESs in other studies (Park, 2007), this type of communication was not mentioned much in the current study. One possible explanation is that students in the current study did not seem to have many chances to interact with local British people or other NESs. They did not have many NES fellow students in the same programmes, and they did not have many social interactions with NESs outside their academic context, especially for the Masters students.

Furthermore, the studying abroad experience has also helped Chinese students view the role of English from a non-exam-oriented perspective. As EFL learners in China, they were educated to learn “standard” English and had little exposure to other NNE styles of speech. This study shows a unanimous acknowledgement of students’ development in listening skills, which was explained by the exposure to a context with students and staff from highly diverse backgrounds speaking with various accents. Despite the struggles, it was clear that students were

able to adapt to these varieties of English in use. Students' adaptation of English skills, particularly in listening and speaking, is consistent with the findings from Liu (2013) and Blaj-Ward (2017). However, what was less developed in previous studies was the impact of such experience on students' psychological states. The current study reveals that exposure to students from different cultures, Europe in particular, whom Chinese students conventionally see as having high English proficiency, made them view their previous perceptions critically. Some of their lecturers and tutors who were seen as the authorities were perceived as not speaking "good enough English". Such experience seemed to have comforted Chinese students, lowered their communication anxiety, positively impacted their awareness of Global Englishes, and encouraged them to own up to their NNES identity. According to Struyven, Dochy, and Janssens (2005), perceptions about evaluation and assessment significantly impact university students' way of learning as a washback effect. In the target context where English is often used but not tested, it is unsurprising that when students are no longer under pressure to take English exams, they transform their roles from English learners to English users.

In addition, this transition in language user identity also gives rise to the need to develop students' strategic competence. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), strategic competence – as a part of CC – comprises a set of metacognitive strategies (see Section 2.2.4.1). Some strategies were mentioned by the participants in this study but developed by themselves without proper coaching. Specific communicative strategies, such as the comprehensive list of strategies synthesised by Dörnyei and Scott (1997), are worth sharing as they can benefit students and everyone else involved in the intercultural university context to develop their intercultural (communicative) competence (IC/ICC) (explained in Section 2.2.4.2).

6.1.1.2 Hidden curriculum – more participation, better experience

One salient theme from the study was students' strong desire to engage in more meaningful intercultural communication through ELF. This resonates with one of their reasons for choosing to study in an English-speaking country, and it supports

Gong and Huybers's (2015) suggestion that English being the host language in the UK is an important factor attracting Chinese students. Furthermore, Section 4.3.3 debunked the misbelief held by many Chinese people that exposure to an English-speaking environment can naturally lead to (oral) English ability improvement. On a similar note, Yang (2007) found that exposure to an international context was one of the primary motivations for Chinese students to study in an English-speaking context, which was considered a cultural factor in Wang et al.'s (2011) study. Nevertheless, as revealed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3, there seems to be an overall lack of need for students to engage in English communication academically and more so in socio-personal life, which might differ from their prior expectations.

All participants in the study acknowledged the value of the intercultural communication experience. Results shows that richer intercultural experience tends to increase students' satisfaction, regardless of the improvement of English-speaking ability (see Section 4.1). This finding is in accordance with a tracking study by Benson, Holden, & Maclean (2017), which found that international students value the rewarding experience of participating in seminars and workshops in a UK university, as well as their overall desire for more engagement in the international context to create better overseas study memories. As students in the current study considered their journeys challenging yet rewarding, their appreciation of learning new skills, including communication skills, accumulated intercultural experience, as well as increasing self-confidence revealed that much of the meaningful engagement could take place not only in the formal academic settings but also in informal settings.

This finding corroborates what some researchers termed as the "hidden curriculum" (Elliot, Baumfield, Reid, & Makara, 2016; Neve & Collett, 2018). Hidden curriculum refers to "ad hoc, often unarticulated learning that occurs outside the formal, taught curriculum" (Neve & Collett, 2018, p. 495). Given the absence of compulsory English language classes during the academic terms, Chinese students are left to develop ICC and English ability by themselves, particularly their speaking skills. Some students in this study held the view that spoken English was improved by their own effort and through their accumulated intercultural communication experience, although this journey was not always straightforward. In addition, OP

requirement in disguise was uncovered in the study (Section 4.2.2), suggesting that not all OP in academic settings take the form of formal assessments.

This theme also corresponds to findings in Yu and Wright's (2016) research on exploring the experiences of six international PhD students at an Australian university. They found that issues most relevant to the satisfaction of student experience were not directly linked to academic studies, as their study revealed that students put much value on matters such as integration into the new community, interactions with other students, and relationships with their supervisors. The current study also revealed a sense among the students that more authentic, meaningful communication and opportunities to develop one's IC would be greatly appreciated. Social contact with local people was also found to have a significant association with students' satisfaction with life in the host environment (Young et al., 2013). The goal of having such experience is to improve their ICC, a transferable and employable skill recognised by students and much emphasised by the job market (Diamond, Walkley, & Scott-Davies, 2011; Jones, 2013). In addition, Deardorff (2006a) pointed out that cultivating students' IC is one desired outcome of internationalisation efforts in tertiary education, which was recognised by students in this study.

Furthermore, the two emerging patterns in the findings (Section 4.6.5) – the virtuous cycle and the vicious cycle of OP – support the social learning theory, which suggests that students' performance and behaviours can be hindered when facing unexpected situations when studying abroad (McLeod & Wainwright, 2009). In the current study, students who seemed to be better prepared academically, linguistically, and psychologically tended to experience positive cycles where they were more likely to engage more with English oral communication and develop their ICC in the process. On the other hand, those who were not as well-prepared tended to be caught off guard or upset over individual instances that demotivated them to engage in other communicative opportunities.

6.1.1.3 Competing priorities

Following the previous point, another emerging pattern was that although many students came to study in the UK hoping to improve their English ability and enrich intercultural experience, not everyone reached this ideal goal because of other academic and personal commitments. This study found that academic achievement, namely graduation, was undoubtedly given the utmost priority by Chinese postgraduate students in the UK, in line with Chinese students' career-motivated mindset suggested by Bamber's (2014). As a result, many other interests were not given sufficient time for exploration. That is not to say that many students have a variety of commitments outside academic life, but there was an overarching theme of sacrificing non-academic interests due to the limited time students had, especially for the one-year Masters students. However, this somehow implicitly conflicts with one of students' motivations to choose the Masters programmes in the UK for their shorter durations compared to the Masters programmes in other countries (Wu, 2014).

Similarly, an overall decline in the time available for students to achieve their ideal overseas experience and its influence on their engagement in social activities was revealed in Spurling's (2006) study, which also investigated Chinese students' experiences in the UK. It is also important to point out that free time here does not only refer to time beyond academic settings. Many students reported working longer hours on their own, owing to slow reading speed and unfamiliarity with the academic culture, which was also pointed out in Holmes' (2004) study of Chinese students' experiences at a New Zealand university. An example of such a sacrifice was that although all the Masters participants in this study expressed their desire to have part-time jobs, only less than half managed to find part-time jobs, and only one managed to keep doing it for some time (see Section 4.3.1). Moreover, Li's (2017) study on Chinese students' academic adaptation also showed a similar experience of not having enough time to socialise with the local communities due to the heavy workload at a German university.

Other possible explanations for students' declining interest in improving their English ability include a more relaxing attitude to the importance of English, coupled

with the unnecessary of speaking English in everyday life (see Sections 4.6.1 and 4.6.2). Students reported anxious and nervous feelings on arrival regarding their English ability. However, they gradually saw English as a tool for communication and an ability which they did not lack to the point where they were motivated to make any further effort, especially regarding spoken English, given its least relevance to assessments. The washback effect pointed out earlier (Green, 2013; Struyven et al., 2005) can be used to support this explanation. Furthermore, a few students stated that travelling around Europe with their friends and loved ones was much more interesting and meaningful than learning the English language, which corresponds to what some participants admitted in Bamber's (2014) study, that the convenience of travelling around Europe is the least academic-related yet important reason for choosing to study in the UK. Bamber's (2014) research on Chinese students' motivations to study in the UK higher education found that improving language skills and gaining cultural insights are secondary motivations of Chinese postgraduate students, while their primary motivations are much career-oriented, such as enhancing their competitiveness by gaining an overseas degree, spending less time on a postgraduate programme, and exploring the UK job market. Owing to the high academic pressure and other personal interests, developing English competence is purposefully pushed lower in the students' to-do lists.

6.1.2 Diverse oral participation needs among Chinese students

Besides the similarities between Chinese students regarding their OP experience and needs, there was also a clear diversity among the students.

6.1.2.1 Small cultures and communities of practice

Culture, as a dynamic and fluid concept, has sparked many re-definitions and debates, such as the essentialist and non-essentialist views of culture (Hofstede, 1997, 2001; Holliday, 1995, 1999, 2011, 2020), as mentioned in Section 2.1.2. Street (1993) even put forward the idea that “Culture is a verb” (p. 25) to indicate the dynamic and

fluid process of making sense of what a culture is. More and more researchers are pointing out the limitations of equating culture to a nation and the problem of a homogenous view of cultural groups. For instance, Montgomery (2010) cautions against the over-emphasis on the relationship between certain behaviours and cultural-ethnicity and draws attention to the diversity among co-nationals. Fritz, Chin, and DeMarinis (2008) warn of the danger of homogenous categorisation of culture, which can result in losing sight of the uniqueness of sub-groups and students' diverse needs. In Wang's (2020) recent research on international students' participation in UK universities, for example, she advocated moving away from the essentialist view of culture as the most significant influencing factor in intercultural communication. To echo findings from previous research on Chinese students' overseas experience, e.g., Zhu (2016), this study also revealed students' various academic patterns and social lifestyles, through which more diverse communities emerged, which can be considered as "small cultures" (Holliday, 1999, 2016) and "communities of practice (CoPs)" (Arthur, 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2010), as briefly introduced in Sections 2.1.2 and 2.3.3.4.

Firstly, students see themselves not only as Chinese students but also members of different groups, which could be based on their programmes, levels of study, accommodations, workplaces, societies, or other commitments. Data showed that students often associated their identities with a certain school or college, indicating a strong connection to their disciplinary communities. It is worth noting that this close proximity is not only an academic concept but also a physical one since different campuses can determine the locations of students' academic life and non-academic activities. Focus group (FG) data, in particular, showed that students did not seem to know much about the academic environment outside their own disciplines, as shown in Section 5.2.1.4. This finding is consistent with Tian and Lowe's (2013b) research, which adopted a small culture approach to study Chinese postgraduate students' learning experience in the UK. Borrowing the term from Holliday (1999), they sought to avoid stereotyping people from one particular cultural group and assuming they share much of their life in common. They also pointed out that a university, departments within the university, programmes and courses can all be seen as small cultures for the clear membership of cohesive groups,

and these groups are changeable over time (Tian & Lowe, 2013b). Moreover, their study found that Chinese students experienced such small cultures both in their academic and everyday life. The diversity of participants' experiences in this study resembles the different adaptive strategies in Tian and Lowe (2013a) study presented in Section 2.1.4.

Findings of this study also revealed that disciplines or even programmes have specific ways of teaching and learning, and the disciplinary variations can influence students' perceptions of the importance of the English language, expectations of OP, and forms of assessment (see Section 4.2.3). For instance, students in law-related programmes are expected to be expressive and more involved in seminar discussions, while engineering programmes involve more conventional paper tests. Students in informatics programmes often rely on multimodality in communication, while business and education programmes tend to include more group work and oral presentations. Similarly, Tran (2008) also highlighted the differences in academic requirements between different disciplines in a UK university, and individual Chinese students have different approaches to unpacking such different disciplinary requirements. Many other studies have focused on student experience from a particular programme or school for the seemingly homogenous group experience and shared practices in the communities (Currie, 2007; Tran, 2008; Wang et al., 2012; Wang & Roopchand, 2015; Zhao & Bourne, 2011).

Second, students in the same school but at different levels of study, i.e., PhD and Masters, displayed very different academic and socio-personal patterns. However, PhD student experience seems to remain an under-researched area. In this context, a CoP, i.e., a researcher community, was formed, as PhD students clearly emphasised their roles as researchers while postgraduate taught (PGT) Masters students have a more conventional student role. PhD participants who had stayed abroad for their previous degrees also highlighted the difference between PGT and postgraduate research (PGR) experience. It is worth highlighting that the only Master by Research student, Wendi, exhibited more similarities with the PhD students in terms of her working pattern (in a lab), academic focus (research-oriented), and social life (associating with PhD colleagues), as compared to the PGT students. This

differentiation accords with some early observations in other studies. While inquiring about Chinese postgraduate students' transition abroad, Quan et al. (2016) cited Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima's (1998) critique of the well-known U-curve transitional model proposed by Lysgaard (1955) for its overlooking the behavioural differences between short-term and long-term sojourners' adjustment process. They pointed out that the postgraduate journey is short-term, so the U-curve does not apply well to the cohort. I would further argue that PhD students who are likely to spend approximately four years in the UK should be considered in a separate category within the postgraduate cohort. Elliot et al. (2016) described the international doctoral journey as a unique form of overseas journey as an "intense, daunting and challenging" experience (p. 736), with high expectations of academic expertise and contribution to the research community. In this study, different research communities were further revealed within the PhD cohort, which impacted the frequency of students' interactions with their supervisors and peers. To fill in the gap in research on doctoral students, a growing number of empirical studies in recent years suggests an interest in exploring these diasporas' unique and complex transformative experience abroad (Anderson, 2017; Chiang, 2003; Cho, Roberts, & Roberts, 2008; Ding, 2016; Elliot et al., 2016; Elliot, Baumfield, Reid et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2016; Li & Qi, 2019; McClure, 2005; Son & Park, 2014; Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine, & Hubbard, 2018; Yu & Wright, 2016).

Furthermore, given the different lengths of Masters and PhD students' stay, they tend to form different individual networks of practice (INoP), which is closely linked to academic English socialisation (Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). INoP is a construct "for analyzing academic (discourse) socialization in second language (L2) contexts" (Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015, p. 333). It was proposed based on social practice theories, including CoPs (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2010) and social network theory (Milroy, 1987). This study showed that Chinese students overlapped in their CoPs, such as academic disciplines, research groups, workplaces, residential areas, societies, and part-time jobs. The study also shows that individuals can be involved in multiple CoPs, and they may change their CoPs over time, resulting in their distinctive INoP, hence influencing their engagement in English communication for learning and living purposes.

6.1.2.2 Challenging the stereotypes of Chinese learners

The current study has demonstrated that current Chinese students abroad can be different from the stereotypical Chinese learners depicted in the literature. Over the past few decades, Chinese learners or students from the so-called Confucian Heritage cultures have often been studied from either the problematic “deficit” perspective or through an equally problematic “surplus” lens (Ryan, 2010). As elaborated in Section 2.3.3.3, the problematic binary view of culture has overly emphasised the differences between cultures and a false dichotomy, and Chinese students have been somewhat misunderstood and mistreated under this traditional approach. This deficit model has been criticised for considering Chinese students as “reduced others” and as a static homogeneous cohort, problematising the Chinese students in their ways of learning and communication (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Grimshaw, 2007; Gu & Maley, 2008; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006). Researchers have looked at these learners from the perspective of their reticence, silence, or a lack of willingness to communicate (WTC) extensively, often regarding intercultural adjustment, cultures of learning, academic performance, English language proficiency, and differences in academic (classroom) behaviours (Ha & Li, 2014). Moreover, these students are believed to share traits and characteristics in their learning styles due to their culture of learning and teaching, such as rote learning and memorisation (Li & Cutting, 2011; Yu, 2013), obedience to teachers and authorities figures (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011), concern about losing face and negative feedback (Hsu, 2015; Zhong, 2013), reticent and passive learners with low autonomy (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

Nevertheless, given recent studies on the educational reform and changing values in the Chinese education system (Ha, McPherron, & Que, 2011; Jin & Cortazzi, 2011; Louie, 2005; Ryan & Louie, 2007; Shi, 2006), it is reasonable to question if the traditional values and beliefs rooted in education and learners are still preserved and approved by Chinese students. Can they be applied to the new generation, especially for those who choose to study abroad? Some researchers, such as Chan (2010), and Li and Cutting (2011), urge more studies to be done to understand Chinese learners in a more contemporary way. Ha and Li (2014) used the

concept of the “Me Generation” to describe the current generation of Chinese international students, which refers to those who were born after 1980, who grew up in a different environment from the previous generations, such as the one-child policy, the open-door policy, and the fast pace of urbanisation. As a result, studies have shown that the new generation of Chinese students can display different values and attitudes towards learning and teaching compared to the previous or stereotypical Chinese students (Grimshaw, 2007; Heng, 2018; Shi, 2006).

The current study found that some Chinese students tended to behave stereotypically or at least could relate to such a cultural portrait of learning. In the meantime, a push back from the students regarding the idea of falling into the stereotypical “Chinese students” category was also discovered, as some students were dissatisfied with being seen as such and were eager to change other people’s stereotypical images of them. Although some students identified themselves with the stereotypes, it was clear that they also wanted to challenge this stereotype of their cultural and educational identity, and they wanted others to view them differently. Some participants seemed to have adapted much better and agreed with the Western pedagogical conventions. They were outspoken, active in OP in academic contexts and joining societies, and PhD students, in particular, were much more confident and less timid to make such efforts. Moreover, some so-called atypical behaviours were identified by some participants, such as frequent involvement with non-Chinese student communities, being direct and outspoken about their ideas in class, and taking the initiative in organising international events. Interestingly, some participants described themselves as “atypical” Chinese students or outliers, which indicates their acknowledgement of certain traits of typical Chinese students.

Moreover, this study also revealed that Chinese students are not just listeners or followers without critical thinking skills. They are observers of details and critics of the status quo. Wendi further argued that it is the Chinese students’ responsibility to challenge other people’s outdated and incorrect impressions of China and the Chinese people (see Section 4.7.1.2). Such active behaviours suggest that Chinese students are not only aware of the stereotypical images of themselves but also seek means to alter others’ perspectives. Some are not afraid to be seen as “different”,

which is scrutinised in a traditionally collective culture. They can be very active, if not more active than their peers, as some students utilised the opportunity in the UK to experience and explore their expressiveness to the fullest, especially those who experienced the virtuous cycle (see Section 4.6.5.1). Instead of being seen as passive and rote learners in a negative light, some decided to study and socialise in certain ways which suit their personalities and learning styles, which should not be confused with a lack of competence to conform. Hence, it raises the issue of self-reflection as a learner in a globalised context, where students contemplate their needs and ability to communicate their own culture and knowledge with people from other backgrounds.

6.1.2.3 From collectivism to individualism

Following the previous point, the current study shows that Chinese students' individualities seem to become more salient than their collective cultural identity, especially given the increasingly diverse backgrounds of this large cohort. This is intuitively opposing the traditional cross-culture literature, which tends to view the Western and Eastern cultures as different from each other rather than sharing common traits, including cultures of learning and teaching (Zhu, 2016). For instance, Turner (2006) compared what typical British students are like against the Chinese students and saw them as almost the opposite, as shown in Table 2.3 in Section 2.1.4. Similarly, Table 2.2 presents Ryan's (2013) comparison of the Chinese and British academic values. However, despite some truths in these general comparisons, the depictions of Chinese learners, as well as learners of other backgrounds, are oversimplified and overgeneralised. In addition, as Zhu (2016) criticised, some of these statements were made "from a purely Western perspective", without an in-depth understanding of the rationale and essence of some cultural practices from a Chinese perspective.

In this study, the participants' profiles varied from having never been abroad to having studied overseas in multiple countries. Although the educational journeys of the Masters students seem to be somewhat homogenous in this study, the PTAS English Bonus project (Woodman et al., 2020) which also took place at the UoE

showed the highly diverse educational backgrounds of 37 Chinese students from seven different schools, including not having any courses delivered in English, having (semi-) English as the medium of instruction (EMI) courses or being in an EMI programme in China, and having “2+2” undergraduate programmes in China and the UK. This diversity in educational and intercultural experience led to more development in students’ own world experience and intercultural communication experience, rather than a unified pattern of experiencing certain cultural, linguistic, and academic shock upon arriving in the UK, which might be the case in some older studies. Gladly, such a trend of diversifying educational backgrounds and its impact on Chinese students’ overseas study has been raised by some researchers, e.g., Hou, Montgomery, and McDowell (2011).

Linking back to the notion of INoP mentioned in Section 6.1.2.1, this study shows that students’ interests, motivations, personalities, and other individual differences can also lead to their different choices to join local activities or take on part-time work, which is related to their OP engagement. This connection, however, seems to be overlooked in previous literature on Chinese students’ adjustment to the local academic and social life (McMahon, 2011; Ye & Edwards, 2015). Another theme that seems to be often omitted is the aspect of intra-personal changes, which refers to the changes that individual students experience during their journeys overseas. As suggested by this study, this is particularly the case for PhD students, who had much longer involvement in the context than the Masters students. Nevertheless, this is not to say that Masters students’ lifestyles are static. Results also showed changing trajectories, such as from a fixed weekly class schedule and frequent group work to a few months of individual dissertation writing without any classes or necessary interactions with classmates – a “free-range period”, as one student described. Although some studies also looked at student experience from a dynamic perspective, revealing different stages of international students (see Section 2.1), again, they did not seem to link such changes to students’ English OP needs specifically. Therefore, the comprehensive individual experience of students from a longitudinal perspective is needed to unpack the complex intra-personal and situational changes influencing their willingness to engage in English communication.

6.1.3 The unexpected realisation

A somewhat surprising finding of the study is students' assertion that improving English speaking ability should not be projected to the whole of Chinese international students. This reflects a type of diversity of students' needs and corresponds to findings on the diverse motivations of Chinese students in the UK in other studies (Bamber, 2014). However, this finding contradicted my own instinct as the researcher prior to the study to an extent, which is most likely due to my professional English teaching experience and field of study, where English ability, particularly speaking, is seen as an important indicator of one's academic performance and professional competence. In addition, it is worth pointing out that many researchers interested in this research area seem to have some connections to English teaching background, which might potentially lead to an overall biased stance or favour towards English acquisition. Moreover, despite the general desire for more oral engagement, some participants also insist on silence in class as a choice, a right, and a legitimate means to participate. This resonates with research that explores the multi-functions of silence and critically views the relationship between verbal and non-verbal participation (Ha & Li, 2014; Kim, Ates, Grigsby, Kraker, & Micek, 2016; Zheng, 2010; Zhou et al., 2005). Another unexpected finding was students' overall relief in their English pronunciation, as speaking with an accent is a criticism often inflicted by Chinese learners themselves onto one another. Examples of such a shift in perception can be found in Section 4.4.1.3, which can be explained by an increase in students' awareness of Global Englishes (Galloway & Rose, 2015), together with their growing intercultural communication experience and ICC.

On the other hand, the study found that in terms of oral communication in English, what frustrated some students the most was not the complex academic vocabulary or unknown territory of knowledge, but everyday words and phrases, such as names of different types of food, as well as things they know very well in Chinese, such as Chinese literature (see Section 4.5.2.2). Moreover, as explained in Section 4.4.1.1, students complained that their use of English words was not "native-like" or colloquial, and that they lacked quick access to formulaic language when speaking. In addition, there seemed to be a noticeable lack of variety in their regular

expressions and reliance on Chinese-English translation, which made them feel that they could sound rather simplistic and boring, a factor hindering their communicative confidence (see Section 4.4.1.2).

Furthermore, what was also not anticipated by me was students' views on oral presentations, which are seemingly challenging to Chinese students but lack the element of interaction (see Section 4.2.1). In contrast, the study reveals the inexplicit but essential OP needs for some participants, which are not directly linked to academic assessments as presented in Section 4.2.2. This highlights the significance of raising students' awareness of the potentially important role of OP in their academic life and its impact on their satisfaction with overseas journeys.

6.2 Multifaceted factors in students' willingness for oral participation

The second RQ aims to explore the factors influencing Chinese postgraduate students' OP during their experience at a UK university. A set of linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and social-contextual factors were identified and presented with supporting evidence in Chapter 4. These factors are connected to factors involved in the (un)WTC literature and research on Chinese students' OP presented in Section 2.3. This section first proposes the term willingness for oral participation in comparison to WTC. It then discusses the abovementioned factors emerging from the current study in relation to the literature.

6.2.1 Re-visit the definition of WTC – Willingness for oral participation

To begin with, I would like to propose the term *willingness for oral participation* (WFOP) to differentiate from the concept WTC. As explained in Section 2.3.1, WTC is used in the context of L2 teaching and learning, whereas research of similar interests to the current study investigates students' participation in a much broader context beyond L2 classrooms. Therefore, a new and more precise term is needed to give rise to the authentic internationalised context where English is used as a lingua franca. Moreover, highlighting OP is a response to some researchers' criticism of equating participation to communication (Wang, 2020). This differentiation also gives legitimacy to non-verbal participation, such as silence.

According to MacIntyre (2007), WTC in L2 is a free chosen process. He also highlighted the complex and dynamic process concerning WTC, in that the variables involved in second language acquisition (SLA) can shift significantly given different definitions of abstract concepts. Unlike MacIntyre (2007), who held that the primary motivation for SLA is to establish a relationship that allows someone to communicate with people from a different cultural group, the current study found insufficient evidence to support students' strong motivation to support this argument. Instead, the results from the study challenge the idea of such a strong need to develop

communicative relationships and challenge the notion of the “target culture” in SLA literature. Chinese students at the UoE are in an “abnormal” target language context because they interact with many more people from the non-target language group who are also non-British or NNEs, including peers at the postgraduate level and staff members in the university. Despite a need to learn and employ communication skills to strengthen students’ communicative experience with a wider group of people from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds, this study did not reveal a strong desire or necessity from the students to engage with local British people or NNEs.

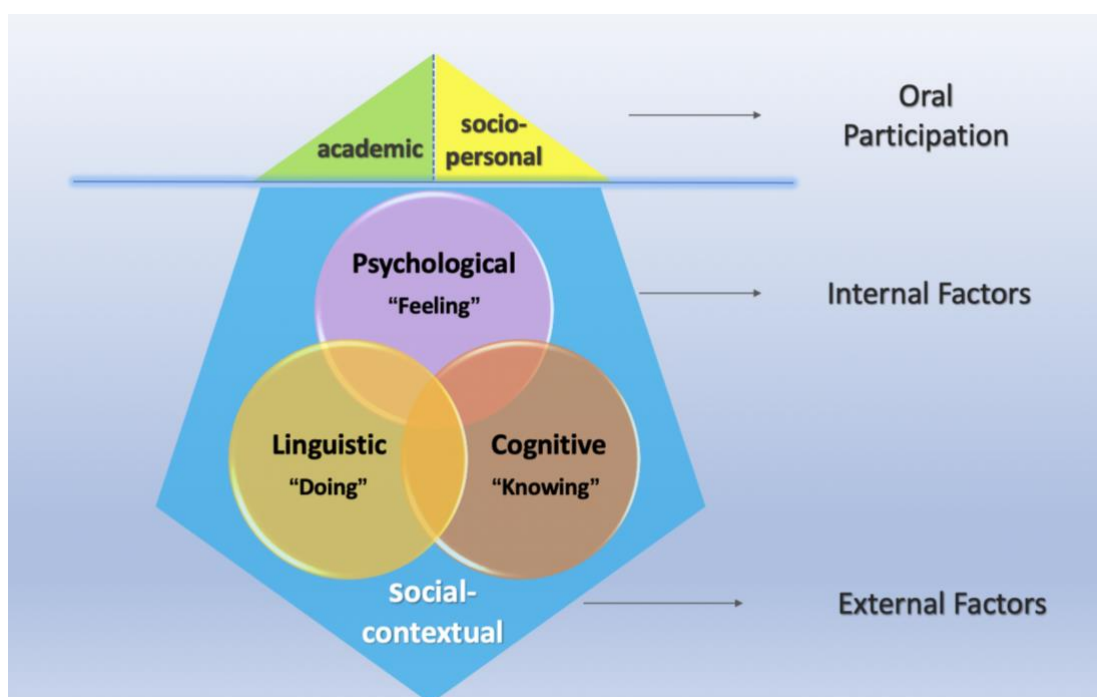
Furthermore, concurring findings from Amoah and Yeboah’s (2021) study, this study also shows that most Chinese students’ motivation for OP tends to be instrumental motivation rather than integrative motivation – two terms proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972). The former refers to learning a language for practical reasons, which in this case is to study and research. Gardner and Lambert (1959) advocated that “a strong motivation to learn a second language follows from a desire to be accepted as a member of the new linguistic community” (p. 272). Here, the notion of a “new linguistic community” is interesting. If it refers to the native speakers of the target language in a traditional sense, then the findings of the study contradicted such a hypothesis. However, suppose the scope of the notion can be broadened to the international community of English speakers or the ELF community. In that case, the study can be considered to support this hypothesis. Evidence in this study suggests that English is considered mostly as an instrumental tool by the Chinese postgraduate students at a UK university to join conversations and create a communicative relationship with people from a variety of culture groups (including other Chinese people) for academic and socio-personal purposes, rather than in the hope of being accepted by the NNEs. Moreover, although it was evident that Chinese students would like to achieve a higher level of English ability in general, students in this study also did not consider the English language barrier as a decisive factor influencing their WFOP, supporting Amoah and Yeboah’s (2021) and Ha and Li’s (2014) research findings. In other words, one’s WFOP is the result of the complex interplay of various psychological, situational, and context-dependent factors, which will be elaborated on in the following sections.

6.2.2 A proposed theoretical model on oral participation

A theoretical model of OP is proposed based on findings of the study and literature in WTC, aiming to illustrate the variables and complexity regarding students' OP needs. Interview findings demonstrated that OP is not only simply the observable behaviours of an individual but also the results of a very complex cognitive process. This inspired my creation of the model below, which resembles an iceberg, indicating that what is hidden underwater may outweigh what can be observed directly.

Figure 6.1

Iceberg Model of Oral Participation



As shown in Figure 6.1, there is a triangle made up of two smaller triangles above the surface in the model. This part refers to what can be observed directly, namely one's OP (needs) in various communicative contexts. It includes speaking in academic and socio-personal contexts, which share a blurry boundary as indicated by a dashed line. Under the surface is what cannot be observed directly, which is the complex process involving internal and external factors, including variables that may

impact the factors. Based on interviews and FGs data analysis, four types of factors are theorised to greatly influence students' OP. The three overlapping circles in the middle of the model represent the internal factors, i.e., linguistic, cognitive, and psychological factors. The rest of the pentagon shape refers to the external factors, which are social-contextual factors, often beyond individuals' control. These factors are interconnected, and their interplay influences students' situated and momentary WFOP. This model is particularly useful for systematically analysing the different factors influencing one's OP needs in different communicative contexts. The following sections will discuss the four factors mentioned above in relation to theories and empirical studies.

6.2.3 Linguistic factors

A need for improvement in speaking ability is no news to research involving Chinese students studying abroad, as linguistics factors have often been cited in other studies concerning students' English OP and referred to as proficiency in the English language, CC, and English accents (Cao, 2011; Liu, 2002; Wang, 2020). Some researchers include CC and language anxiety as part of the "individual context" in relation to WTC (Peng, 2014, p. 256). Section 4.4 illustrated the connection between linguistic issues and students' OP from the perspectives of struggles with specific speaking skills, the overall development of oracy skills (speaking and listening), and retrospective views on IELTS exams. It is worth noting that linguistic factors here refer to the themes that emerged from the data analysis from the current study rather than borrowing from the CC models mentioned in Section 2.2.4.1. However, many studies overlooked the strategic and pragmatic aspects of linguistics, which in this study have shown their importance in Chinese students' transition and adaptation to life in the UK as part of their ICC development.

This study revealed students' overall mixed feelings regarding their self-perceived improvement in English-speaking abilities. On the one hand, students reported having struggled with specific areas of speaking skills, particularly in the lack of diversity of vocabulary and expressions, formulaic language, and

organisation skills. Many did not achieve the developmental goal in spoken English as they had expected due to a lack of conscious effort, a lack of exposure to the English-speaking environment, a lack of understanding of what to improve, and a lack of appropriate strategies for improvement. As evident in Chapter 4, despite their considerable lexical and semantic resources, Chinese postgraduate students struggled with formulaic language in verbal expressions and the ability to communicate appropriately in English, which is considered a component of pragmatic competence. As a result, they often focused more on delivering the key messages while sacrificing the complexity and diversity of language choice.

As introduced in Section 2.2.4.1, according to Bachman and Palmer (1996), pragmatic knowledge includes functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. As far as Chinese students are considered, it seems that they particularly have challenges in the sociolinguistic knowledge area, which refers to “how the utterances or sentences and texts are related to features of the language use setting”, e.g., cultural references and figures of speech, dialects/varieties, and natural or idiomatic expressions (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 68). This issue might be due to an overall lack of exposure to and practice of authentic oral communication in Chinese students’ daily lives (Wei & Zhang, 2013), China’s cultural resistance to adapting to communicative language teaching pedagogical practices while the grammar-translation method remains dominant (Hu, 2002; Tan, 2016), and an idealised and outdated conceptualisation of the English language based on the monolingual origin of native English (Wang, 2015; Wang & Jenkins, 2016). Moreover, this phenomenon also seems to be related to “the noticing hypothesis” (Schmidt, 1990, 2001, 2010), which suggests that language input does not necessarily internalise as language intake unless it is noticed and consciously registered by the learner. However, data also showed diversity among students in terms of learner autonomy, in that some students only noticed the use of what they considered as better expressions by other speakers while others actively kept notes of such encounters and practised using these words and expressions by themselves to internalise the language.

On the other hand, it was also clear that many Chinese students have developed ICC during their journeys. For instance, many students reported an

improvement in fluency, speed of response, and a more relaxed attitude towards speaking English. Their pronunciation, which was often stated as their self-perceived weakness in spoken English, was treated as a much lighter issue over time. What seemed surprising to the students was that listening comprehension played a major factor contributing to their successful OP, and that many of them struggled with listening, particularly in understanding non-standard or NNES English. As explained in Section 4.4.3, this is likely due to a lack of exposure to different varieties of English or Global Englishes in their former English learning experience, including preparing for standardised exams such as IELTS. Additionally, previous studies also observed that unfamiliar academic discourse structures could be challenging to students' listening comprehension (Olsen & Huckin, 1990; Tauroza & Allison, 1994), as is the case for Chinese postgraduate students in the UK who experience "triple transition" (Schartner & Young, 2020) (see Section 2.1.1), plus the challenge of studying in a foreign language. Nevertheless, most students described the challenges as only part of the initial transition period, and they were able to adjust to different accents relatively successfully as they progressed to the second semester. Exposure to other NNESs from different backgrounds seemed to have helped Chinese students become better ELF speakers. Some of them seemed to cultivate communicative strategies from the real-life experience of intercultural communication, which suggests development in strategic competence.

It is also worth pointing out that an apparent mismatch was noticed between students' expectations and reality regarding the English language. On the issue of viewing the IELTS exams, most students considered it useful as a yardstick while questioning its predictability of academic performance, supported by evidence in Section 4.4.4. As mentioned in Section 2.2.2, much research has looked into the correlation between IELTS test scores and students' subsequent academic performance (Cotton & Conrow, 1998; Dang & Dang, 2021; Dooley & Oliver, 2002; Feast, 2002; Green, 2007; Hill et al., 1999; Kerstjens & Nery, 2000; Schoepp, 2018; Yen & Kuzma, 2009), but results remained inconsistent. Even though some discrepancies were results of different methodological approaches, such inconsistencies leave room for questioning the predictability of such standardised exams. Yen and Kuzma's (2009) study argued a positive correlation between

Chinese students' listening IELTS scores and their academic performance, particularly in the first semester. Their study also suggested that Chinese students seemed to be able to develop more in their listening ability as they spent longer time at a UK university. Moreover, some participants in the current study have also pointed out the vast difference between preparing for the standardised English exams and the use of English in authentic communication, hence urging prospective students to better prepare for real use of English rather than being overly confident based on the exam results. The problem of extensive coaching and preparation of the IELTS exam was also pointed out in Hu and Trenkic's (2019) study. More discussion on pre-arrival preparation will be presented in Section 6.3.2.1.

Despite the resemblance found in Ingram and Bayliss's (2007) study regarding some linguistic features of students' use of language between IELTS and actual in-class participation, Paul (2007) argued that good results from English proficiency exams could not prevent students from encountering linguistic difficulties in the demanding and complex academic contexts. In Sabet and Babaei's (2017) study, which explored the relationship between the listening of IELTS exams and academic programmes, they observed more discrepancies in constructs than similarities. Another concern raised by Sabet and Babaei (2017) was the absence of the listening–speaking connections in the IELTS exams, which can be quite different in real-life interactions, in line with Ducasse and Brown's (2011) study, which observed the need for students to produce more interactional functions in university context as compared to IELTS speaking. This corresponds to some exam-intensive strategies mentioned by the participants in this study (see Section 4.4.4). They could be very good at the listening and speaking sections of the IELTS exam due to their extensive preparation, but this did not transfer their ability to authentic communication engagement, which is much less structured and predictable. This further collaborates with what was observed in Ducasse and Brown's (2011) study, in that the structured nature of the IELTS speaking test and a lack of collaborative interaction raised questions of the comprehensiveness and practicality of such exams regarding skills required for candidates' preparedness for target tasks.

6.2.4 Cognitive factors

As explained in Section 4.5, the second group of factors influential to students' OP are cognitive factors, which broadly refer to their content knowledge in both academic and non-academic areas. The cognitive factors can also be understood in relation to the construct of self-efficacy, which refers to someone's belief in their capabilities required to perform a task (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy has been argued to be a contributing factor hindering students' academic success (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). Results from the study show that in any given communicative situation in the target context, a student first needs to make sense of the content being communicated by linking it to their previous knowledge – often in the Chinese language and culture, hence the crucial cognitive processing phase. This finding is similar to Liu's (2002) construction of cognitive factors that influence Chinese students' use of silence in American classrooms, which entail their prior learning experience, background knowledge, and mental readiness. The current study singles out subject knowledge as a key to students' WFOP, whether its academic or non-academic knowledge (see Section 4.5), due to its importance in exposing a student to the challenge of connecting their existing knowledge to new knowledge through English or other means, and to make sense of the new knowledge. Topical knowledge is also considered by Bachman and Palmer (1996) as a key component of CC, as explained in Section 2.2.4.

Moreover, knowledge and experience regarding specific topics can be used to interpret the temporary nature of WFOP, concurring with Dörnyei (2005) and MacIntyre (2007), who argued that we should view WTC in relation to time frame rather than treating it as a trait-like tendency. This study shows that students evaluate their stance on speaking in comparison to the competence of their peers. This is particularly important for Chinese students, who, as revealed in the study, can be highly self-critical and judgemental of others to some extent. They seem to emphasise the correctness and quality of information being exchanged while dismissing the contribution of frequent low-quality verbal participation, especially in a classroom setting. This seems to be one of the mismatches between Eastern and Western pedagogical practices, as silence is shown in some empirical studies as a

means to react to others' contributions and engage in participation (Tatar, 2005). Given the "face culture" etiquette in Chinese society explained in Section 2.3.3.2, sufficient content knowledge and expertise in a given area is seen as self-assurance for Chinese students, who are culturally reluctant to express uncertainty in public, to gain the voice to speak up. Moreover, one feature of current Chinese postgraduates abroad is that they tend to be relatively young with limited work experience (Wu, 2014). As a result, they often lack the professional experience, knowledge, or the power to make them confident to verbally contribute to seminar discussions, as exemplified in Sections 4.5.1 and 4.6.4. In addition, it is also not uncommon for some Chinese students to shift their subjects of study when progressing to postgraduate studies, which can lead to more challenges in disciplinary knowledge, especially learning in an L2, hence more difficulties in effective oral engagement as well as more frustration in their inability to participate.

Another angle which could be potentially explored in more depth is personal growth and maturity in relation to their OP. This study involved PhD students who had spent a few years in the UK on purpose. Based on their reflections on their own changes in OP over their experience abroad, from undergraduate or Masters to PhD, a shift was noticed – from newcomers who lacked disciplinary knowledge to more academically competent researchers and L2 users. This study shows that as the PhD students mature as researchers, they gradually gain more knowledge and confidence to be more vocal and believe they have ideas worth sharing.

Last but not least, non-academic content knowledge is also important to students' OP, and most students seemed somewhat frustrated over their ability to fully participate in English communication involving non-academic topics. As demonstrated in Section 4.5.2.2, this type of frustration is particularly intensified when it comes to areas of knowledge that students are supposed to know in Chinese, e.g., sports, literature, and entertainment. Naturally, individuals have different responses to such mismatches of expectations. However, this aspect seems to be often neglected in previous research that investigated Chinese students' experiences in the UK.

6.2.5 Psychological factors

The psychological factors that emerged from the study overlap with what is identified by other researchers as affective factors (Liu, 2002; Peng, 2012; Wang, 2020), affective schemata and personalities (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), or individual factors (Cao, 2011). Here I use the term broadly, which includes interests, motivations, confidence, perceptions, beliefs, personalities, attitudes, affection, etc., which effectively influence students' situated decisions to engage in OP, as explained in Section 4.6. Findings on the dynamic nature of speakers' psychological states occur with previous WTC research (Macintyre et al., 1998) on the trait (personality in general), situation-specific (anxious in L2), and state levels (nervous at the moment) of WTC.

As elaborated in Section 4.6.1, this study shows an overall decline in students' motivation to improve English language competence, which can be explained by 1). an increasing exposure to authentic English communication with other NNEs and a growing awareness of Global Englishes, leading to the liberation from the native-speakerism mindset, and 2). their instrumental and extrinsic motivations for learning English, such as passing exams, rather than integrative or intrinsic motivations, such as genuine interests in the local culture. This decrease was further strengthened by the lack of severe challenges in oral communication, as many programmes did not require much oral engagement as a necessity, and many students considered their English ability to be good enough to “survive” their academic and daily demands.

What seems to be lacking from previous research is what I conceptualised as long-term experience-influenced WFOP, taking the forms of virtuous or vicious cycles of OP (see Section 4.6.5). As illustrated by participants' lived experiences, students' psychological propensity regarding L2 communication is often influenced by other factors and reinforced. Those who are better at speaking English get appraisals and gradually become more confident in approaching English conversations. They are more likely to develop integrative motivation to develop English ability, have positive attitudes toward the English language, and have more interest and curiosity about the L2 culture. The increasing familiarity with

interlocutors and the target context and development in English proficiency can increase students' self-confidence, which is also a vital factor affecting students' participation (Brown, 2008). On the other hand, students who do not receive positive feedback on their oral engagement or even get ridiculed for their English ability can find themselves in the vicious cycles of OP. Such negative experience, coupled with a lack of support from their surrounding environment, can damage their WFOP and hinder their future participation. Data also showed that this was particularly the case for students who had held high self-esteem and confidence in their English ability before arrival, concurring findings from Quan et al.'s (2016) study.

The lack of interaction and support from the local community is echoed in Jiang's (2018) study, which investigated Chinese students' adjustment regarding self-efficacy and psychological well-being when studying at UK universities. Similar to the current study, participants in Jiang's (2018) research also expressed dissatisfaction with the interaction with the host nationals, which did not contribute positively to their psychological well-being. Moreover, Jiang (2018) revealed that although discrimination did not emerge as a prominent theme, some participants stated their choice of not socialising with British students due to a lack of necessity, negative feelings towards British people for being cold and insincere, and other forms discriminatory experience. Although discrimination did not emerge as a major problem for participants in this study, what Wendy experienced with her supervisor (see Section 4.7.1.2) and Xiao's experience with an NES student (see Extract 39) were very unpleasant. Difficulties in interacting with the local community, which were also identified in other studies involving Chinese students (Yu & Moskal, 2019), can lead to students' frustration, loneliness, alienation, and avoidance of further interaction.

Nevertheless, this study wants to stress the differences between "British culture/people" and "the local community", in that the latter involves a much broader sense of internationalisation and gives a more accurate depiction of the "new linguistic community" (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 272), as discussed in Section 6.2.1. Many participants in this study revealed that they have not interacted with British people, but they have interacted with people from much wider and more

mixed backgrounds, all of whom contributed to the building of the local environment. Moreover, interestingly, Wendy, who was subject to discrimination in her lab, seemed to be the only student immersed in a very British environment, while all the other participants neither had such an immersive experience in the L2 or British community nor experienced such discrimination. This may suggest a more mixed and diversified cultural environment may enhance all students' awareness of ICC.

Furthermore, while some studies claim the length of stay is a main factor influencing international students' CC (Guo, 2015), data from this study only partially agree with it. On one hand, this study also shows that PhD students overall seem more competent in OP compared to their Masters counterparts, and there is evidence supporting the intra-personal development among the PhD students who have been abroad for a few years (see Section 4.5.1). On the other hand, to attribute the length of stay as a factor remains rather superficial, because what really makes a difference is not the time but rather changes in students' linguistic ability, cognitive competence, and psychological propensity, as illustrated in the findings chapters.

6.2.6 Social-contextual factors

Last but not least, social-contextual factors which tend to be out of students' control also play a role in determining whether they would initiate or carry on a conversation, including situational environment and atmosphere, spatial arrangement, other speakers' ethnolinguistic backgrounds and speaking styles, and the power relationships between interlocutors (see Section 4.7.1). These factors correspond to the characteristics of the language use or task and setting in Bachman and Palmer's (1996) CC model, the environmental factors concluded in Cao (2011), or the sociocultural factors identified in other studies (Liu, 2002; Wang, 2020), where "culture" in Wang's (2020) study also referred to the small culture such as the classroom culture. Peng's (2014) investigation also showed social context factors to be vital in influencing Chinese students' L2 WTC, with sub-factors including classroom climate, group cohesiveness, teacher support, and classroom organisation in Chinese EFL classrooms.

In terms of communicative space, first, as explained in Section 4.7.2, it was clear that participants overwhelmingly agreed that it was much easier for them to engage in oral communication in less formal settings, such as in accommodations, cafés and pubs, and common rooms, as they felt more relaxed and less pressured to speak “correct” English. Interviews from the PTAS project (Woodman et al., 2020) also concurred with this finding. Secondly, spatial arrangement of communicative settings also matters, such as how classes/discussions are arranged, group size, and how instructors and students are positioned. Although this issue was not a salient theme emerging from this study, there was evidence suggesting students are more likely to enjoy group discussions in smaller groups for a better OP experience. Spatial arrangement is often raised in other studies, e.g., Bamber (2014). One example from PTAS project (Woodman et al., 2020) also seemed to support this finding. As the research assistant, I observed two students from the same Masters programme taking the same course in two separate workshops on the same day (covering the same weekly content) and noticed very different levels of engagement. One major difference between the two classes was the size of groups. Students seemed to be more active in smaller groups (3-4 people), whereas the larger groups (6-7 people) were much quieter. In another class in the same project, where the teacher asked students’ preference in forming discussion in groups of three or six, the class chose the former, indicating their comfort in working with smaller groups. Although physical space of communication in class has not been mentioned in depth in previous WTC research, it is not a new theme in research on classroom instructions in general. Research has shown that the physical arrangement can indicate to students the type of behaviours valued by the teachers (Savage, 2009). It can function as a powerful tool to give clear instructions, elicit effective interactions, or inhibit classroom activities and hinder social exchanges between students (Cummings, 2000; Stewart, Evans, & Kaczynski, 1997).

The power relation between interlocutors in a communicative setting seems to be key to students’ WFOP, as shown in Section 4.7.1. Pedagogically speaking, Alexander (2008) agrees that the social and political relations among participants in the classroom setting can affect the dynamics of interaction. Interlocutors’ ethnolinguistic backgrounds and overall linguistic proficiency were given much

attention by participants in this study, based on which English speakers can roughly be categorised into NESs, proficient NNEs, and less proficient NNEs. Although different students might have different attitudes towards speakers from different backgrounds, it seemed that Chinese students tended to be more intimidated by the presence of NESs, for reasons such as their fast speaking speed and being overly dominant, as well as their own fear of (self-inflicted) criticisms on their English ability. However, such feelings tended to fade as they became more experienced in intercultural exchanges and grew into more confident bilinguals. In the meantime, students clearly appreciated the experience of communicating with other NNEs, including Westerners who they had assumed to speak native-like English but actually spoke with various accents. In addition, they pointed out the higher degree of tolerance of ambiguity in NNEs-NNEs communication. As mentioned in Section 6.1.1.1, the presence of other NNEs can lead to a sense of “shared non-nativeness” among speakers (Galloway, 2011), which influences the situated psychological factors. The two School of Chemistry participants were in different research groups, and they exemplified this point. The Euro-centric group (Wendi’s group) appeared to have some very questionable and culturally inappropriate comments. In contrast, Shuai’s group, which was highly internationalised, was described as very friendly and welcoming (see Section 4.7.1.2).

With a growing body of literature on the relationship between students and their instructors/supervisors in internationalised universities, other research has also looked at the relationship between people in conversations in similar settings (Hu et al., 2016; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Yu & Wright, 2016). The role of instructors, who are the authoritative figures, especially in certain educational cultures, is crucial to students’ WFOP for setting up their expectations, modelling the norms of classes, influencing the communicative climate, explaining instructions, answering questions, and providing more teacher support. It was also clear from the data that the power relations between different students and instructors/supervisors differed very much, from very familiar and friendly to distant and unprofessional. Therefore, one student may experience very different WFOP based on a particular interaction with a particular person. Appropriate teacher acts and more pedagogical implications will be explained with internationalisation at home in Section 6.3.4.

Although students' OP needs should not be overgeneralised and reticence should also be respected as a legitimate form of participation, specific strategies can be implemented to optimise the multifaceted factors influencing the WFOP of Chinese students or a wider cohort. The following sections will focus on some of these suggestions.

6.3 Suggestions for implementation and Implications

The third RQ is focused on addressing and meeting students' OP needs. Specific suggestions were proposed and evaluated by the participants, as discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Having explained the dynamic and context-specific nature of WFOP, this section puts forward further suggestions for individuals and different university departments to take actions, as the international student experience (ISE) is an ecological cycle involving many stakeholders. These suggestions will be presented with the issues discussed earlier in the chapter and results in relevant research.

6.3.1 Guided autonomy & The ISE PDF frameworks

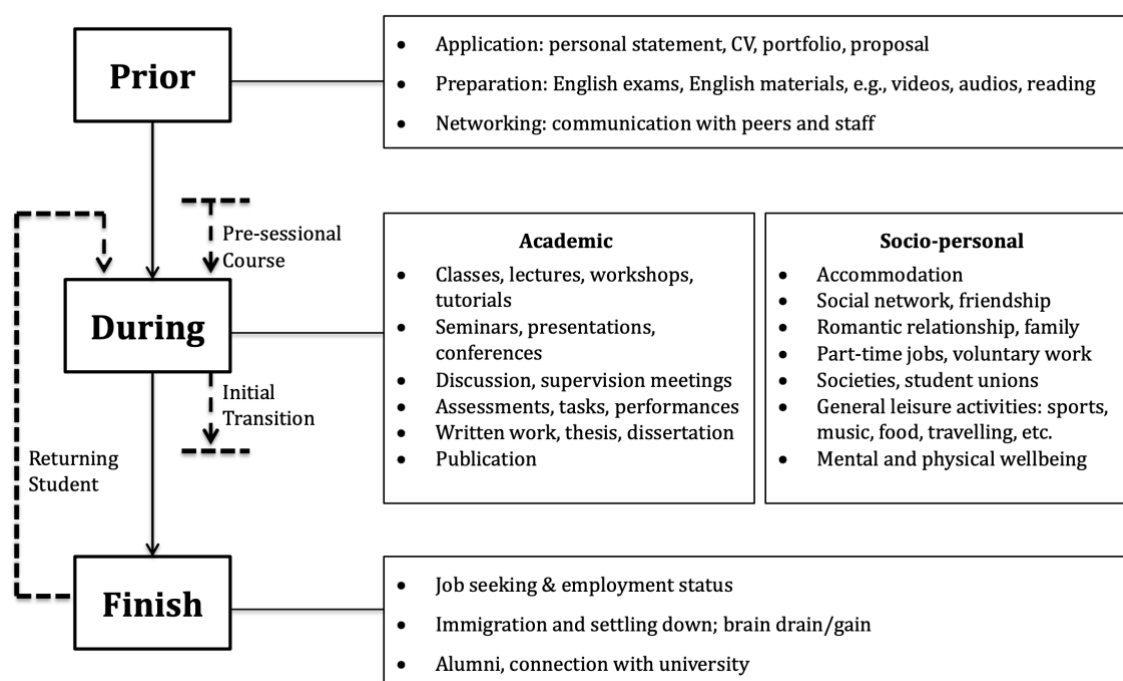
First and foremost, a guided autonomous approach to Chinese (international) students' needs analysis and ICC development in a study abroad context is proposed. Here, I use the term ICC instead of English language competence, as the former essentially refers to the ability to use the language effectively and appropriately in intercultural communication (Byram, 1997; Zhu, 2019) (see Section 2.2.4.2). Therefore, it is more comprehensive and inclusive than the sole focus on English language development. It also reflects the findings of this study that Chinese students appreciated the development of ICC from their overseas journeys as a valuable transferable skill while losing their motivation to improve their English language ability. Moreover, according to Deardorff (2006a), ICC is also one of the major desired outcomes of internationalisation of higher education (IHE).

By proposing a guided autonomous approach, I argue that the most effective way to develop students' ICC and WFOP is not to tell them what they need to do but to support them to become truly autonomous learners who can identify and formulate their own goals, as well as adjust their goals to cater for their own learning needs and interests (Dickinson, 1995). In the same light, López-Rocha (2016) pointed out the importance of challenging students and providing guidance to develop their critical communication skills. Therefore, a framework for different stakeholders and a needs analysis for individual's context are recommended to be implemented together.

Based on the results of the study and other ISE literature (Amaechi et al., 2013; Haselgrove, 1994; Morgan, 2012; Quan et al., 2016; Temple et al., 2014), I propose the following ISE Prior-During-Finish (PDF) framework to present ISE in a visual, comprehensive, and step-by-step manner (see Figure 6.2). This framework views the ISE from a holistic and ecological perspective. It illustrates the different possible stages of ISE and some aspects and needs embedded in this complex process.

Figure 6.2

International Student Experience Prior-During-Finish (PDF) Framework I



This ISE PDF framework exhibits wide applicability to a majority of international students and offers flexibility to cater to individual student cases. Notably, it demonstrates adaptability through various possibilities within the ISE process, particularly during the transitional phase, as denoted by the dashed line on the left side. Unlike existing frameworks, this comprehensive model takes into account both returning students and international students enrolled in pre-sessional courses offered by institutions.

Within this framework, the initial "Prior" stage is significantly elaborated compared to other frameworks. It delineates the specific steps students need to undertake, including application procedures, preparatory measures, and networking activities. The "During" stage encompasses a wide range of academic situations such as attending classes, lectures, workshops, meetings, completing assignments, and participating in assessments. Additionally, it also acknowledges socio-personal situations that international students typically encounter, including aspects such as finding accommodation, developing social networks, establishing friendships, managing relationships, engaging in student societies, pursuing employment opportunities, participating in leisure activities, and ensuring personal well-being. The "Finish" stage refers to the experiences of graduates, including their job search and employment status, decisions regarding settling down, and ongoing connections with the university as alumni. It is important to note that some graduates may choose to return to universities for further education, which initiates a new and distinctive cycle within the ISE framework.

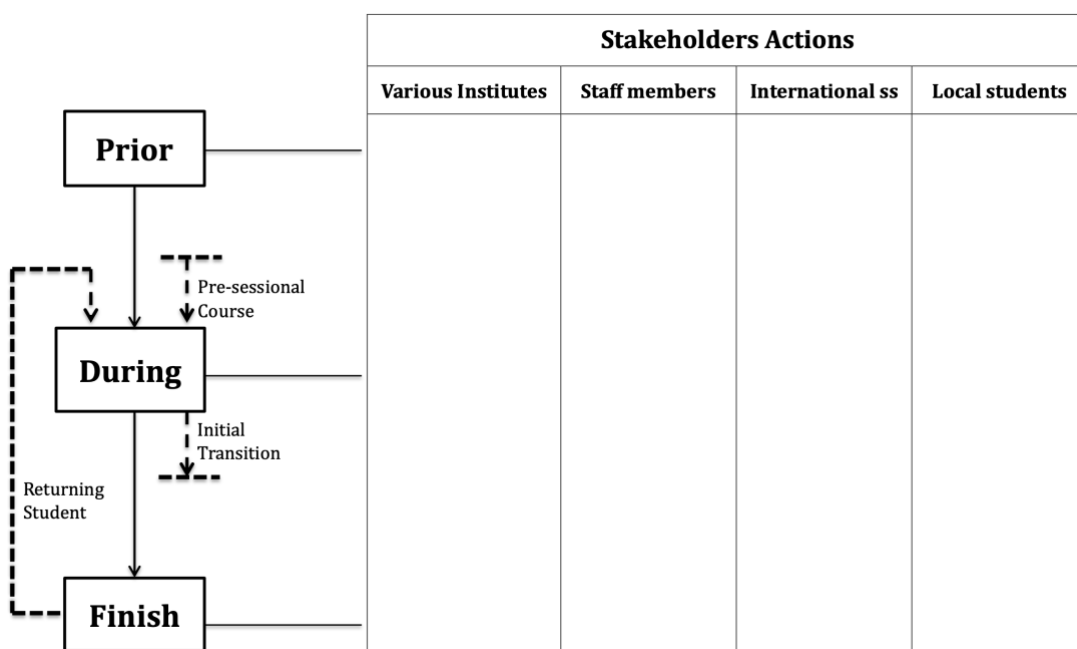
In the context of the current study, this framework accentuates the crucial aspects related to English communication. It specifically focuses on situations where students may find the need to engage in English communication. Additionally, this adaptable framework can be readily applied to research concerning other related topics within a similar context. For instance, it can be effectively utilised to explore students' social networks, psychological development, intercultural competence, and other experiences. By employing this framework, researchers investigating ISE can gain valuable insights into the placement of their research focus within the broader ISE journey. Thus, this framework serves as a valuable tool for researchers to situate

their studies within the ISE framework and establish meaningful connections to other areas of inquiry.

Building upon this framework, a secondary ISE PDF framework is proposed, aiming to foster multi-directional collaboration among diverse stakeholders with the objective of enhancing students' experiences in specific areas of concern. This framework encompasses the "Who, When, and How" aspects, setting forth action plans that can be developed and implemented by various stakeholders. Figure 6.3 provides a visual representation of this framework.

Figure 6.3

Stakeholders Action Plan in International Student Experience – PDF Framework II



For the current study, the focus revolves around the OP experience of Chinese international students. Consequently, the major stakeholders identified include different institutes and departments within the university, staff members, international students, and local students. Each stakeholder is encouraged to contribute to the enhancement of students' experiences by planning and implementing their own actions within their respective roles. The framework

effectively facilitates collaboration among stakeholders, enabling them to work together in a coordinated manner.

This framework holds great potential for student experience support groups as it allows them to maintain an online profile of the students, along with their other academic records. Moreover, this profile can be seamlessly transferred between different phases of the student journey, ensuring that all student support staff and students themselves have access to the necessary information to provide appropriate support and follow-through. For example, students who have participated in pre-sessional sessions to improve their English for academic purposes, such as academic writing and presentation skills, can have their progress and achievements documented and shared with tutors in specific programmes. This facilitates task design, student feedback, and the provision of language and academic support. Similar needs across different schools can be recorded and adapted to cater to the requirements of different programmes.

To address the initial adjustment and adaptation challenges faced by international students, staff members in different schools can provide valuable feedback to the English Language Education/Centre for Open Learning (ELE/COL) department based on their previous experiences. Subsequently, the ELE/COL department can organise a language and culture orientation programme for incoming international students, helping them acclimate to the academic expectations and cultural norms of the university. This programme could include language support, academic writing workshops, and cultural competence training to facilitate students' adjustment and adaptation to their new university life in a different country. Additionally, departmental staff can offer personalised advising and support to international students on academic, social and personal matters. Collaborative efforts with other departments can provide comprehensive support services, including study abroad opportunities, career development workshops, and mental health services. The Student Counselling Service can offer workshops and counselling sessions specifically tailored to address the unique needs and challenges faced by international students, such as homesickness and stress management. Local students can also play an active role by initiating or participating in department-led activities

like orientation events and local walking tours, thereby assisting incoming international students in a successful transition. Furthermore, events such as cultural exchange events and international food festivals can promote understanding and appreciation of different cultures among local students, fostering a welcoming and inclusive campus environment for all students.

By utilising this ISE PDF framework, stakeholders can identify the appropriate actions to undertake and effectively collaborate with one another. This collaborative approach enhances the potential for positive outcomes and comprehensive improvements in the identified area of concern. Moreover, it is important to note that the responsibility for implementing specific suggestions does not lie solely with any particular stakeholder. Rather, it is often the result of collaborative efforts between multiple parties. Individuals and institutes can use this framework to interpret the recommendations put forward in the following sections and adopt strategies that are most suitable for their students, staff, and the institution.

6.3.2 Institutional guided support

The findings of the study warrant the importance of institutional guided support, particularly in assisting students with preparation regarding relevant knowledge and useful skills at different stages of their journey, as well as facilitating their meaningful engagement in intercultural communication. Here, the institution refers to the university, its supporting departments, and individual schools and programmes. The reason why I use the term “institutional guided support” rather than “institutional support” is to emphasise the active role of students as the primary participants in self and peer support with the help of institutions, rather than the passive recipients of such institutional support.

6.3.2.1 Pre-arrival preparation

As the saying goes, “Well begun is half done”. The stage prior to studying abroad can be crucial for students’ successful adjustment, and it is also often singled out in other researchers’ stage-by-stage ISE models (Amaechi et al., 2013; Morgan, 2012). Based on the mismatches identified in this study and other research, incoming students are advised to increase awareness of their needs, establish a realistic vision of the target culture and their potential lifestyles in the UK, and familiarise themselves with the prospective contexts with the help of institutional guidance.

Despite students’ alleged desire to improve their English ability, the current study and Woodman et al.’s (2020) PTAS project show that most Chinese students who have passed the language requirement for entry do not seem to worry about their language skills. According to Quan et al.’s (2016) research on Chinese postgraduate students’ adjustment process at UK universities, many Chinese students seemed to have pre-arrival over-confidence because they had attained satisfactory IELTS scores, which provided them with a false sense of security. Respondents in Quan et al.’s (2016) study reflected that they should have made more efforts at this stage to learn about British academic practices and enrich their subject knowledge, which is similar to what some participants in the current study have reported. In addition, some students in this study pointed out that they were clueless about what to prepare. They may rely on information on various online forums and approach previous students in the same university but not necessarily in the same discipline, hence receiving confusing or even misleading information. I highly suggest incoming students be aware of the role of English proficiency exams as a minimum requirement, while real-world communicative situations can be much more complex and challenging.

A second mismatch is between the so-called standard British English that students expect to hear and the English language they actually encounter in authentic intercultural communication in the UK. The English varieties and accents reflect an area of the ongoing Global Englishes discourse, which entails the use of ELF as a means of instruction, as well as the concept of World Englishes (Galloway & Rose, 2015). This is perhaps particularly the case for an environment such as the UoE, where students and staff come from very diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds and

speak English with various accents, which may not be familiar to the new students who are mostly used to the so-called standard English accent. As pointed out across the data set, most students had spent time preparing for IELTS exams, and their expectation of the use of English was influenced by such exams to an extent. In addition, another mismatch identified in the study is between students' expectations and their actual encounters in terms of the frequency and situations of English communication, particularly regarding spoken English. As presented in Section 4.3.2, some students had few chances and little need to engage in verbal communication in their academic and socio-personal life. Moreover, prospective students need to raise awareness that the long-standing myth that studying in an English-speaking country automatically leads to English development is simply not true (see Section 4.3.3).

As explained in the previous chapter, many of students' misunderstandings stem from unclear expectations prior to their arrival and a lack of familiarity with the new environment. Therefore, it is vital to inform new students of the potential situations they may encounter. Schools and programmes are suggested to provide resources for students which can offer them a realistic idea of the potential contexts they would be in and the level of requirement for English communication. This is particularly important for the Masters students, most of whom are first-time overseas students. These resources can include sections of recorded courses, workshops, seminars, group work, presentations, students' testimonials, etc. For those who do not attend pre-sessional EAP courses, it is beneficial for them to have access to such information in their respective schools or programmes, to have a virtual experience of what they will encounter later in the authentic university life.

Although improving English ability may not be a priority for every student, this study agrees that students should make more effort for pre-departure preparation by focusing on both academic and social needs and managing their expectations properly. Academically speaking, such expectations entail an understanding of educational practices and pedagogical norms at a UK university. For example, Durkin (2011) pointed out that academic problems could arise from a mismatch between Chinese students and their teachers' educational expectations, such as understanding how to make critical argumentation. As mentioned in Section 2.1.4,

critical thinking and learner independence are highly valued in the British education system, while the Chinese education system has a tradition of expecting students to obey authority and conform to group identity (Ryan, 2013). Ward et al. (2001) warned that such gaps between the expectations of people from different educational backgrounds could lead to unsuccessful interactions. Moreover, it is also believed that the implicit nature of the British academic conventions and cultural pedagogy can make things even more diffident and confusing for non-Anglo students to comprehend, including Chinese students (Earwaker, 1992; Turner, 2006).

Interestingly, findings from the study suggest the great potential of social media and “we media” (or “self-media”) as a more effective and less costly university-led form of communication between the university and students. Students seem to appreciate texts, photos, and videos that reflect the academic and social lives in the target communities, ranging from living accommodations, places for socialisation, leisure activities, job opportunities, culture shock experience, and academic peer support, to name a few. This is also evident in Çömlekçi's (2020) study, which suggests international students use a range of social media, including Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, IMO, Viber, and Line, for cultural adaptation and socialisation purposes, even before they come to the host university. Given many Chinese students' inability to access some Western social media, such as YouTube and Facebook, UK universities which have a large intake of Chinese students can increase their presence by joining popular Chinese social media platforms, e.g., Bilibili, WeChat, RED, and other sites used by Chinese students to share their experience abroad and learn from others' experience. I believe such platforms are powerful tools for the university to understand students' lived experiences, gather anecdotal evidence of what students consider positive, and identify areas for improvement.

As this study shows that Chinese students love learning more about the academic and socio-personal aspects of being in a new environment from fellow students, UK universities can organise experience-sharing events for new entrants, such as inviting current students or recent graduates from a wide range of academic and cultural backgrounds to share their experience, which can also help strengthen

students' sense of community. In addition, participants in the study suggested the university can make videos on and off university campuses, e.g., libraries, labs and classrooms, accommodations, gyms, student union buildings, and other popular and familiar places that students may frequent. Holding live sessions or having these videos available prior to arrival can be very helpful to help incoming students get an overall picture of the academic and everyday life on campus and establish realistic expectations. Furthermore, I would also suggest such videos cover a comprehensive image of students and staff members from different backgrounds to present the diversity of the staff and student cohorts within the internationalised university.

Lastly, students can improve learner autonomy by raising awareness of their needs. Schools or programmes can ask students to anticipate challenges they may encounter and actively put themselves in these potential situations in advance. Students need to be proactive and self-reflective in finding their own strengths and weaknesses. Where it is allowed, students are also suggested to seek opportunities to practise oracy skills before arrival. They can even practise communicating in English and increase exposure to the English environment. For instance, they can preview the lectures provided by the university and familiarise themselves with the vocabulary needed for academic studies and everyday life in the UK. Incoming students are suggested to contact other entrants in the same year as early as possible to establish friendships and peer support prior to the start of their studies to best overcome the initial transitional shock.

6.3.2.2 Transitional support

The initial transitional stage after internationals' arrival is a critical phase as it sets the "tone" of the following experience. As mentioned in Section 2.1.1, research shows that upon arrival, all students go through some form of transition academically, socially, culturally, psychologically, and linguistically. Similar to what is revealed in other studies on academic adjustment, students at this stage can be overwhelmed by the large volume of information while experiencing cultural and learning shock (Quan et al., 2016). This study shows that Masters students in the one-year

programmes in the UK go through an intensive information-overflow period where they need to find their grounds as fast as possible while dealing with other personal issues such as relationships, finance, and health-related issues. However, rather than suggesting a period for the transitional phase, e.g., Quan et al., (2016), the current study revealed that individuals differ in terms of the length and intensity of their transition, especially due to their previous experience. For students who have previously studied abroad, especially in the UK, such a transition period could be much shorter and smoother than the other first-timers.

In terms of language support, as mentioned in Section 2.2.2, many UK universities currently provide pre-sessional EAP courses for international students. Most participants in the PTAS study (Woodman et al., 2020) who had taken the EAP courses acknowledged the great value of such courses in guiding them through the initial transition and preparing them with the necessary skills for their academic demands. Some respondents in their study attributed their confidence in oral engagement to the initial support they received from the EAP courses. However, Seppälä (2018) criticised some EAP courses which treat learners as traditional students and are ineffective in triggering learner agency. Seppälä (2018) advocated a blended design of the EAP course which requires more personal investment from the students and incorporates their own life-worlds in tasks design and language learning, which utilises students' expertise and enables their ownership of the course. In the same light, Byrnes (2002) suggested that L2 teaching pedagogy should encourage learners' creative expression of personal meanings or allow them to apply their own strategies and characteristics when speaking the language. This is in line with my core argument that the support provided by the university should aim at facilitating students' learner agency rather than staying at an institutional or superficial level. Strong learner autonomy needs to be developed into a long-term reflective habit, which will be discussed later in Section 6.3.3.

Supporting departments at the university such as IAD, ELE/COL, Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA), and student accommodation management have been suggested to organise communicative events during the initial transitional stage to help students adjust to the new cultural, social, and academic environment,

and to get comfortable with their new communities, which is echoed by other studies which deem the role of university services highly important in assisting students to overcome academic challenges (Yu & Wright, 2016). Such support service is also highlighted in Benson, Drybrough, Knox, Northcott, and Northcott's (2016) study as tutors often direct students who have linguistic needs to ELE/COL or other university support for help. Moreover, institutional support services can also play an important role in providing necessary assistance, building strong and stable student communities that facilitate meaningful and frequent interactions between students, and promoting the best pedagogical practices (Yu & Wright, 2016). More promotion of university services is advocated because some students may not be fully aware of them or underutilise them (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008). This leads to the next section, which will discuss the role of continuous institutional support.

6.3.2.3 Continuous support on English for learning and living purposes

This study found that Chinese international students may encounter various challenges in English oral communication concerning their academic studies and everyday life. Moreover, it also found that although students desired to improve their spoken English, they might not have the right tool or suitable ways to practise. Hence, more in-session English support for international students with a focus on oral English is welcomed, both in relation to EAP and English for general purposes (EGP). Nevertheless, in English-speaking nations, the distinction between EAP and EGP is not that clear for international students because they use ELF both for academic and general purposes, such as engaging in everyday activities outside campus with their peers. However, as pointed out earlier, one gap in the ISE literature in the higher education context is the insufficient discussion on the use of English outside the domain of EAP studies. Therefore, I am proposing the notion of *English for learning and living purposes* (ELLP), which emphasises the holistic nature of using English in an international educational context.

Departments such as ELE/COL, which has expertise in English language support provision, can increase their support for students in need with a particular

focus on oral communication abilities, in addition to focusing on academic reading and writing abilities. Likewise, Liu (2011) concurs that many organisations in a university should contribute to providing language support to better prepare international students for a successful adaptation to the new learning and living context. Gladly, since my data collection in the academic year 2017/2018, I am aware that ELE/COL at UoE has added oral communication support for students, which indicates a growing interest in international students' OP and ICC. Such language support should be made aware to all students and academics as well. In addition, Benson et al. (2016) stressed the unique expertise of staff in ELE/COL who are experienced in working with international students whose first language is not English, and they are familiar with students' various linguistic and academic needs. ELE/COL can work with different disciplines and programmes to offer specific subject-related support and create opportunities for students to engage in activities that enable them to have meaningful oral engagement, through which students can make connections and expand their networks which they might find challenging to do alone. The abovementioned Seppälä's (2018) suggestion on the blended EAP approach is also relevant to ELE/COL course design to empower students' ownership of the development journey.

Moreover, this study also found a specific demand for OP needs regarding communicative strategies-oriented support, owing to the shift of students' realisation in self-identity from language learners to language users (see Section 6.1.1.1), which indicates a more sociolinguistic and pragmatic view on intercultural communication. Therefore, it is urgent and effective to educate all students, NESs and NNEs alike, on communicative strategies to enhance ICC (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). Furthermore, applying such strategies can decrease NNEs' level of linguistic insecurity and communication apprehension due to the perceived language "deficiency", and increase interlocutors' tolerance of ambiguity in intercultural communication.

As positive examples of peer learning and feedback provision emerged from the study, they can also be applied to a wider scale. Implementing an ELLP-focused buddy system or a small-scale peer support system for all students on campus and beyond is suggested for creating meaningful communicative opportunities and

building an active network. Such schemes can be organised by the university or institutes within the university, and proficient English speakers are highly suggested to be recruited to take the supporting role. However, as pointed out by the participants in this study, a lack of time commitment and inadequate quality assurance can be a problem in such programmes (see Section 5.2.1.1). Therefore, specific training, materials provision, participation certificates, and monetary incentives are highly suggested to be provided for supporting participants.

6.3.2.4 More opportunities for meaningful engagement

6.3.2.4.1 Diversity of opportunities

Although all participants in the study wanted to communicate with people from other cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, discuss non-academic issues and broaden the scope of the overall overseas experience, not all of them had such experience. It was clear from the study that some Chinese students lacked the surrounding language environment for intercultural communication due to institutional constraints, while some were too reserved to seek opportunities outside their comfort zones. For instance, students who lived far off campus and those who did not have international flatmates or classmates felt they missed out on much of the expected intercultural experience in their socio-personal lives. Some were in programmes dominated by Chinese students, which reduced their satisfaction with the overall study abroad experience. As explained in Section 2.3.3.4, other studies have also reported similar findings that many (Chinese) international students may not have sufficient access to communicate with NESs or have adequate opportunities to integrate into local communities off campus, which they found frustrating and disappointing (Benzie, 2010; Gao, 2017; Yu, 2017; Yu & Moskal, 2019).

According to Nunan (1991), good L2 language learners can apply their growing language skills beyond classes, and this step is crucial for their language development. From a sociocultural perspective, broader and more meaningful communication is vital for enhancing learners' ability to communicate in the target

language (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2010). Social and INoP theory (Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015) also suggests the strong connection between learners' socialisation with other speakers and learners' acquisition of L2. These all conclude that more experience beyond the university setting can assist students' intercultural communicative experience and L2 competence. Therefore, this study highlights one way to empower students in their journey abroad and facilitate their ICC development by providing more diverse and quality communicative opportunities, and keeping the intercultural interaction natural, authentic, and meaningful.

The current study also shows that (Chinese) international students tend to enjoy university organised activities and events, especially those who do not have many chances to socialise with international communities. Although students can self-organise events, they seemed to prefer the university as organisers, considering their authoritative roles and students' trust in them. Besides their schools and programmes, ELE/COL, IAD, Edinburgh Global and EUSA were nominated to take the lead in organising such events. Collaborate between these support departments with specific schools or programmes is welcomed. Moreover, not only do students appreciate the university for creating a frequent environment for them to socialise and help them form their INoP, but they also believe that the university has a responsibility to facilitate intercultural communication between students from different cultural backgrounds. According to Benson et al. (2016), academic staff in the same university also believe that the university has the responsibility to provide all students with additional resources and support. Activities and events organised at student accommodations have been praised for achieving such purposes because they tend to be more informal, relaxing, and convenient to participate in. Furthermore, it is even suggested by participants in this study that a small fee could be required in addition to the tuition fee for the purpose of ICC development to support such opportunities, as students are more likely to pay for such expenses up front rather than paying for additional events after enrolment.

Nevertheless, with regard to the diverse communication opportunities, it is not always "the more, the merrier". Based on the FG results, I would argue that not only should institutions provide such opportunities, but they should also optimise the

existing activities and events, as some students in the study revealed that they had never heard of the Global Buddies Scheme or International Student Café (see Section 5.3.1), and other students found it difficult to join such events for various reasons. For the activities and events that have already proven successful, it is highly suggested that they are run more frequently. Furthermore, effective promotion is needed to make them more visible and accessible to students. This is particularly useful to students who lack the initiatives to explore new opportunities or miss the opportunities due to time clashes with other commitments. Regarding activities outside campus, getting to know local families through homestay and visiting local companies, schools, and other workplaces are suggested to facilitate such intercultural communication between the locals and sojourners. For instance, Liu (2011) reflected that the homestay experience distracted her from her homesickness and helped her overcome culture shock. She was also exposed to many chances to learn authentic English, gain insights into local lifestyles, and experience customs and foods in the host family.

As evident from the participants' responses in the study, taking on more non-academic roles locally not only can help students gain rewarding experience or make financial benefits, but can also help them build their confidence and join a supportive community. This corresponds Liu's (2011) voluntary Chinese-teaching experience in Canada, as she was confident and proud to do something where her native-speaker identity was respected. She used English during the lessons to explain and negotiate meanings, and discussions on lesson-related topics were extended to outside class. She established friendships with her students and subsequently sought more opportunities to communicate in English. Liu (2011) described volunteering as a "friendly, low-stress, and meaningful opportunity to interact with people" (p. 83). However, regarding part-time jobs, not all participants in this study who took part-jobs would agree with Liu's (2011) experience which gave her the chances to communicate with people with diverse speaking styles and accents. As explained in Section 4.3.1, many students did not get the chance to work off-campus as they had wished, and not all the students who held part-time jobs did work that required them to engage in verbal English communication. In addition, student representative roles and other organised activities such as Toastmasters International organisation are

cited to help learners improve communication-related skills, such as managing conversations, changing subjects, controlling the speaking rate, and other public speaking techniques (Liu, 2011). Moreover, Liu (2011) also commented on this aspect of her previous English learning experience, which neglected the practical and emotional side of language use. Similarly, participants in this study have expressed their frustration in that their use of language tends to be more formal, sometimes in a direct-transitional style and lacking the colloquial features, which was pointed out as shortcomings of the English education system in China. This warrants the need for them to increase the use of English in more authentic and everyday settings.

Previous research shows that non-academic issues emerged central to students' overall experience abroad, if not more important than academic success (Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Yu & Wright, 2016). Similar findings also emerged from this study. For instance, this study found that accommodation life is essential to international students' social and personal life. However, it seems that students differ in terms of whom they would like to live with. While some students seem to hope for more international contact where they live, others prefer living with co-nationals who tend to have similar living habits. Although this creates challenges for arranging flatmates to cater for students' preferences, more accommodation-based activities are welcomed by students as they are community-based, which provides a sense of connection and belonging. Yu and Wright (2016) also reported that Chinese students could feel very lonely and have great challenges in integrating into the new environment and building meaningful friendships with other students. Therefore, provisions of such support networks where they live can be considered a good strategy for helping international students overcome such negative feelings and help them find the agency to work on ICC.

6.3.2.4.2 Transferable skills-based activities

The provision of more experience-oriented and skill-based programmes that can enrich students' transferable skills, English competence, and (I)CC is highly recommended throughout the year. During such transferable skills-based activities or

training, English is used as a lingua franca and the medium of instruction, so the development of English ability is a “by-product” but not the main focus. Transferable skills refer to a range of skills and abilities that can be applied to various areas in one’s professional, academic, social, and personal life. Common transferable skills include problem-solving, leadership, teamwork, negotiation, management, analytical, critical thinking, creative thinking, etc., and many are related to communication skills. Elements of OP can be integrated into the programme activities to enhance students’ transferable skills and provide opportunities for meaningful engagement. It is worth highlighting that these activities are welcomed for inclusivity, and there is less tendency to problematise international students or NNEs. For instance, in this study, Wen stated how the presentation workshops benefited not only her but also her NES colleagues (see Section 5.2.1.2). In order to enhance students’ commitment to such courses, certificates of participation are also considered effective incentives by students as they indicate the university’s acknowledgement of students’ effort and proof of students’ extracurricular effort for self-development.

Furthermore, as ICC is an important transferable skill in the globalised era and one of the goals of IHE (Deardorff, 2006a), intercultural communication-focused workshops can be organised to help students and staff from various backgrounds to meet and communicate in the hope of breaking stereotypes, discuss the sources and validity of stereotypes, learn more about each other’s cultures, and last but not least, reflect on one’s own culture.

6.3.2.4.3 A balanced host community

Besides providing a range of opportunities to facilitate intercultural communication between students from different language backgrounds, it was also raised that organisers should endeavour to create a more diverse and balanced environment. As revealed in Yu and Moskal’s (2019) study, certain programmes in UK universities, particularly business schools, can be overpopulated with Chinese students, which limits students’ opportunities for intercultural contact on campus and personal growth. As a result, some Chinese students turned to exploring communities

off campus to engage in communication with non-Chinese people. Support networks such as local church communities were cited as helpful (Yu & Wright, 2016). Similarly, recruiting students from countries other than China is also suggested by the Chinese students in Bamber's (2014) study, who were unsatisfied that some programmes were overly dominated by Chinese students. Such limited opportunities for interaction among students from different backgrounds can demotivate students to improve their English language communication skills and intercultural communication skills (Gan, 2013; Yu & Wright, 2016).

Nevertheless, as the current study shows, such extremely imbalanced programmes are not representative of the university as a whole, especially not at the PhD level, and there are also programmes where Chinese students are the minorities. In Wendi's case, for instance, the overly European/British-centric environment even seemed to give rise to inappropriate racist behaviours (see Section 4.7.1.2, also discussed in Section 6.2.5). Given the differences in students' INoP and lifestyles, I would suggest we focus on the "host community" concept rather than the "host country", as the former refers to a more contingent concept. In addition, classroom makeup is also an area of concern which constitutes such a community. Purposefully arranging group work to be relatively small (approximately four people) and a relatively balanced mix of ethnolinguistic backgrounds with students from a minimum of two different countries is suggested to elicit more intercultural interactions, which is also suggested by Benson et al. (2016).

6.3.2.4.4 Spatial arrangement

As explained in Sections 5.2.2.1 and 6.2.6, space arrangement can influence students' WFOP, and more psychical space is needed to facilitate students' meaningful engagement. Common rooms and other social spaces around campus are suggested to provide excellent opportunities for students to socialise. Some participants, particularly the Masters students, have complained about not having enough opportunities to talk to their peers after class. Therefore, it is proposed that course organisers try to make the classroom available for a more extended period

before or after class to create a convenient and accessible place for students to interact without worrying about booking study rooms or being rushed to leave the classrooms. In the same light, the PhD students' experience in this study also indicated the importance of having an allocated working space, concurring with the findings in Yu and Wright's (2016) study, which also revealed the international PhD students' loneliness and isolation with a lack of stable and consistent support network. An allocated workspace is described as essential to make students feel that they were part of a community, especially for students whose research is highly individualised (Yu & Wright, 2016). Moreover, the high living cost and its negative impact on students' lives overseas was another issue raised in Yu and Wright's study (2016), which echoes findings from this study, prompting the provision of more affordable spaces on and around campus for students to socialise. Although these issues tend to be overlooked, they should not be deemed unimportant, as they can implicitly influence students' academic success and satisfaction with their journeys.

6.3.3 Enhance students' reflexivity and learner autonomy

6.3.3.1 Personalised ICC development plan

The current study revealed that students might have very different needs for English language development. One strategy in response to that is to enable students' personalised reflection and create more personalised support. As explained in Section 6.3.2, even with the help of institutional guidance, students should not be passive recipients but should take an active role in finding out and addressing their own needs. Therefore, I would suggest that at the beginning of their studies, each NNES student can be given an "Intercultural Communicative Competence Development (ICC) Plan", which aims to guide them to actively think about and reflect on their intercultural communication goals and personal needs during their sojourns abroad. In addition, a section in this plan can be specially designed for English language development.

This ICC development plan can start with a brief explanation of what ICC is and what it entails (see Section 2.2.4). It then presents a self-evaluation of current ICC, English ability, strengths, and weaknesses, followed by two further questions: 1. What is my goal this year regarding ICC development, including English language ability? 2. What can I do to achieve this goal? This study found that the short one-year Masters programme is far insufficient for students to drastically improve spoken English based on their unrealistic expectations. For students whose first language is not English, they need to establish clear and realistic learning goals for their journeys by first reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses, which concurs with Liu's (2011) suggestion for international students to set clear goals, breaking them into smaller and manageable tasks, and playing to their personal interests. Similar advice was also proposed by Snow (2014). Moreover, this ICC development plan should include periodical remarks to remind students of their action points, evaluate their progress and reflect on their positive and negative experiences.

The benefit of having such a plan is to guide students to have a personalised analysis and trigger their intrinsic motivation. The process of thinking about their strengths and weaknesses in English ability and ICC and making improvement plans can assist students in contemplating what they want to do and how to achieve their goals. Moreover, having such a personalised plan concurs with Lantolf's (2006) argument for the reconceptualisation of the language-learner relationship, as students studying abroad are coming up with new ways to perceive, talk, and think about their realities. Obviously, the effect of this plan depends on individuals' ambition, motivation, and effort. However, the process of personalised reflective thinking and writing down can facilitate their future reflection on their growth in the sojourns. PhD students in the current study shared their awarding experience of recording presentations and meetings, observing and listening to how they speak English as a starting point for building up their English communication-related skills. Motivated students can record their spoken English at different stages during their experience in the UK to track their development. Additionally, this ICC plan can be used to invite students to write down their (English) development goals during their time in the UK and present to them at the end of each semester for reflexivity purpose.

6.3.3.2 More learner proactivity and self-awareness

All the institutional support mentioned above aims at enhancing students' reflexivity and learner autonomy. Learner autonomy as a vital lifelong learning skill is what educators endeavour for and is stressed in a learner-centred curriculum. An autonomous language-learning strategy is advocated by researchers such as Lantolf and Johnson (2007), Liu (2011), and Liu (2013), as students need to take the main responsibility for their learning roles and choose to participate in activities that can benefit their language development. To seek opportunities and challenge one's current self is one way to be more proactive in increasing intercultural awareness and developing ICC. The current study suggests that international students who are reluctant to participate due to a lack of common interests with others can cultivate new interests to better connect with different people (see Hong and Chang's examples in Section 5.3.2). As discussed in Section 6.1.1.1, this study found that some Chinese students managed to transform from passive English learners to active English users with growing ownership of their linguistic identities and confidence in ELF communication. This echoes Lantolf and Thorne's (2006) suggestion that L2 learners need to make use of the contextual meaning in their development of language skills. It also supports Lantolf and Johnson's (2007) view that learning a language is beyond understanding words and sentences, as well as behaviours and actions that co-construct contextual meanings. In addition, Byrnes (2002) states that given the appropriate language pedagogy, L2 learners should be able to express personal meanings creatively or use strategies and styles that are most suitable for their needs and ultimately reach the full learner potential through the resources available to them.

Based on the findings presented in Section 5.3, it is vital for students to develop an awareness of autonomous language learning and enhance learner agency in intercultural communication, which entails continuous effort from students to be proactive and self-reflective in finding their own ways of speaking, and own weaknesses and strengths, paying attention and adapting to others' ways of speaking. As revealed in the study, motivated language learners can develop strategies that suit their needs, such as watching one's own recorded presentations, listening to audio

recordings of their speaking, keeping notes for new vocabulary, practising oracy skills while watching English shows, or asking help from NES colleagues to provide constructive suggestions. It is also suggested that students should be proactive in intercultural communication, such as introducing themselves to others rather than waiting to be spoken to or asking for help when needed rather than waiting for someone else to ask questions or offer solutions. Another notion regarding language learning and cultural exchange is that learning a foreign language such as English is not only about learning a language and its background culture but also about introducing one's own culture. Being able to describe concepts and ideas related to Chinese culture as Chinese festivals, literature, history, and tradition and customs in English is just as important, if not more important, than discussing their Western counterparts in English.

In a recent study conducted by Çömlekçi (2020) which explored international students' use of social media in a Turkish university, interview data showed social media as a tremendously powerful and useful tool for international students' cultural adaptation and socialisation, which corresponds to my observation during the study. Çömlekçi (2020) also found that social media is effective for international students' language learning and cultural orientation, as participants reported the use of social media as a part of their daily lives, which also provides them with the opportunities to practise their language use through reading and writing, particularly regarding everyday language and some culture-specific expressions, something that the Chinese students in the current study reported as an area of weakness. One interesting point revealed in Çömlekçi's (2020) study was that some international students changed the social media tools they used in the new environment, which was an effective means to adapt to the new context, meet new people, and gain cultural experience. This issue is particularly enlightening yet challenging to Chinese students, who are used to specific social media platforms popular among Chinese people, which they may still rely on even when they are abroad. Therefore, it may take more self-motivation and effort to convince them to try different and local social media tools to receive information from various sources and engage in more intercultural communicative opportunities.

6.3.4 Internationalisation at home

In the discussion of IHE, there has been growing attention to the concept of internationalisation at home, which has been defined as “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69). This definition highlights the intentional inclusion of elements related to IHE rather than randomly piling up different aspects of IHE hoping to create a seemingly international and intercultural environment. This definition further explains one myth regarding IHE, which is that the presence of a large number of international students alone does not naturally lead to internationalisation at home, as it does not guarantee the internationalisation of institutional culture, curriculum, and learning outcomes (Beelen & Jones, 2015; de Wit, 2011; Knight, 2011).

When mobile students come from different cultures, they bring their existing learning habits and co-create classrooms consisting of various cultural scripts (Welikala & Watkins, 2008). As a result, they are faced with academic difficulties due to cultural and linguistic differences while challenging the pedagogical practices in the host institutes, injecting new blood into the education system (Dippold, 2015). In Welikala and Watkins (2008) proposed cultural scripts for learning, peer interaction and the teacher’s role and status are key relationships for learning, along with participation in session. This indicates the importance of interactions between Chinese students and other students, as well as the role of instructors. It seems vital that home students and academics understand the challenges that international NNEs students may encounter. Therefore, developing local students’ and instructors’ ICC is key to internationalisation at home and better ISE. It is worth noting that ICC here refers to all speakers’ ability, including NNEs, to interact with people from other cultures effectively and appropriately, whether in their native language or L2.

6.3.4.1 Develop local students' ICC

In the existing ISE research, much focus has been given to incoming (international) students regarding their linguistic (in)ability, cultural transition, and adjustment to the local academic environment. However, it is worth bearing in mind that the presence of a large number of international talents, i.e., students and academic staff, also bring great learning opportunities to the local students because high-quality intercultural contact can also strengthen local students' intercultural competency (Yu & Moskal, 2019). As was raised by the participants in this study, bilingual international students are advantageous in the global market. Being at an internationalised university is an opportunity for local students to reflect on their world views and equip them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for being successful intercultural speakers (Byram, 1997, 2020). One suggestion emerging from the study is to have ELF course for home students, aiming to introduce NESs to concepts such as Global Englishes (Galloway & Rose, 2015) and native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006), which challenges the status quo of English imperialism, broadens local NES students' knowledge on how English is used worldwide, and educates them on the communicative strategies applicable for intercultural communication. Credit-earning programmes on intercultural communication as part of the liberal arts education curriculum are also suggested to be provided by the university.

Moreover, domestic students and other NESs should not be the “silencers”, as this study demonstrates that their native-speaker identity can create an imbalanced power relationship in the presence of speakers of other ethnolinguistic backgrounds. They need to be educated not to hold a deficit view towards ways of doing things that are different from the local practice but try to understand different approaches to knowledge generation and the communicative norms in other cultures, such as the multifunction of silence as a choice, a politeness strategy, a form of intimacy and privacy, and a means to show respect (Fivush, 2010; Tatar, 2005). Moreover, Fivush (2010) makes an important distinction between “being silenced” and “being silent” based on the power play between speakers (p. 88). Different from the dominant belief that having a voice means owning power and silence means the opposite,

Fivush argues that silence in the form of “being silenced” can be conceptualised as a loss of power and self-identity, while “being silent” can be deemed as exhibiting power and showing the shared understanding that something is not necessarily to be said out loud.

According to Zhang and Goodson (2011), host nationals’ WTC plays a critical role in the process of both short-term international sojourners and long-term immigrants’ cultural adaptation. Moreover, the overly British or Euro-centric environment might reinforce some insensitive or problematic behaviours toward international students, even though these biases could be implicit or unconscious, as illustrated in Wendi’s experience (see Section 4.7.1.2). Participants in Moskal and Schweisfurth (2018) also reflected on the prejudices they experienced from local students and the sense of marginalisation during their international postgraduate student experience in the UK. Therefore, local students are also suggested to develop an awareness of ICC and take more initiatives to embrace the incoming international students as the locals can sometimes seem prejudiced and distant.

6.3.4.2 Professionalisation of staff development

The sections above have discussed how support can be provided for international and local students. In the meantime, staff also need support and training to develop their ability to be effective instructors in such an intercultural context and maintain consistency across the teaching body. As illustrated in the previous two chapters, particularly in Section 5.4.3, instructors’ role is crucial to international students’ academic acculturation and successful ISE. This section puts forward some suggestions regarding the professionalisation of staff development in international universities.

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, the perceived low level of international NNEs students’ English proficiency has become a research focus in recent years. However, as this thesis has repeatedly stressed, we need to avoid problematising international students whose first language is not English and find

more strategies to synergise the potentials brought by the mobile international diaspora. Benson et al. (2016) conducted an empirical study in the UoE, which aimed at supporting university lecturers in teaching international students by gathering lectures' perceptions on the matter. Their study revealed that lecturers seemed to problematise international NNEST students, as they were concerned about the quality of programmes with non-active international students and worried about these international students' inability to contribute in class, echoing previous criticisms of the deficiency views that some academic staff hold against Chinese students (Heng, 2018; Sequeira, 2021). University lecturers in Benson et al.'s (2016) study, on the one hand, confirmed that it was an awarding experience working with international students, and the top benefits were cultural diversity in the learning environment and chances for better cultural understanding, including moving forward from stereotypes. On the other hand, they also admitted the challenges in teaching in such an environment, such as difficulties in managing students' expectations and dealing with international students' reluctance to participate. Nevertheless, these challenges are expected and should not be seen in a negative light, as they can be cultural resources that drive the internationalisation of the curriculum and pedagogical practices (Leask, 2015; Urban & Palmer, 2014).

With instructors' growing knowledge and experience in teaching international students, clarifying potential miscommunication and mismatches of expectations is an effective strategy. It seems necessary for instructors to establish the communication norms at the beginning of a course, which is particularly important for institutes such as the UoE with a high intake of international students so that students have a clear understanding of when, where, and how they are expected to engage and participate. Besides offering students more opportunities for classroom participation as suggested by other studies, e.g., Bamber (2014), the current study also argues that it is helpful to explain and demonstrate how participation is expected in this intercultural context, as some students who are unfamiliar with the discussion culture in the UK may be confused about the communication conventions, and certain practices and their purposes in academic sessions. For instance, participants in this study explained why Chinese students tend to stay quiet in class but like to line up to interact with the instructors after class,

which some instructors might find confusing. Therefore, perhaps it is worth spending some time clarifying such issues in advance. This suggestion particularly supports the strategies proposed by Murray (2018) for managing students' classroom participation in an internationalised university, i.e., "explaining and contextualising the issue of participation at the outset" and "negotiating how participation will be understood" (p. 6). Similarly, Liu (2013) also suggests the importance of instructors in raising awareness of the potential differences in learning and communication, as well as the stress caused by such differences, to help students manage expectations and assist them with developing skills vital to successful intercultural communication. Moreover, Murray (2018) also pointed out that teachers need to clarify with students whether and how participation will be assessed, which is supported by evidence from this study as some students were frustrated by the mismatch between their expectation of assessing participation and how oral presentations were (not) graded (see Section 4.2.1).

Regarding classroom participation, Chinese students in Bamber (2014) raised the issue that although they appreciated classroom participation in UK universities, some classrooms were simply too large to have effective OP. The current study also revealed that most students enjoyed groups of smaller size for more meaningful engagement and discussion, as suggested by Cao and Philip's (2006), and constantly changing classmates was also disliked by students for lacking a consistent and familiar environment. Moreover, during in-class group discussions, it is recommended that instructors go into different groups for more inter-personal contact rather than being physically away from the students. Group discussion is also advocated by Liu (2013) and Benson et al. (2016) for peer support and communication opportunities. However, on the issue of speaking students' first language for discussion, participants in this study seemed to disagree with Liu (2013). Liu (2013) stressed the point of mixing students from different linguistic backgrounds in the same group so that using their first language can be avoided. While students in the current study appreciated the opportunities to have foreign group members for richer intercultural experience, they also seemed to value the efficiency of group discussion over linguistic experience. In addition, balancing the

cultural profiles of group members was also suggested by Murray (2018) in his suggestions for more pedagogical strategies to promote students' OP.

Regarding Chinese students' collective reticent learning style, it may be helpful for teachers to provide extra encouragement for them to raise questions, allowing time for them to write down what they want to say before speaking, explain the expectation of challenging their peers and teachers, as well as thinking outside the box. Moreover, encouraging students to use English without fearing inaccuracy or other barriers, and sharing experience of their own intercultural study experience to create a healthy rapport and pastoral support is suggested. On the issue of classroom participation and contribution, academics need to raise awareness of the different norms of learning and teaching in different cultures. Although many practitioners seem to use these terms interchangeably, the current study and Woodman et al.'s (2020) project clearly indicated that some students make a distinct differentiation between OP and contribution. Interestingly, this debate can be traced way back to Gioia (1987), who questioned the concepts of classroom participation and contribution, and argued that participation itself is a "fruitless enterprise" (p. 15) and meaningful participation must benefit oneself and others. This echoes what participants in the current study reported, as some viewed OP as pointless and complained about some students taking up the valuable speaking time without making many contributions. In addition, Gioia (1987) also highlighted the importance of "thinking" rather than drawing people to engage in intensive "talking", similar to some respondents' views in this study, which puts more stress on the process of internal and independent learning. Although there seem to be some differences among Chinese students' preferences regarding the volume and intensity of classroom participation, they collectively hope instructors in the UK university understand the multifaceted use of silence and respect silence as a choice, a right, and a legitimate way of participation.

Contradicting what emerged from this study, university lecturers in Benson et al.'s (2016) study seemed to hold the view that meeting international students' linguistic needs had little relevance to teacher development, but in the hands of support services and admission offices. However, I would argue that addressing

students' linguistic needs requires multi-directional effort, as it is unrealistic for admission offices to drastically raise the bar of entry requirements due to financial concerns. It also does not guarantee an immediate impact on students' performance, as indicated by the lack of consistent evidence supporting the predictability of IELTS on students' academic success (see Section 2.2.2). Moreover, D'Andrea and Gosling (2005) also argued against staff operating on the basis of a deficit model, which attributes the complexity of problems that students encounter to their under-preparedness and linguistic deficiency, which is pointed out by Quinn (2012) as well. Therefore, it seems that not only students but also instructors need to manage their expectations and adjust their approaches accordingly. To concur with Benzie (2010), we need to approach the current debate over English language proficiency in higher education from a wider perspective to recognise and better understand the benefits that international students bring to the local universities, rather than bearing negative attitudes or holding unrealistic expectations. Instead of treating students from diverse backgrounds as a challenge, Benson et al. (2016) suggested teachers use cross-culture as a means to facilitate leaning, exchange different opinions and encourage students' sharing. Nevertheless, although teachers are advised to be aware of potential cultural differences, it is not suggested that they over-emphasise and reinforce such differences, which might strengthen stereotypes and further inhibit students who want to adjust their ways of learning and communication. Instead, instructors are encouraged to facilitate students' learning and communication by mediating and offering opportunities for students to make such a transition. Value students' individuality rather than treating them as members of one particular cultural group because they are all members of multiple CoPs.

As revealed in Benson et al. (2016), academic staff believe international students bring benefits to home students and help lecturers broaden their global views of examining their teaching, concurring Leask's (2015) and Urban and Palmer's (2014) perspectives of international students. Teachers can reflect on the feedback they have received from their previous teaching experience and their own practice, and adjust their methods and styles accordingly, which will make their communication with incoming students more effective (Benson et al., 2016). In addition, instructors need to refresh their course designs and implement strategies to

facilitate peer communication better. However, as shown in this study, students' feedback may conflict with one another, so staff need more professional support to deal with various feedback critically. This can be done on an individual level, but it will also be effective if schools or institutes can organise teachers who have received more positive feedback and are more experienced in teaching a mixed-background cohort to share their practices. Educational support departments like IAD can organise such events to provide overall suggestions while incorporating features of different disciplines. According to lecturers' perceptions in Benson et al.'s (2016) study, lecturers held an overall negative attitude towards obligatory attendance to generic development training seminars and workshops, and they seemed to prefer tailored seminars and workshops for colleagues from the same school, indicating a favour for support based on academic CoPs.

One less prominent but interesting theme emerging from the data analysis is the good practices worth sharing. Both interview and FG data brought up the diversity of not only the student cohort but also the staff cohort in the university, and how their teaching styles and knowledge of intercultural communication seemed to vary considerably. Therefore, it would be of value to set up support for teaching staff to share such practices to learn from experts and their peers to better prepare for their roles in international universities. There are workshops in the university currently run by departments such as IAD to improve staff's and student tutors' ability to teach, sometimes covering the theme of dealing with students from diverse backgrounds. Lubicz-Nawrocka and Bunting (2018) conducted a qualitative analysis of the qualities of teachers who were nominated for student-led teaching awards at the UoE and concluded that students appreciated the four types of teachers' endeavour to create a positive academic experience: 1) concerted, visible effort; 2) commitment to engaging students; 3) breaking down student-teacher barriers; 4) stability of support (p. 10). Results of such studies are suggested to be circulated among staff in different disciplines and discussed regarding their practicality in different contexts. Given the increase in interaction between students from different cultures of learning, some academics have gained rich insights from their experience teaching students from various origins, which can also be valuable to other colleagues.

One problem worth highlighting concerning this study is that traditional research-intensive universities such as the UoE, which have attained their prestige based on world-leading research outcomes, can attract competent researchers who are not necessarily good teachers (Quinn, 2012). As revealed in Skelton's (2004) critical evaluation of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS), a UK national-level award for higher education teachers, focusing on improving teaching practices can sometimes be seen as distracting from doing important research work, and the teaching award winners may even feel isolated from their colleagues. As cited in Quinn (2012), many academic staff members seem to operate on the belief that their knowledge and expertise grant them the status of good instructors, and there seems to be a resistance to engaging in professional development activities. Concurring Benson et al. (2016), Quinn (2012) suggested a subject or disciplinary-based targeted support for academic staff sharing good practices. Departments which can be regarded as CoPs play a key role in constructing academics' professional identities and facilitating professional development (Knight & Trowler, 2001). A competing argument held by D'Andrea and Gosling (2005) is that both discipline-specific and cross-discipline development support for academics is needed because boundaries between disciplines are flexible and blurry, and different disciplines are somewhat interdependent. Mixed-disciplinary communication can also be beneficial in providing a CoP absent in certain departments (Davidson, 2004).

Maintaining a good teacher-student relationship has a great impact on the communication process (Benson et al., 2016), and students can tell when instructors are making an effort (Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bunting, 2018). One suggestion for instructors is to improve their intelligibility when communicating with students. Students in this study urged teachers to speak more slowly and clearly as some struggled with understanding the instructors' accents and varieties of speech. Instructors' and peers' English accents are also found in Wu's (2015) study to influence students' classroom participation. Self-paraphrasing can be an excellent strategy to ensure students' understanding. Liu (2013) echoed this point and suggested that instructors scaffold classroom interaction with international students by adopting strategies such as slowing down their speed of speaking, adjusting their pronunciation and intonation, as well as paying attention to the use of sentence

structure and other pragmatic areas to ease the communication process. The issue of instructors' regional accents and dialects was also raised in Bamber's (2014) and Robertson et al.'s (2000) research. Moreover, Wang and Jenkins's (2016) study revealed that Chinese students' inadequate intercultural and ELF experience could result in their tendency to conform to the native-speakerism mindset and connect NESs to intelligibility almost exclusively. However, different from Liu's (2013) suggestion on speaking "standard English", students in the current study did not strongly urge teachers to speak more "standard English", despite having pointed out the difficulty in understanding instructors' non-standard English. Students in this study seemed to value the Global Englishes spoken by different people, students, and teachers alike. Some even considered such "deficiency" in teachers' oral English interesting and encouraging. Therefore, it seems that instructors also play a role in decreasing students' communication apprehension with their diverse linguistic characteristics and language "deficiency" while increasing their tolerance of ambiguity and the development of ICC.

At the postgraduate level, where education is very advanced and knowledge can be very abstract, translanguaging, which refers to bilinguals utilising different linguistic features and various modes of autonomous languages to optimise the communicative process (García & Wei, 2014), can be helpful for students to learn more efficiently and creatively. Good preparation of lesson content in advance and having jargon and technical vocabulary written down can help smooth the content delivery. Some students in this study suggested that teachers have a better sense of the classroom in that they can help lighten up the class atmosphere and break the awkwardness in class. Avoiding jokes that are hard for international students to interpret is also suggested. Regarding feedback provision, Liu (2013) suggested that teachers provide feedback on international students' language use to facilitate their English competence development. Tian and Lowe (2013b) advocated for a more informed and sensitive approach to providing feedback on the students' first submission to guide international students through the initial academic culture shock. Benson et al. (2016) suggested providing feedback and feed forward, as well as offering more targeted support for specific students.

Moreover, supervisors need to be made aware of their key roles in PhD students' academic success and their overall psychological state (Ives & Rowley, 2005; Platow, 2012). According to Yu and Wright (2016), the negative, unstructured, and generic feedback provided by the supervisors can cause frustration, confusion, and anxiety on PhD students. In addition to the effective practices worth sharing, I believe it would be beneficial to share bad practices and students' unsuccessful experiences of interaction with staff in intercultural communication. For instance, insulting comments such as what was said to Wendi by her PhD supervisor (see Section 4.7.1.2) is highly unprofessional and inappropriate, which should have never happened in a prestigious institute.

6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter moved beyond the data analysis and integrated the results of the current study with existing theories and research. To summarise, a balanced and rounded view of Chinese students' OP needs is taken, which acknowledges the common patterns in students' transitional experience as well as the diversities among students based on CoPs, INoP, and other individual differences, suggesting the fluidity in individual development in their living and learning experiences in the UK. An iceberg model of OP was proposed to illustrate students' OP needs and the multifaceted factors influencing students' WFOP, including linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and social-contextual factors. A ray of areas regarding institutional guided support is suggested, including more pre-arrival support, transitional support, continuous support on ELLP, and more opportunities for meaningful engagement. International students are advised to raise reflexivity and learner autonomy, focus on community building, and seek opportunities for meaningful connections while broadening engagement with different communities. Suggestions are also put forward to help domestic students and staff be more interculturally aware and competent, and specific pedagogical implications are proposed as well.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the current study by first restating the aim of the research and the proposed research questions (RQs), followed by a summary of the research design. Main findings from the study will be presented, followed by an explanation of the three types of research contributions of this study. The researcher's reflection will then be presented, followed by an explanation of the limitations of the current study and how the researcher addressed these issues. Finally, this thesis ends with specific recommendations for future research.

7.1 Overview of the research

The large population of Chinese international students studying in Western countries has been a major manifestation of internationalisation of higher education (IHE). There has been a growing research interest in understanding this group of students, in terms of their collective and diverse experiences, in order to improve the quality of educational services in intercultural universities, bridge the gaps between students and teachers from different backgrounds, as well as enhance international students experience (ISE). Despite the fact that the English language continues to be a core factor that influences student experience in English-speaking countries, research on Chinese students' oral participation (OP) experience in both the academic and socio-personal domains remains scarce.

The purpose of the study has been to describe and increase the knowledge of Chinese postgraduate students' experiences while studying at a UK university, particularly regarding their engagement in oral English communication. The study has aimed to explore the Chinese postgraduate students' English OP needs, factors that influence such needs, and how their needs can be addressed and met. Three RQs were formulated accordingly to break down the inquiry as follows:

1. What are Chinese postgraduate students' English oral participation needs while studying at a UK university?
2. What factors influence their English oral participation?
3. How do students think their oral participation needs can be addressed and met?

To answer the RQs, the current study adopted an ethnographic case study approach with a sequential design. 10 Masters students and 10 PhD students from 10 different schools at the UoE were interviewed, and two follow-up focus groups (FGs) were conducted based on the interview results. Three pilot interviews and two pilot FGs were also conducted to ensure the validation of the research instruments. In addition, this study was also informed by my prolonged engagement in the case university as a researcher, and my experience as a graduate Masters student from the UoE, a current PhD student, a tutor in Masters courses, and a research assistant of two PTAS projects which investigated issues very similar to the current study. A summary of the main findings is as follows.

7.2 Summary of main findings

The first RQ aimed to identify the specific OP needs of Chinese postgraduate students during their experience at a UK university. The study found that Chinese students had a range of OP needs in both of their academic and socio-personal lives, including many similarities and diversities. Although little OP was required directly to pass the basic requirement for obtaining a postgraduate degree for many students, and it was not essential in many students' everyday life, it remains an important and desirable component in Chinese students' overseas experience. Several mismatches were revealed between students' expectations of OP engagement and the reality, and some students were unclear about the expected norm of communication in the new academic context. Moreover, disciplines varied in their different requirements for OP and communicative opportunities offered for students, which could shape students' perceptions of the importance of OP. A prominent difference was also noticed between the Masters and PhD students, even in the same school. Furthermore, data

showed very different patterns between students' OP needs for socio-personal purposes, ranging from frequent participation to nearly zero engagement. In addition, there was an overall lack of opportunities for Chinese students to engage in English as a lingua franca (ELF) communication in their socio-personal life, due to various reasons such as inadequate opportunities to build intercultural relations, accessibility to the Chinese community, little work experience, and convenience of services and modern technology which could help them avoid English oral communication. As part of the hidden curriculum, high quality OP in English seemed to hold a positive correlation with Chinese postgraduate students' satisfaction of their international sojourns, and more opportunities to engage in meaningful intercultural communication were appreciated.

The aim of the second RQ was to identify factors that influence Chinese postgraduate students' OP in different contexts and stages of their study abroad experience. Four categories of factors were concluded, namely linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and social-contextual factors. Linguistically, many students struggled with specific speaking skills, such as unfamiliarity with colloquial language and not having quick access to formulaic language, habitually resorting to direct translation, and weak organisational skills. Although many students were not satisfied with their English-speaking ability development compared to their expectations, data suggested an overall development in their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) during their studies in the UK. Most participants reported a self-evaluated improvement in their speaking ability over time, with an improvement in fluency being the most common indicator. Listening comprehension was found crucial to the successful OP, and some students felt over-confident with their listening ability. A variety of English accents were found to be new and challenging to Chinese students, which created some initial barriers in ELF communication but contributed to their overall ICC development. Topical knowledge and experience in both academic and non-academic areas were also found to affect their OP.

Psychologically speaking, Chinese students became less motivated to improve spoken English and more relaxed towards speaking English over time, given their increasing exposure to authentic ELF communication, instrumental motivation

to learn English, as well as embracing their bilingual identities. This decrease in motivation was further strengthened by the lack of severe challenges in oral communication, as many programmes did not require much oral engagement as necessity, and many students considered their English ability to be good enough to “survive”. In addition, variables such as perceptions of English, personal interests, personalities, and previous English communication experience were also found to be relevant. Finally, a range of social-contextual factors were found to influence students’ diverse willingness for participation, including the dynamic power relations between speakers (especially speakers’ ethnolinguistic backgrounds and professional identities), communicative settings (locations and group size), and students’ exposure to the English-speaking environment (especially in their programmes, workplaces, and accommodations).

The third RQ aimed to explore possible ways to address and meet Chinese postgraduate students’ English OP needs in the given context. Based on the above OP needs and contributing factors, a number of suggestions were put forward to facilitate more meaningful oral communication and enhance students’ intercultural communication experience at internationalised universities. Overall, a guided autonomous approach was proposed, suggesting Chinese students take an active role in finding out and addressing their OP needs, and developing their English communication ability with institutional support. Furthermore, more opportunities for meaningful engagement were suggested, including targeted and specific English language support, transferable skills-based language support, more focus on students’ intercultural ability, and support intrinsic to the academic contexts. More pre-arrival and transitional support, as well as environmental support, were called for, such as creating a balanced host community and better spatial arrangement. Moreover, results showed that more learner agency was needed from Chinese students, which entailed learner proactivity and self-reflexivity. Last but not least, raising intercultural awareness and developing ICC is suggested for all students, including Chinese, local, and other international students, as well as university staff, because successful intercultural communication requires the synergy of different interlocutors.

The next section will elaborate on the three types of contributions that this thesis makes.

7.3 Research contributions

7.3.1 Theoretical contributions

Firstly, this study enriches the discourse on international students in IHE from a particular cultural background with culturally and educationally assumed identities and collective characteristics. It enriches the ISE literature by providing a detailed description and empirical evidence of Chinese Masters and PhD students' experiences while studying at a UK university. Secondly, it contributes to Holliday's (2012) theory on culture and neo-essentialism in that it illustrated that the notion of Chinese students can be interpreted from a big culture (ethnolinguistic) perspective as well as a small culture or CoPs perspective in the IHE context. Thirdly, this study provides rich empirical data which contributes to the advancement of the theoretical development of willingness to communicate (WTC) in the field of English language education (ELE) and second language acquisition (SLA) from language classes to a broader context by proposing the notion of *willingness for oral participation* (WFOP). Fourthly, this study contributes to research on English for specific purposes (ESP), English for academic purposes (EAP), English for general purposes (EGP), and ELF in the internationalised institutes in Anglophone countries, where students use English both for academic and socio-personal purposes, by proposing the term *English for learning and living purposes* (ELLP). Moreover, this study contributes to the ongoing discussion on ISE from the perspective of how the English language plays a role in Chinese students' overseas study experiences, particularly regarding their experience and needs in ELF communication.

Furthermore, an Iceberg Model of Oral Participation (Figure 6.1) was proposed to further the understanding of the interplay between different linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and social-contextual factors which can influence students' OP needs and WFOP. Furthermore, the proposed *International Student Experience*

Prior-During-Finish (PDF) Framework I (Figure 6.2) has added value to the ISE research to visually represent the process of students' sojourns and various potential academic and socio-personal encounters. Last but not least, a *Stakeholders Action Plan in International Student Experience – PDF Framework II* (Figure 6.3) was also put forward to assist different stakeholders in setting realist action plans, synergising, and collaborating over the course of ISE.

7.3.2 Methodological contributions

As mentioned in Section 3.4.4.1, FG is a research method often left out by researchers in the field of ELE, ESP, and applied linguistics (Galloway, 2020; Starfield, 2016). Therefore, this study offers empirical evidence for using the FG method to conduct needs analysis on intercultural communication. More importantly, this study makes an original contribution of applying the Thinking Hats strategy (de Bono, 1985) to facilitate FG discussions in the target research context, following a robust pilot study (see Section 3.4.4.5), furthering the exploration of FG in qualitative research as a means to improve communication, encourage creativity, and facilitate parallel and collaborative thinking.

One methodological contribution of using the Thinking Hats strategy in FG is to address the limitation of the FG research method because participants often only answer some but not all questions asked in the conventional FG discussions (Stewart et al., 2007). Therefore, some researchers may challenge the credibility and dependability of the data obtained by using FG. By taking control of the discussion and taking away the talking-time from certain overly expressive participants to some extent, this technique gives more control to the group as a whole by making sure each participant gets to address each question. Issues with interrupting the flow of thoughts, turn taking, and following the thinking hats instruction were identified in the pilot FGs, which were subsequently solved with specific strategies (see Section 3.4.4.6).

Furthermore, the FG method was modified to be more culturally suitable for the Chinese participants by adopting and adjusting the Thinking Hats strategy, as explained in Sections 3.4.4.4 and 3.4.4.6. Given that Chinese students tend to be reserved in communication, this modification allowed them to make the most use of group thinking and individual thinking, to speak by following both controlled turn-taking and free speaking. Feedback from the participants demonstrated very positive attitudes toward this approach, as they appreciated the organised critical thinking process, which made them concentrate on different aspects of the discussion step by step and helped them explore and expand each argument better. They acknowledged the benefit of combining individual and group thinking, and both groups highlighted that the strategy was helpful in controlling individual talking time. The PhD students also commented that this approach was efficient as participants did not tend to repeat others' arguments but focused on other peoples' views and built on each other's points, and avoided going back and forth regarding the same point. More importantly, they pointed out that the Thinking Hats strategy was useful to avoid clashes of opinions in discussions, which fit Chinese people's cultural etiquette and tendency to prioritise harmonious relationships.

In addition, as explained in Section 3.4.4.6.3, the Thinking Hats strategy itself was also adjusted to be more culturally appropriate because the notion of "green hat" in the original design has a negative connotation to a Chinese cultural reference – "wearing a green hat" (戴绿帽子) referring to a man who has an unfaithful wife or girlfriend. Therefore, I changed the "green hat" to "orange hat" and kept the principle of the strategy, without embarrassing or distracting the participants. This suggests that researchers involved in working with participants of various cultural backgrounds should be cautious about and sensitive to cultural issues (Liamputtong, 2010). They need to re-evaluate the ethics and effectiveness of specific research methods in response to the internationalisation of research. Moreover, this provides a good example to illustrate the complexity in researching multilingually (Holmes et al, 2013, 2022).

7.3.3 Contributions to practice

The study sought to address Chinese international students' English OP needs in the UK higher educational setting. Given the relevance of RQ3 to practice, detailed suggestions for stakeholders in enhancing international students' OP experience and strengthening the intercultural community have been proposed and elaborated in Chapter 6, particularly in Section 6.3. A summary of implications is as follows.

Overall, the study advocates a guided autonomous approach, which highlights the important role of higher education institutes in assisting students to achieve the goal of learner autonomy and learner agency. Various areas of institutional guided support are suggested, including more support in pre-arrival preparation, transitional adjustment, and continuous ELLP support. More opportunities for meaningful engagement are suggested as well, which include providing a diversity of opportunities for intercultural communication, organising more transferable skills-based activities, creating a balanced host community, as well as paying more attention to the spatial arrangement on campus. International students are advised to raise reflexivity and learner autonomy, focus on community building, and seek opportunities for meaningful connections, while broadening engagement with different communities. Development of domestic students' ICC and university staff's professionalism are also highly suggested to equip them to be more interculturally aware and competent. With the collaboration between different stakeholders, successful implementation of these suggestions is believed to have an important and positive impact on facilitating IHE in intercultural UK universities.

In addition to the aforementioned pedagogical implications, I also launched a PhD Roundtable project (see Appendix M) which intended to create a safe and supportive environment for students to engage in contemporary and meaningful discussions and provide a chance for students to practise their spoken English. Eight sessions have been held, and 35 students have participated in total. I am proud to say that these sessions were well received by the participants, and I would highly recommend such a form of discussion be adopted by different organisers.

7.4 Researcher's reflection

Throughout the process of completing this thesis, I have met many interesting people and learnt much more about the fields that I am passionate about. Of all the findings, what came as most surprising to me personally was that the development of one's English language ability was not perceived by the students as important as I had expected. This somewhat shocking result made me wonder that as language educators, are we just being arrogant to assume that all (NNES) international students want to have more English-speaking experience in the UK? Are we too blind to see that the students have many other things to worry about and skills they want to develop, all of which are prioritised before their English competence?

The turning point was when I realised that, first of all, Chinese students do yearn for English communication opportunities, particularly meaningful engagement, not the superficial “hi-bye interaction”. Secondly, what some students meant by not caring about their English language development is based on a very limited understanding of language competence, in that they see linguistic competence as equal to grammatical competence, which does not accurately reflect the comprehensive model of communicative competence (CC) (see Section 2.2.4.1). Moreover, data demonstrated how most of them have made the transition from being English learners to more competent English users during their experience at the UK university, and they have developed their pragmatic competence and strategic competence in various ways — they just did not realise that these were also parts of CC. Therefore, it is interesting to explore why students would think like this, despite the continuing discourse on (I)CC in the field of applied linguistics and ELE, and what are some of the issues of the application of the (I)CC model that hinder students' conceptualisation of language competence. Furthermore, data also showed students' desire for skill-based development where they see English as a valuable tool for their overall development, indicating strong instrumental rather than integrative motivation for English language development.

I was pleased to learn that the diversity within the Chinese student cohort was indeed as interesting and complex as I had expected, which was an impression I had

acquired prior to the beginning of the study. As the results showed, Chinese students' language environments and lifestyles were very different from one another, even within the same university, and my own experience can also shed light on this point. At the beginning of the study, I was initially immersed in the research context in a relatively balanced environment consisting of a large group of international students from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds. During this PhD, I was fortunate to have worked on two projects of similar interest to this study, which allowed me to speak to a much wider group of stakeholders, including students, teachers, and programme directors, for much broader and richer understandings of the complex context and issues in dealing with students' English language ability within this university. Later, the pandemic and changes in my personal life resulted in me distancing myself from the previous office environment and the research participants, allowing me to interpret the participants' experiences more objectively.

7.5 Research limitations

Although the study has successfully answered the RQs, potential limitations need to be addressed, which will help to direct further research.

First, the current study investigated Chinese postgraduate students' intercultural communication experience primarily based on interviews and FGs with Chinese postgraduate students. If more time and resources were available, more stakeholders' voices as sources of data on interacting with Chinese students would have been included for data triangulation, such as staff members, local students, and non-Chinese international students, which might shed light on their communication experience and needs and contribute to the fuller picture of intercultural communication at a UK university. Secondly, the current study focused on Chinese postgraduate students in one research-focused university with a large intake of international students. It might be interesting to conduct similar research in another UK university, such as a teaching university or one with a smaller population of (Chinese) international students, and compare and contrast the results of this study.

Thirdly, having two moderators for FGs with different roles is suggested by some to be better than the researcher acting as the sole moderator, who is inevitably biased in qualitative research (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Nevertheless, seeking another moderator for this study was not easy since there was a concern regarding the power imbalance between the participants and the moderator, which according to Greenbaum (2000), is crucial for FG discussion. Moreover, Fischbacher-Smith et al. (2015) also advocated using a postgraduate researcher such as myself as the moderator for studies of similar nature, as explained in Section 3.4.4.3. To address this issue of potential bias, two stages of FG data coding were conducted to achieve higher intra-rater dependability (Ruel et al., 2016). Interviews were re-coded after the initial open coding for the same purpose (see Section 3.5.1).

Regarding the researcher's positionality, it needs to be acknowledged that I am involved in the data collection and analysis process, and I have explained my stance in Section 1.4 as well as my reflection as a researcher in Section 7.4. Although qualitative research should aim to achieve high confirmability, as explained in Section 3.6, my presence should by no means be seen as some sort of contamination, but an active co-constructer together with the participants to give meanings to the qualitative data (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001).

7.6 Suggestions for further research

7.6.1 More stakeholders' voices

The current study revealed that successful intercultural communication takes multi-directional endeavour. Therefore, more stakeholders' voices are welcomed to the discussion, which is supported by relevant stakeholders theory such as stakeholder analysis of higher education institutions (Maric, 2013). It would be interesting to conduct more research to investigate the local and non-Chinese students' OP experience in a similar context, as well as gather academic staff's views on their communicative experience with students. Previous research such as Grimshaw and Sears (2008) also called for more voices from international experts

and more emic approaches in empirical research on international education. In the same light, Kingston and Forland (2008) looked at the differences in international students' expectations and the expectations held by academic staff, and Wang's study (2020) gathered voices from international students, domicile students, and their instructors. More research such as Benson et al. (2016) and Daniels (2013) is also needed to focus on academics' perspectives, experiences, and responses to the changing institutional demands.

7.6.2 An increasing focus on “small cultures”

This study revealed noticeable diversities among the Chinese international student cohort, particularly concerning different “small cultures” (Holliday, 1999, 2016) or CoPs (Arthur, 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2010). In light of the non-essentialist perspective of the research findings, this research could be used as a platform which foregrounds more research on the experience and perceptions of students in a particular group or CoP, such as a course, a school, an exchange programme, a voluntary programme, a society, or a certain level of study, rather than viewing them through the lens of students from a particular cultural background. For instance, in the existing literature that looks at international students, particularly Chinese students in the UK, there is a gap regarding doctoral students' academic and social experience. This study found that PhD students have a relatively different understandings of their roles in the given context compared to their PGT counterparts. Moreover, it can also be argued that the PhD students, especially those who have previously studied overseas prior to their doctoral studies, make excellent ISE research subjects, given that they have more accumulated experience in the study abroad context, including positive and negative experiences, and their reflections can be considered more insightful to an extent.

7.6.3 Keeping up with the new contexts

As explained in earlier chapters, the student cohort pursuing higher education in the UK has changed over the past several years in various aspects. In the meantime, UK universities have also been seeking new approaches and strategies to adjust to such changes and meet new needs. Research data in this study were collected in the academic year 2017/2018. Given my prolonged engagement in the target context, I am aware of some changes in the UoE since the data collection, such as growing interest in the ELE/COL department in international students' OP. My involvement in the second PTAS project (Benson et al., 2020), a collaboration of ELE/COL and the School of Education and Sport, which investigated international students' participation in different classroom settings, exemplifies such an upcoming research interest from the university's point of view. Furthermore, since 2018, ELE/COL has launched in-session speaking classes for university students as a way to enhance students' English-speaking skills and help them adjust to life in an international campus. These changes bring about new student experience, which will provide new evidence-based issues and a new context for future research. Therefore, researchers need to sharpen their senses and keep up with the changing contexts to conduct important and relevant research.

How technology plays a role in the future of education has been of great interest for some researchers over the past two decades (Singh & Curley, 2017; Stephenson, 2001; Wanner & Palmer, 2015), some of whom specifically look at culture-related issues in online education (Erez et al., 2013; Olaniran, Rodriguez, & Williams, 2010; Zhu, Valcke, & Schellens, 2009). Given the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, online learning has gained much attention and popularity, such as virtual labs and experiments, online lectures and workshops, video meetings and conferences. The impact of such a transformation on daily communication and higher education is yet to be explored in depth. However, such a shift will undoubtedly change the outlook of education, e.g., assignment and feedback, classroom interaction between teachers and students, and interaction among students (Raaper & Brown, 2020; Rizun & Strzelecki, 2020; Sanderson, Spacey, Zhu, & Sterling-Morris, 2021). It warrants future research to investigate more diverse ways

of communication co-created by novel technologies. Moreover, as mentioned in Section 6.3.2.1, social media has already become an important platform where students engage in a lot of daily academic and social activities, especially for international students interested in building new connections abroad while being attached to their previous virtual network (Çömlekçi, 2020; Pang & Wang, 2020). Therefore, social media can also be seen as a new research tool, topic, and context. More research on Chinese students' use of social media for their study abroad experience is suggested.

Having recommended the areas for future research, it is worth pointing out that the current study shows that in the quest for a rich understanding of the ever-growing field of IHE, it is vital to conduct research that engages in various strands of knowledge and calls for collaboration of researchers with expertise in different yet interconnected fields to bridge gaps in the literature. It is also recommended that a researcher be a “bricoleur” (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010), who is willing to adopt the appropriate research approaches and adapt research methods if necessary to address the aims and objectives of a study.

Hopefully, this thesis can help other researchers who are also curious and passionate about similar research topics in some ways. Finally, I believe the following words of Alan Turing offer somewhat a poetic closure to my journey of completing this PhD thesis.

*We can only see a short distance ahead,
but we can see plenty there that needs to be done.*

– Alan Turing

Chapter 8 References

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Chapter 9 Appendices

Appendix A Information Sheet



PROJECT TITLE

Exploring Internationalisation of Higher Education: Chinese Postgraduate Students' Needs for Oral Participation in English during Their Experience in the UK

INVITATION

You are being asked to take part in a research project conducted by SHAN Jing (Alice), and supervised by Jill Northcott and Dr. Nicola Galloway. The general aim of the research project is to explore issues regarding Chinese postgraduate students' needs for oral participation in English during their experience in the UK.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

- For student participants:
You will be asked to participate in one audio-recorded interview with the researcher, with the recording devices provided by the researcher. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to answer a background questionnaire which will be helpful for data analysis in the later stage. Then you will answer a series of open-ended questions provided by the researcher. Please feel free to express your opinions. By the end of the first interview, please indicate whether you would like to participate in the second interview and volunteer for the focus group.
- For non-student participants:
You will be asked to participate in one video-recorded focus group facilitated and moderated by the researcher, with the recording devices provided by the researcher. You will discuss with other group members on issues relevant to the research topic, themes emerged from the interviews and focus groups with students, and the researcher's conversational interviews with other informants.

TIME COMMITMENT

The estimated time for each interview and focus group is approximately an hour.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

Your participation in the study is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or choose to stop participating at any time. You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you decide. You have the right to ask that any data supplied to that point be withdrawn/destroyed. If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

This study poses no known risks to you. It does not provide any tangible benefits beyond enriching empirical studies and advancing academic knowledge.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and, unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored where only the researcher will have access to this information. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible. Any identifying information you supply will be presented anonymously (or with aliases) in the report or publication of the research, so that no one will be able to link the data you provide with your identity. Audio and video recordings will be destroyed (deleted from recording devices and computer) by the researcher one year after the research is finished.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The researcher will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time.

Researcher's contact information:

Email address: jing.shan@ed.ac.uk

Cell phone number: 0044 07821432762

If you agree to participate in this study, please read and sign the consent form.

Thank you!

Appendix B Consent Form



PROJECT TITLE

Exploring Internationalisation of Higher Education: Chinese Postgraduate Students' Needs for Oral Participation in English during Their Experience in the UK

NAME OF RESEARCHER

SHAN Jing (Alice)

PROJECT AIM

The general aim of the research project is to explore issues regarding Chinese postgraduate students' needs for oral participation in English during their living and learning experiences in the UK.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

1. you have received a copy of the information sheet and the consent form, and you have read and understood the information sheet and consent form;
2. you are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion);
3. you have been given the opportunity to ask about your participation in this study, and all questions (if any) have been answered with satisfaction;
4. your responses will be kept strictly confidential;
5. you understand that if at any time during the interview you feel unable or unwilling to continue, you are free to quit;
6. you can withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences;
7. you have been informed that if you have any general questions about this project, you should feel free to contact SHAN Jing (Alice);
8. your signature is not a waiver of any legal rights;
9. you understand that you are able to keep a copy of the informed consent form for your records;
10. you are aware of the potential risks (if any).

Signature of the participant *

Date

Signature of the researcher

Date

**Participants wishing to preserve some degree of anonymity may use their initials
(from the British Psychological Society Guidelines for Minimal Standards of Ethical
Approval in Psychological Research)*

Consent Form



For Focus Groups

I, the undersigned, have read and understood the background information about the PhD research project – Exploring Internationalisation of Higher Education: Chinese Postgraduate Students’ Needs for Oral Participation in English during Their Experience in the UK, conducted by SHAN Jing (Alice).

By signing this consent form, I hereby agree to take part in the focus group discussion. I agree that the focus group will be recorded, and materials from this focus group may be used by the aforementioned project, provided any details that could identify me or others have been removed.

Signature of the participant *

Date

**Participants wishing to preserve some degree of anonymity may use their initials (from the British Psychological Society Guidelines for Minimal Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research)*

Appendix C Background Questions



Researcher: Before we start the interview, could you please fill in this questionnaire, which may be helpful for the data analysis? All information that can be used to identify you will be kept confidential, so please don't worry about that.

Name _____ Preferred alias if any _____

Age _____ Gender _____ Place of Origin _____

Educational background:

Current PG Programme (e.g. MSc TESOL) _____

Programme starting time _____

Pre-sessional EAP course attendance (Yes/ No) _____

Previous Education:

a. Undergraduate programme & university _____

Medium of instruction (e.g. Chinese/English) _____

b. Master's programme & university (PhD only) _____

Medium of instruction (e.g. Chinese/English) _____

English Proficiency:

IELTS Overall Score _____ Speaking Score _____

Alternative English Proficiency Exam Score _____

How would you describe your current English proficiency?

Intermediate _____ Advanced _____ Proficient _____

In your opinion, which one is your best English skill and which might be the worse?

Listening _____ Speaking _____ Reading _____ Writing _____



受访者背景概况

中文姓名 _____ 希望使用的化名 _____

年龄 _____ 性别 _____ 家乡(例: 浙江杭州) _____

学习背景:

现在就读专业 (例: MSc TESOL/ PhD Education) _____

开始就读时间 _____

入学之前有无参加过学校提供的语言班 (Yes/ No) _____

之前学习经历 (中英文皆可):

c. 本科大学名称 & 专业名称 _____

教学语言 (例: 中文/英文) _____

d. 研究生大学名称 & 专业名称 _____

教学语言 (例: 中文/英文) _____

英语水平:

雅思综合分 _____ 口语分数 _____

或者其他英语水平测试分数 (例: 托福) _____

你觉得你的英语水平总体如何?

中等一般 _____ 中上高级 _____ 熟练精通 _____

在你看来, 你的英语听说读写能力哪个是最强项 (✓) 哪个是最弱项 (×)?

听 _____ 说 _____ 读 _____ 写 _____

Appendix D Development of Interview Guides (English & Chinese)

Final Version in English

Opening

Interviewer:

Hello, thank you again for participating in my PhD research project!

Before we start the interview, could you please fill in a background questionnaire, which may be helpful for the data analysis? All information that can be used to identify you will be kept confidential, so please don't worry about that!

In this interview, there are three sections. First, I would like to ask you some questions about your general experience as an international student in the UK, and then we will move on to talk about how the English language plays in a role in your everyday life. The third section focuses on your oral participation in English during your experience in the UK.

Now let's get started!

Part 1. General Experience as an International Student

1. Could you start by introducing yourself, and describe your overall experience as an international student in the UK?
2. Can you describe what you usually do in a week?

Part 2. English and International Student Experience

1. Following your self-evaluation on your English ability in the questionnaire, could you further explain your strengths and weaknesses in English?
2. What do you think of the English language requirement for entering your programme?
Follow up: Do you have any suggestions on assessing international student English ability?
3. What do you usually use English for in the UK?
Follow up: In what situations would you participate in oral English communication?

4. How's your experience coming to live and learn in this English-speaking context from your previous work/study environment? (Adaptation)
Follow up: What do you think about your English language ability since you came here? (Improvement/changes)
5. Do you have motivation to improve your English during your study in the UK?
6. How do you perceive the relation between English ability to international students' success in this context?
7. Have you heard of or tried any English language support provided by the university?

Part 3. Oral Participation in English

1. What do you think about your ability in oral English communication?
2. What (situations) would motivate you to engage in oral English communication?
3. Are there any concerns or difficulties for you when speaking English with others?
4. Are there any aspects of English-speaking ability would you like to improve?
5. What do you think of the current environment in the university for helping you to improve English speaking ability?
6. How do you perceive the importance of English-speaking ability in relation to your living and learning in the UK? What about after your study?
7. What do you think are some of the characteristics of Chinese students in classroom or other English-speaking settings?
8. How do you perceive yourself as a non-native English speaker in the UK?
9. Have there been any changes regarding your view of the use of English in authentic communicative context since the beginning of your study in the UK?
10. What's your preferred English learning and teaching method, particularly regarding English speaking?
11. How would you suggest the university address Chinese students' needs for oral participation in English?

Closing

Interviewer:

Thank you again for participating in this interview! The data you have provided will be of great value to my project. I should have all the information I need. Would it be okay to contact you later if I have any more questions?

Would you like to participate in a focus group discussion some time later? You will discuss some issues relevant to my research topic with about 4 other Chinese students, and the focus group will also be in Chinese. This is a good networking opportunity for you to communicate and share your overseas experience with your peers. I would really appreciate if you could participate! Thank you very much!

Final Version in Chinese

开场白

采访者:

非常感谢你参加此次访谈! 访谈开始前, 请配合填写一下受访者背景问卷, 有助于我了解一些关于你个人的情况。其中任何隐私信息都是保密的, 你也无需提供真实姓名, 请勿担心。

此次访谈包括三部分, 先谈你的留英经历概况, 再谈英语与你留学经历的关系, 最后重点聊你对留英期间关于英语口语交际参与这方面的需求与想法。我们现在开始吧!

1. 留英经历概况

1. 你可以先简单地介绍一下自己, 并聊聊你在英国总体的留学体验吗?
2. 能说一下你一般一周都做点什么呢?

2. 英语与留英经历

1. 在背景问卷中你对自己的英语水平做了个基本评估, 能具体说说你的长处和短板吗?
2. 你怎么看你们专业入校英语成绩要求?
接着问: 你有没有什么给学校的关于衡量国际生英语水平的建议?
3. 你在留学期间一般什么情况下会使用英语?
接着问: 你在英国期间校内校外一般会在什么情况下会参与英语口语交流?

4. 你从之前的学习/工作环境来到全英文环境学习生活感觉如何? (适应能力)
接着问: 你感觉自己来了英国以后英语水平有提高吗? (改善/提高)
5. 你在留学期间有提高英语的动力吗?
6. 你认为英语水平的高低与国际学生的留学经历好坏有何关系吗?
7. 你听说或者尝试过学校哪些英语辅导的服务吗?

3. 留学期间使用英语进行的口语交流

1. 你觉得自己英语口语交流能力如何?
2. 在怎样的情况下你会更有积极参与口语交流的动力?
3. 你在口语交流过程中有遇到一些困难或者觉得比较难沟通的情况吗? 你如何应对?
4. 在英语口语交流中你有没有什么想要提高的方面?
5. 你觉得目前学校的环境能够帮你有效提高口语和交流能力吗?
6. 你觉得留学生口语交流能力好对生活和学习有什么帮助吗? 毕业以后呢?
7. 你觉得中国学生一般在课堂或者其他英语交流场合很表现如何?
8. 你是如何看待自己作为英语为非母语者的国际生这一身份的?
9. 自从来到英国留学, 你对英语在实际口语中的交流是否有了新的认识?
10. 你比较喜欢哪种英语教学模式, 尤其针对提高口语和交际能力的部分?
11. 你觉得学校应该如何提高中国学生在英语口语交流能力与参与度呢?

结束词

采访者:

再次感谢你参加我此次的访谈, 你提供的信息和材料都对我非常有帮助!
如果有需要的话我们再联系。

此外，请问你愿意参加我之后将组织的焦点小组访谈吗？你会与大约4个其他中国学生一起对于我研究中的个别话题进行探讨，也是用中文的。当然这也是很好的交流和交友的机会。非常感谢！

3rd Modified Version (March 2017)

Opening

Interviewer:

Hello, thank you again for participating in my PhD research project!

In this interview, there are three sections. First, I would like to ask you some questions about your general experience as an international student in the UK, and then we will move on to talk about how the English language plays a role in your everyday life. The third section focuses on your oral participation in English during your experience in the UK.

Now, let's get started.

Part 1 General Experience as an International Student

留英经历概况

1. Could you start by introducing yourself, and describe your experience so far as an international student in the UK?

可以先简单地介绍一下你自己，和聊聊在英国留学经历吗？

(Discipline, duration, previous study experience, accommodation, social circle, satisfaction)

2. Can you describe a typical day of yours?

能说一下你一般一天都做点什么呢？

(Academic work, e.g., classes, assignment)

3. What do you do mostly when you are not studying?

你一般课余时间都做点什么呢？

(Non-academic activities, e.g., part-time job, social activities)

Part 2 English Language in Relation to ISE 英语与留英经历

1. What do you think of your English proficiency? What are your strengths and weaknesses?

你觉得你的英语水平如何，长处和短板在哪里？

2. How important do you think English ability is to the success of international student experience in this context?

你觉得英语水平高低对于国际学生的留学经历好坏影响大吗？

(Academic, social-personal)

3. What do you think of the predictive validity of IELTS in relation to your academic performance?

你认为雅思考试结果和你的学习成绩关系如何？

(Assignment, pre-sessional course, language requirement)

4. How often/well do you use English in academic contexts? For what purpose?

你经常在学习活动中使用交流吗？为何目的？感觉如何？

(Classroom, seminar, supervision meeting, group work, workshop, etc.)

5. How often do you use English in non-academic contexts? For what purpose?

你经常在课外活动中与人用英语交流吗？为何目的？

(With friends, teachers, flatmates, co-workers, international/Chinese students, etc.)

6. What would motivate you to improve your English ability during your ISE?

你在留学期间有提高英语的动力吗？

7. What type of university provided English language support are you are aware of or have tried?

你了解的或者有尝试过学校哪些辅导英语的服务吗？感觉如何？

Part 3 Oral Participation in English 英语口语交际参与

1. How often do you participate in English communication in academic and non-academic settings while you are here in the UK?

你在英国期间校内校外经常会用英语进行口语交流吗？

(What for, where, with whom, comparison to expectation)

2. What do you think about your English communicative competence?

你觉得自己英语口语交流能力如何？

3. Does your programme require a speaking score for entrance? What do you think about this?

你的课程需要入校英语成绩有口语成绩吗？你觉得为什么呢？

4. Do you think the current academic environment helps you improve (spoken) English effectively?

你觉得目前学校的环境能够帮你有效提高口语和交流能力吗？

5. What do you think are some characteristics of Chinese students in classroom settings?
你觉得中国学生一般在课堂很表现如何?
6. What kind of concerns or difficulties do you have when you are engaging in English communication? Any examples? How do you overcome it?
你在口语交流过程中有遇到一些困难或者觉得比较难沟通的情况吗? 你如何应对?
7. How do you perceive the usefulness or importance of English-speaking ability in the living and learning abroad context? What about after your study?
你觉得留学生口语好对生活和学习有什么帮助吗? 毕业以后呢?
8. How do you perceive yourself as a non-native English speaker in the UK?
你是如何看待自己作为母语不是英语的国际生这一身份的?
9. Has your attitude towards the English language changed since the start of your international student experience?
自从来到英国留学, 你对英语的使用是否有了新的认识?
10. In what situations do you feel more motivated to engage in verbal interaction in English?
在怎样的情况下你会有积极参与口语交流的动力?
11. What aspects of English regarding oral English ability do you want to improve the most?
在英语口语交流中你最想提高的是什么方面?
12. What's your preferred English learning and teaching method, particularly regarding improving speaking ability and oral communicative competence?
你比较喜欢哪种英语教学模式, 尤其针对提高口语和交际能力的部分?

(With other Chinese students, local students, international NES & NNEs, language support)
13. Do you have any suggestions which might be helpful to improve students' oral participation, and/ or better assess students' English skills that are required by the university and the international student experience in general?
你有没有什么给学校的建议, 关于如何提高学生口语交流参与度, 和根据学校的学习和留英生活的要求来制定学生英语水平的需求以及衡量的方式/标准?

Closing

Interviewer:

Thank you so much for participating in this interview! The data you have provided will be of great value to my project. I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to contact you later if I have any more questions? Thanks again!

* The interview questions were developed based on preliminary results from exploratory interviews and sample NA questions from Gravatt, Richards & Lewis (1997), Kikuchi (2004), and Nation & Macalister (2010).

2nd Modified Version (Feb 2017)

Opening

Interviewer:

*Hello, thank you again for participating in my PhD research project!
In this interview, there are three sections. Frist, I would like to ask you some questions about your general experience as an international student in the UK, and then we will move on to talk about how the English language plays in a role in your everyday life. The third section focuses on your oral participation in English communication during your experience in the UK.
Now, let's get started.*

Part 1 General Experience as an International Student

在英留学经历概况

1. Could you start by introducing yourself, and describe your experience so far as an international student in the UK ?
可以先简单地介绍一下你自己, 和聊聊在英国留学经历吗?
(Discipline, duration, previous study experience, accommodation, social circle, satisfaction)
2. Can you describe a typical day of yours?
能说一下你一般一天都做点什么呢?
(Academic work, e.g. classes, assignment)
3. What do you do mostly when you are not studying?
你一般课余时间都做点什么呢?
(Non-academic activities, e.g. part-time job, social activities)

Part 2 English Language in Relation to ISE 英语与留英经历

4. What do you think of your English proficiency? What are your strengths and weaknesses?
你觉得你的英语水平如何，长处和短板在哪里？
5. How important do you think English proficiency is to the success of international student experience in this context?
你觉得英语水平高低对于国际学生的留学经历好坏影响大吗？
(Academic, social-personal)
6. What do you think of the predictability of IELTS in relation to your academic performance?
你认为雅思考试结果和你的学习成绩关系如何？
(Assignment, pre-session course, language requirement)
7. How often/ well do you use English in academic contexts? For what purpose?
你经常在学习活动中使用交流吗？为何目的？感觉如何？
(Classroom, seminar, supervision meeting, group work, workshop, etc.)
8. How often/well do you use English in non-academic contexts? For what purpose?
你经常在课外活动中与人用英语交流吗？为何目的？感觉如何？
(With friends, teachers, flatmates, co-workers, international/Chinese students, etc.)
9. How would motivate you to improve your English ability during your ISE?
你在留学期间有提高英语的动力吗？
10. What type of university provided language support are you are aware of or have tried?
你了解的或者有尝试过学校哪些辅导英语的服务吗？感觉如何？

Part 3 Oral Participation in English Communication

英语口语交际参与

11. How often do you orally participate in English communication here?
你在英国期间经常会用英语口头交流吗？
(What for, where, with whom, comparison to expectation)
12. What do you think about your English communicative competence?
你觉得自己英语口语交流能力如何？

13. Does your programme require speaking score for entrance? Why?
你的课程需要入校英语成绩有口语成绩吗? 你觉得为什么呢?
14. Do you think the current academic environment helps you improve (spoken) English effectively?
你觉得目前学校的环境能够帮你有效提高口语和交流能力吗?
15. What do you think of the phenomenon that Chinese students tend to stay quiet or are reluctant to speak up in class?
你怎么看待中国学生一般在课堂很安静这一情况?
16. Do you have some opportunities to engage in English communication outside school?
你在课余期间有机会经常接触到英语口语交流的机会吗?
17. What kind of concerns or difficulties do you have when you are engaging in English communication? Any examples? How do you overcome it?
你在口语交流过程中有遇到一些困难或者觉得比较难沟通的情况吗? 你如何应对?
18. How do you perceive the usefulness or importance of English-speaking ability in the living and learning abroad context? What about after your study?
你觉得留学生口语好对生活和学习有什么帮助吗? 毕业以后呢?
19. How do you perceive yourself as a non-native English speaker in the UK?
你是如何看待自己作为母语不是英语的国际生这一身份的?
20. Has your attitude towards the English language changed since the start of your international student experience?
自从来到英国留学, 你对英语的使用是否有了新的认识?
21. In what situations do you feel more motivated to engage in verbal interaction in English?
在怎样的情况下你会有积极参与口语交流的动力?
22. What aspects of English regarding oral English ability do you want to improve the most?
在英语口语交流中你最想提高的是什么方面?
23. What's your preferred English learning and teaching method, particularly regarding improving speaking ability and oral communicative competence?
你比较喜欢哪种英语教学模式, 尤其针对提高口语和交际能力的部分?
(With other Chinese students, local students, international NES & NNEs, language support)

24. Do you have any suggestions which might be helpful to improve students' oral participation, and/ or better assess students' English skills that are required by the university and the international student experience in general? 你有没有什么给学校的建议，关于如何提高学生口语交流参与度，和根据学校的学习和留英生活的要求来制定学生英语水平的需求以及衡量的方式/标准？

Closing

Interviewer:

Thank you so much for participating in this interview! The data you have provided will be of great value to my project. I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to contact you later if I have any more questions? Thanks again!

* The interview questions were developed based on preliminary results from exploratory interviews and sample NA questions from Gravatt, Richards & Lewis (1997), Kikuchi (2004), and Nation & Macalister (2010).

1st Modified Version (Jan 2017)

Opening

Interviewer:

Hello, thank you again for participating in my PhD research project!

In this first interview, there are three sections.

Frist, I would like to ask you some questions about your general experience as an international student in the UK, and then we will move on to talk about how the English language plays in a role in your everyday life. The third section focuses on your oral participation in English communication during your experience in the UK. I hope to use this information to help the international students, particularly Chinese students to be better prepared for their overseas study journey, and also inform the academics and universities on students' language needs and learning experience.

The interview should take about 1.5 hours.

Now, let's start with part one, shall we?

Part 1 General International Student Experience

1. Educational background

- Could you tell me something about your overseas study experience so far? Such as how long have you stayed in the UK? What are you studying?
- Have you ever studied or lived in an English-speaking environment prior to present study? If so, do you think it has any influence on your current living and learning experiences?

No.	Topic Lists	Guided Questions
Q1	Educational background	- Could you tell me something about your overseas study experience so far? Such as how long have you stayed in the UK? What are you studying? - Have you ever studied or lived in an English-speaking environment prior to present study? If so, do you think it has any influence on your current living and learning experiences?
Q2	General life in the UK	- Can you describe to me a typical week of yours? - Where do you live? How is your accommodation? - How do you like your experience in the UK so far? Is it international? Interesting?
Q3	Academic studies	- What do you think of the academic side of your student experience in the UK? Do you find it challenging or relatively easy? It is what you had expected before the start of the programme? - Can you describe what the typical classes are or academic activities are like in your programme/course? - What types of assignment do you usually have?
Q4	Social-personal life	- What do you do mostly when you are not studying? - Who do you mostly socialize with? Member of any societies? - Any par-time job, voluntary work, other social activities?
Q5	Critical incidents	- Are there any particular incidents during your experience so far that you think is somewhat important for your journey?

Part 2 English Language in Relation to ISE

No.	Topic Lists	Guided Questions
Q1	English proficiency	- What do you think of your English proficiency? - What do you think are your strengths and what are your weaknesses in English? - Do you hope to improve your English proficiency?
Q2	English proficiency and ISE	- How do you evaluate the importance of English proficiency to the success of ISE? - Before you started your course, do you think you had a clear idea what the experience will require of you in terms of language proficiency? Do you think you were well informed and prepared?
Q3	Academic Studies	- How was your IELTS exam experience? Did you take preparation classes? - What do you think of the predictability of IELTS now that you've been studying in the UK for a while? - How is your English proficiency evaluated in relation to your studies? - What do you think of the language requirement from your academic studies?
Q4	Social-personal life	- Do you think English is a facilitating factor to better your social-personal experience in the UK? - How often do you engage in English communication outside classroom? With friends, teachers, flatmates, wo-workers, etc.
Q9	Autonomous learning	- How driven are you to improve your English ability during your ISE? What motivates you? - Do you take actively actions to improve your English competence? What do you do/ would you like to do?
Q10	University Support	- What type of language support are you are aware of that are provided by the university? - Have you tried any? Why/why not? What do you think of them?

Part 3 Oral Participation in English Communication

No.	Topic Lists	Guided Questions
Q1	Target Tasks/Function	- What kind of situations would you need to speak English? - How often do you speak English here? - Who do you usually speak English with? - Is your experience of using English to communicate with

		other here so far different from your expectation prior to your arrival?
Q2	Academic Studies	- Does your programme require speaking score for entrance? Why do you think that is? - Do you actively engage in academic communication? - What about the language environment here for you? Do you think the current environment (e.g., class, lab, etc.) is helping you improve (spoken) English effectively?
Q3	Social-personal life	- Do you have some opportunities to engage in English communication outside school? If so, what kind of interactions? If not, why? - Do you actively seek opportunities to engage in English communication outside school such as taking a part-time job?
Q4	Attitudes	- What do you think about your English-speaking competence? - What do you think being a “proficient English speaker” means? - How do you perceive the usefulness of English-speaking ability in the living and learning aboard context? What about after your study? - What do you think about the different accents and varieties of English you encounter in this context? - How do you perceive yourself as a non-native English speaker in the UK? Do you think you are at a disadvantage? - Do you think your attitude towards the English language has changed since the start of your experience?
Q5	Motivation	- How motivated are you to interact with others by speaking English here, or do you prefer not speaking English unless you have to? - Do you think being good at speaking English is a significant factor in determining the success of the overall living and learning experiences of an international student such as yourself in this context? - In what situations do you feel more motivated to engage in verbal interaction in English?
Q6	Problems/ Lacks	- Are you satisfied with your English-speaking skill? - What do you think is the most challenging part for you when speaking English? - Have you received any help or training in relation to the identified problems? - Do you think some of the problems in your speaking ability have been overlooked? - Do you find it easy to enter and keep a conversation in English? - Do you worry about saying something in case you make mistakes in your English so you prefer not talking?

		- Do you often encounter not knowing how to say something in English (lack vocabulary), or not knowing the most appropriate way to express yourself in English? - Worry about your accent or have difficulties with your pronunciation? - Do you have trouble wording what you want to say quickly enough?
Q7	Critical Incidents	- Have you encountered any difficulties in communicating in spoken English since your study here, such as encoring misunderstandings or having troubles talking about certain topics, or not being able to express yourself clearly? The situation could be with classmates, teachers, staff members, or outside class, such as friends, salespersons, flatmates, etc.?
Q8	Preferences/ Wants	- What aspects of English regarding oral English ability do you want to improve the most? - What's your preferred English learning method, particularly regarding improving speaking ability? - Would you prefer practicing your oral interactive skill in English with someone who is also Chinese as well or do you prefer speaking to foreigners? - Do you prefer speaking to other non-native English speakers or with native English speakers to practice English? - What kinds of things would you prefer or feel comfortable to communicate in English with others? - Which aspect of speaking skill would you like to improve the most to a more competent English speaker?
Q9	Actions/ Solutions	- What do you need to do to improve what you want regarding English speaking competence? - Have you actively made an effort to improve it? How much time and you devote to it? - Do you know any English language course or service provided by the school or university that is aiming to improve your English competence, particularly regarding speaking? Have you tried any of the services? Why (not)? Did you find it useful?
Q10	Suggestions	- Looking back on your journey so far, do you think any changes could be made to your experience regarding using English? The changes could be about yourself or may be others such as your surroundings and the context. - Do you believe any changes should be made to your programme about communicative interaction in English? - Do you have any other comments which might be helpful in assessing what English skills, particularly regarding speaking are expected of you by the university and the life in the UK in general?

Closing

Interviewer:

Well, it has been a pleasure finding out more about your student experience. Thank you very much for participating in this interview! The data you have provided will be of great value to my project. I appreciate the time you took for this interview. I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to call you at home if I have any more questions? Thanks again. I look forward to our next interview.

* The interview questions were developed based on preliminary results from exploratory interviews and sample NA questions from Gravatt, Richards & Lewis (1997), Kikuchi (2004), and Nation & Macalister (2010).

Original Design (November 2016)

Opening

Hello, thank you again for participating in the project.

Interview Questions Based on Categories in NA Studies

1. Target Tasks/Functions:

What kind of situations would you need to speak English?

How often do you speak English here?

Who do you speak English with? (friends, classmates, teachers, flatmates, etc.)
For what purposes? Academic or socio-personal aspects?

Do you think it's sufficient to learn just enough language for communication to occur?

Is your experience of using English to communicate with other here so far different from your expectation prior to your arrival?

Do you have any experience or encounters you would like to share? It can be a conversation you find interesting or meaningful, or not successful or even upsetting.

2. Motivation:

How motivated are you to interact with others by speaking English here, or do you prefer not speaking English unless you have to?

Do you think being good at speaking English is a significant factor in determining the success of the overall living and learning experiences of an international student such as yourself in this context?

In what situations do you feel more motivated to engage in verbal interaction in English?

3. Educational and language background:

Have you ever studied or lived in an English-speaking environment such as spending a semester abroad or learning in an EMI (English as the medium of instruction)? If so, does it have any influence on your experience of using English to learn and live in the UK?

4. Problems/ Lacks:

Are you satisfied with your current oral communicative competence in English?

What do you think is the most challenging part for you when speaking English?/

What kinds of things would you have difficulty with when speaking English?

Have you encountered any difficulties in communicating in spoken English since your study here, such as encoring misunderstandings or having troubles talking about certain topics, or not being able to express yourself clearly? The situation could be with classmates, teachers, staff members, or outside class, such as friends, salespersons, flatmates, etc.?

- Have difficulty giving oral presentations.
- Have trouble wording what you want to say quickly enough.
- Worry about saying something in case you make mistakes in your English so you prefer not talking.
- Not know how to say something in English (lack vocabulary).
- Not know the best or most appropriate way to express yourself in English?
- Worry about your accent or have difficulties with your pronunciation
- Find it difficult to enter or keep a conversation.
- Have you received any help or training in relation to the identified problems?
- Do you think some of the problems in your speaking ability have been overlooked?

5. Attitudes:

What about the language environment here for you? Do you feel that being here in the UK has helped to improve your English-speaking ability?

What do you think it means to say that someone is a “proficient English speaker”?

How do you perceive the usefulness of English-speaking ability in the living and learning aboard context? What about after your study?

How do you perceive yourself as a non-native English speaker in the UK?

6. Preferences/Wants:

Do you think the current environment (e.g., class, lab, etc.) is helping you improve (spoken) English effectively?

What aspects of English regarding oral English ability do you want to improve the most?

What’s your preferred English learning method, particularly regarding improving speaking ability?

Would you prefer practicing your oral interactive skill in English with someone who is also Chinese as well or do you prefer speaking to foreigners?

Would you prefer speaking to other non-native English speakers or with native English speakers to practice English?

What kinds of things would you prefer or feel comfortable to communicate in English with others?

Which aspect of speaking skill would you like to improve the most in order to a more competent English speaker?

7. Actions/ Solutions:

What do you need to do to improve what you want regarding English competence?

Have you actively made an effort to improve it? How much time and you devote to it?

Do you know any English language course or service provided by the school or university that is aiming to improve your English competence, particularly regarding speaking? Have you tried any of the services? Why (not)? Did you find it useful?

Did you take any preparation classes for IELTS or other English proficiency test? Why (not)? Did you find it useful?

8. Suggestions

Looking back on your journey so far, do you think any changes could be made to your experience regarding using English? The changes could be about yourself or may be others such as your surroundings and the context.

Do you believe any changes should be made to your programme or the way it is taught as a result of difficulties EFL students might have with English?

9. Additional Comments

Do you have any other comments which might be helpful in assessing what English skills, particularly regarding speaking are expected of you by the university and the life in the UK in general?

Closing

Well, it has been a pleasure finding out more about your student experience. Thank you very much for participating in this interview. The data you have provided will be of great value to my project. I appreciate the time you took for this interview. I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to call you at home if I have any more questions? Thanks again. I look forward to our next interview.

* The interview questions were developed based on some sample NA questions from Gravatt, Richards & Lewis (1997), Kikuchi (2004), and Nation & Macalister (2010).

Appendix E Focus Group Guide

English Version

Moderator: Researcher (Alice SHAN)

Participants: 5 Masters/5 PhD Students

Medium of communication: Mandarin

Time: Approx. 1 hour

Location: TBC

(Behind the stage: Provide snacks and drinks, and give participants about 10 minutes to mingle and socialize before beginning the focus group.)

Greeting

Hello, everyone! Welcome and thank you for volunteering to take part in this focus group. You've been asked to participate in the focus group because you have already participated in the previous individual interviews, and your perspectives are very important. I realise you are busy, and I appreciate your time.

Introduction

This focus group discussion is to follow up the previous interviews with Chinese postgraduate students such as yourself across different disciplines in the University of Edinburgh, to further explore some issues relevant to your living and learning experiences in the UK, as well as your needs for oral participation in English. I have spoken to each of you individually, and I have certainly found many similarities and some differences between students. So maybe together we will reach some agreement and propose some ideas as a student group, and we can also talk about the things that emerged from the previous interviews that I found very interesting, and would like to hear more about your thoughts. Many students have indicated their appreciation to participate in the project to talk about their own experience and to know about others' experience as well. So please feel free to express your opinions and share your experience, and make your voice heard. The focus group discussion will take approximately one hour.

Regarding anonymity

I would like to assure you that the discussion will be anonymous. May I video record the following discussion to facilitate its recollection? (If someone has any objection, either move the camera where their faces cannot be filmed, or switch to audio recording.) The video recording is to help me better capture group dynamics and who says what during the discussion, and it will be kept safely until they are transcribed, and then they will be destroyed. The transcribed notes of the focus group

will contain no information that would allow individual subjects to be linked to specific statements. You should try to answer and comment as accurately and truthfully as possible. If there are any questions or discussions that you do not wish to answer or participate in, you do not have to do so. I and the other focus group participants would appreciate it if you would refrain from discussing the comments of other group members outside the focus group.

Ground rules

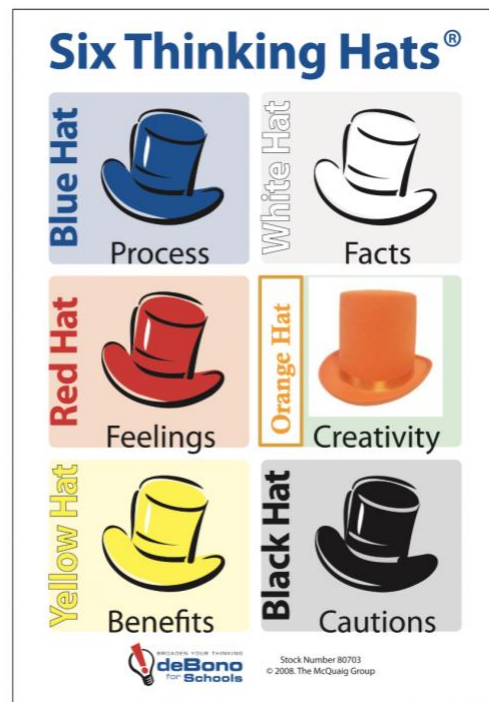
- One person speaks at a time. There may be a temptation to jump in when someone is talking but please wait until they have finished.
- There are no right or wrong answers. You do not have to agree with the views of other people in the group, but please express your opinions in a respectful manner.
- You do not have to speak in any particular order unless you are asked to.
- When you do have something to say, please do so. There are many of you in the group and it is important that I obtain the views of each of you.
- Ask the group: Does anyone have any questions?

Warm up

- I'd like you to introduce yourselves to the person next to you in pairs of three within one minute. First, tell each other your names and your schools of study. And then share one thing about yourself that has nothing to do with your study.
- The next step: please introduce the person next to you to the whole group in turn.

Introducing the “Thinking Hats”

Brief explanation with PPT slides (see below): This is a technique widely used in both public and private sector organisations as a thinking tool for group discussion and to facilitate your individual thinking about certain issues. Basically, there are six colors of thinking hats which indicate different perspectives what we look at particular issues, including white (facts & information), red (feelings & emotions), black (critical judgment and disadvantages), yellow (positive judgment & advantages), green (creativity & suggestions), blue (process and organisation). Due to the negative connotation of the notion “green hat” in Chinese culture, let's use the color “orange” instead.



Quick Summary

I will pitch some ideas proposed by students in the interviews, and let's talk about your opinions by first going around wearing different thinking hats in turn, and then we can move on to free discussion. The basic order for our discussion is: red-yellow-black-orange. We could use this technique flexibly based on the particular dialogue. In addition, I am actually wearing the blue thinking hat right now, as I've laid out the ground rules for discussion and I am informing you of the process of the focus group discussion.

Now let's begin the first round.

Topics for discussion:

1. Language preparation prior to arrival

Prospective students take English language courses for learning and living purposes before studying overseas. Be informed of potential oral participation needs and situations in the UK context, learn and practise presentations and tutoring skills, etc.

(Prompt: IELTS class and exam, provider, materials, fee, content & topics)

Example of moderating with the Thinking Hat technique:

Moderator:

The first topic for discussion is regarding language preparation prior to arrival. Some students suggested that students who want to study overseas should take English language courses before going abroad. Currently, although we have the IELTS test, some students don't think the test to represent the authentic use of English in the UK. Therefore, they think it is important to inform the prospective students of the potential challenges and opportunities regarding or participation during their stay in the UK. For example, they can practise their oral expression skills or presentation skills. Now we will explore what do you think about it?

The first round is wearing the red hat; that is to talk about your initial emotion or attitude towards it. I'll let you think about it for 5 seconds and let's start our first round one by one. Remember there is no right or wrong answer. So please feel free to express your thoughts. (5' later) Let's start from (*name of student A*).

Thank you for sharing your initial feeling of the suggestion. Now let's move onto the second hat, the yellow hat. In this round we're going to talk about the benefits or the advantages of this suggestion. Remember we will only focus on the pros of this suggestion. If you find it difficult to come up with, try to put yourself in other people's shoes to understand what might be the reasons for someone making such a suggestion. This time, I'll give you 10 seconds to think about it before we start. (10' later) Now let's start from (*name of student B*).

Great, now that we've talked about the advantages, let's put on the third hat, which is the black hat. We are going to be critical of the suggestion now, and talk about some of the disadvantages or potential challenges to implement such an idea. 10 seconds and then we start. (10' later) Now let's start from (*name of student C*).

Thank you very much. Finally, let's put on the orange hat, which means it's time to be creative! Based on what we've discussed so far, including the pros and cons, do you have any suggestions to make the original idea better, such as to make it more practical? I will give you 15 seconds to think about it. (15' later) Now let's start from (*name of student D*).

After the final round, now we have about 3 more minutes to discuss further. Please feel free to comment on anything we've mentioned previously, building on each other's ideas, or adding something new. (Free discussion)

Thank you very much! Now let's move on to the next discussion point. We will use the same order as the first round. So the topic is...

2. Washback effect

The UK university exams international students' English competence at the end of each academic year to keep students motivated to learn English.

(Prompt: organiser, form of assessment & criteria, voluntary)

3. Peer support

The UK university uses buddy system to help NNEST students with EFL buddies. The EFL buddies receive incentives (e.g. rewards, certificates) if their NNEST buddies show improvement in the end-of-the-year English assessment, particularly in speaking test.

(Prompt: organiser, language proficiency, frequency, recruitment, incentives, assessment)

4. English enhancement activities

The UK university organises activities and events for the purpose of improving students' English communication skills and intercultural communication strategies.

(Prompt: TANDEM, organiser, participants-EFL? forms and means, focus on English or other topics, frequency, recruitment)

5. Online ELLP short videos

The UK university provides clips online on situational English – available to all university students, even prior to arrival. Teach useful sentences and strategies to facilitate conversations.

(Prompt: organiser, audience, content & topics)

6. Preference for medium of communication (For Masters student group)

If there is group work/discussion in courses where there are high percentages of Chinese students, the teachers could ask students' preferences of medium of communication (mostly English/Chinese) in group work, which is to set ground rules for language use in group work before groups are formed.

(Prompt: function of English, English-speaking environment, application outside academic context, informed prospective students)

7. Practise oral engagement skills for various purposes (PhD student group)

PhD students organise workshops or sessions to practise spoken English, public speaking skills, interview skills to better present their research projects and themselves in various events for academic and professional purposes.

(Prompt: organiser, discipline, audience – inclusivity, promotion)

Concluding question (optional)

Of all the things we've discussed today, what do you think is the important issue?

What do you think of the use of the Thinking Hats for discussion?

Conclusion

- Thank you for participating! This has been a very successful discussion.
- Your opinions will be a valuable asset to the study.
- We hope you have found the discussion interesting.
- I would like to remind you that any comments featuring in this report will be anonymous.
- If there is anything you are unhappy with or wish to complain about, please feel free to speak to me after the session or contact me later.

Note: The structural procedure of this focus group guide was adapted from Krueger (2002).

Chinese Version

问候

大家好，谢谢大家抽空参加我们今天的焦点小组访谈！你们之所以被选中是因为你们之前都参加过和我研究课题有关的采访。你们的观点对我来说非常重要。

介绍

本次焦点小组访谈是接着我之前采访了我们学校各个学院的中国学生，更加深入探讨一下关于国际生在英国生活与学习方面使用英文，尤其是口语交流的情况。在之前的采访中，我发现学生们中间有很多相似的经历和想法，当然也不乏各方面的区别。所以把大家今天放到一起，也是希望你们可以针对一些学生提出的一些具体想法和建议以组的形式提出一些看法。之前采访的时候也有不少同学说起觉得很少有机会在留学期间和不是自己学院的同学交流他们对于在海外留学和生活的看法，所以希望大家今天可以各抒己见，你们的想法都没有对错，重在参与。这个访谈会进行一个多小时。

匿名参与

我可以保证你们的名字都不会在我的文章里面被公开，所有人都有代号。访谈我会录像下来，目的是在我转录文字的时候知道谁说了什么。不知道有没有人不同意被录像？当然所有的摄影材料都会安全保管起来，转录好了以后录像就会被删了。希望大家尽量把真实的想法表达出来，但是假使有个别问题你真的不知道如何回答也不必勉强。在今天的活动之外你们的身份也是保密的，我们在访谈里谁说了什么也希望大家不要带到活动之外去分享。

发言规则

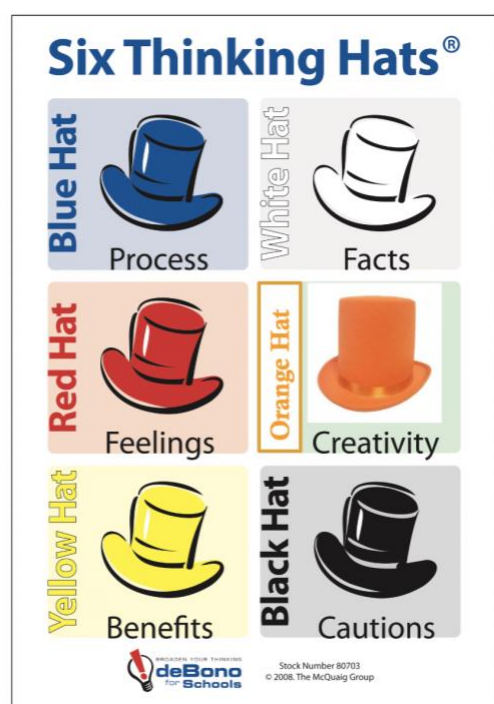
- 一个人发言的时候其他成员请认真听。也许你很想表达你的想法，不过还是请你先听别人把话说完在发表你的看法。
- 观点没有对错。你不用必须支持谁的观点，但是请你在反驳别人观点的时候尽量做到友善、礼貌。
- 如果你有什么想法请尽情表达，我们焦点小组中的每一个成员的观点都很重要。
- 问组员：还有什么问题吗？

热身

- 请在一分钟內，向你旁边的同学介绍一下你自己。先说一下你的名字和来自哪个学院的，再分享一样关于你但是和你学习完全无关的事儿。
- 第二步是向我们整个小组介绍你下你旁边的同学，初步互相认识一下。

介绍“思考帽”

（PPT 辅助见下图）六顶思考帽是英国学者 Dr. Edward de Bono 开发的一种全面思考问题的模型，广泛运用于各个领域的团队协作思考，它提供了“平行思维”的工具，避免将时间浪费在互相争执上。运用波诺的六顶思考帽，将会使混乱的思考变得更清晰，使团体中无意义的争论变成集思广益的创造，使每个人变得富有创造性。基本上，我们有代表思维控制和组织的蓝帽子，代表情绪和只觉得红帽子，代表正面和积极的黄帽子，代表负面和缺点的黑帽子，代表客观与事实的白帽子，以及象征建议与创新的绿帽子。当然由于绿帽子的概念在我们中国文化中有着特殊的意义，我暂且在实践中把颜色换成橙色帽子。



Quick
Summary

那我们讨论的过程呢是我先给大家一个议题，也就是学生提出的想法，针对如何可以更好地解决中国学生在英国留学生活期间英语口语交流的障碍和提高口语交流能力。我们首先按照红-黄-黑-橙的顺序各抒己见，然后再转为自

由讨论。具体操作不过可以根据具体情况而随机应变。其实现在我已经戴上了蓝色帽子，也就是代表思维控制和组织的帽子，因为我在给大家解释整个讨论的流程以及规则。

好了，我们现在开始吧。

讨论议题：

1. 行前的语言准备

在海外留学之前，先以上培训班的方式为全英语课程学习和生活做好充足准备。让未来的留学生了解在英国有哪些用英语进行口语交流的情况并且如何应对。比方说让学生学习和练习如何做 presentation 或是当 tutor。

(提示: 雅思辅导课, 提供方, 教材, 收费, 内容和主题)

使用“思考帽”方式的主持例稿：

主持人：（大约 4 分钟）

我们今天讨论的一个话题呢是关于中国同学在留学之前进行的语言上的准备。有些同学之前提到就是中国学生可以在出国留学之前在国内再加一些与提高英语有关的课程。现在的话虽然我们有雅思考试，但是有些同学觉得它不能代表在英国真正使用英语的情况。所以他们觉得对于未来将要留学的同学而言，我们应该让他们提前得知在英国的时候可能有哪些机会可以使用英语进行口语交流，或者在口语交流中会有哪些挑战。比方说他们可以练练口语表达和做 presentation 的能力。然后我们现在呢就来看看你们大家的想法。

首先第一轮呢我们是带上红帽子，也就是谈一谈你听到这个建议的时候的第一反应，也就是你的态度，简要的说一下就好。给大家 5 秒钟的时间思考，5 秒钟过后我们就以来分享一下。没有对错，大家可以随便说。5 秒开始。好了我们现在开始分享吧，从你开始。

OK，谢谢大家的分享。现在呢我们进行这轮的第二顶帽子，也就是黄帽子。它是代表看到这个议题的优点，也就是谈谈它有什么可取之处。注意我们这一轮只讲优点，如果你觉得有什么想反驳的，我们可以留到下一轮讲。如果你觉得很难想到有什么好处的话，你可以尽量尝试着想想为什么那个同学会提这样的建议？我给大家 10 秒钟的时间考虑。OK 时间到，我们谈谈吧。这次从你开始。

好的，现在呢我们来带上第三顶帽子，黑帽子。也就是说这一轮的我们只讲这个想法的一些潜在的缺点，或者说你们觉得在执行这个想法的时候有什么潜在的挑战或者隐患。我给大家还是 10 秒钟的时间思考。好时间到，我们开始分享吧。从你开始吧。

非常好，现在我们来带上最后一顶帽子，就是橙色的帽子。这一轮我们要开始发挥我们的想象力和创造力，根据刚才大家讲的优缺点，我们可以看看怎么样把这个想法稍微修改一下，可能让它实施起来可能性更大。我给大家 15 秒钟的时间。好了时间到。这一轮我们从你开始分享吧。

我们在剩下来的时间呢可以自由发挥，你可以针对刚才任何一个同学发表的意见谈谈你的想法，也可以提出一些我们刚才还没有谈到的想法。我们一共有三分钟的时间，大家谁想说就发言吧。

好的，非常感谢大家的踊跃发言。那么我们接下来就以相同的方式讨论第二个同学的建议。

2. 反拨作用/回流效应

英国大学在每个学年结束时考试国际学生的英语能力，以保持学生积极学习英语的动力。

(提示: 组织者, 测评方式和标准, 自愿性)

3. 朋辈帮助

英国大学可以建立“一帮一”伙伴机制，就是 **buddy system**，让母语是英语的同学和母语是非英语的同学结对子。母语是英语的同学负责辅导帮助他的小伙伴，比方说是中国学生。在学期期末的时候会有一次英语测评。如果中国小伙伴的英语有显著提高，尤其是口语方面，那他的小伙伴会有相应的奖励，证书或者其他物质上的奖励。

(提示: 组织者, 英语水平, 频率, 招人, 奖励, 考核)

4. 提高英语的活动

英国大学组织各类活动，旨在提高学生的英语沟通能力和跨文化交流策略的使用。

(提示: TANDEM, 组织者, 参与人-母语为英语者? 活动方式, 频率, 招人, 主题为英语或其他)

5. 网上教学小视频

英国大学提供有关情境英语的对话短片，所有大学生都能观看学习，甚至在抵达英国之前就可以，教授学生实用的句子和策略来促进对话能力。

(提示: 组织者, 观众, 主题和内容)

6. 区分语言偏好(针对硕士生小组)

如果在中国学生比例高的课程中进行小组工作/讨论，教师可以事先询问学生在小组中使用什么语言作为沟通媒介的偏好（大部分是英语还是汉语），然后让同学们自己根据不同偏好组队，但是约定好小组讨论时使用的主要沟通语言。

(提示: 英语的作用，英语交流环境，此法在课外的使用, 之情的学生)

7. 为各种目的练习口语沟通技巧（针对博士生小组）

博士生可以组织 workshop 或者其他类似的活动来提高口语水平、public speaking 能力、面试技巧，让他们在学术或者职业场合中更好地展现他们的研究项目和展示他们自己。

(提示: 组织者，学术领域，感兴趣的学生，宣传力度)

总结问题（选用）

在我们今天讨论的所有问题中，你认为重要的一点是什么？

对于我们在讨论中使用思考帽的方式，你们有什么评价与感受吗？

总结

- 谢谢大家的参与！今天的讨论非常成功！
- 你们的想法都是我研究非常重要的素材！
- 希望你们也觉得今天的讨论有意义。
- 再次提醒大家，我的论文中的任何评论都将是匿名的。
- 如果你有任何不满意的地方的话，请随在会后与我联系

Appendix F List of Interviewees

Code	Names	Programmes	Schools	Abbreviations
P1	Xiao	MSc TESOL	Moray House School of Education	Xiao (Edu., PGT)
P2	Tian	PhD Education		Tian (Edu., PhD)
P3	Yoyo	MFA Film Directing	Edinburgh College of Art	Yoyo (ECA, PGT)
P4	Han	PhD Architecture		Han (ECA, PhD)
P5	Tangdou	LLM International Banking, Law and Finance	Law School	Tangdou (Law, PGT)
P6	Wen	PhD Law (International Investment)		Wen (Law, PhD)
P7	Meiyi	MSc International Business & Emerging Markets	Business School	Meiyi (Biz., PGT)
P8	Dai	PhD Management		Dai (Biz., PhD)
P9	Hou	MPP Public Policy	School of Social and Political Science	Hou (SPS, PGT)
P10	Huang	PhD Sociology		Huang (SPS, PhD)
P11	Jinjin	MSc Comparative Literature	School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures	Jinjin (LLC, PGT)
P12	Zhuang	PhD Comparative Literature		Zhuang (LLC, PhD)
P13	Yong	MSc Signal Processing	School of Engineering	Yong (Eng., PGT)
P14	Hong	PhD Engineering		Hong (Eng., PhD)
P15	Xin	MSc Artificial Intelligence	School of Informatics	Xin (Info., PGT)
P16	Chen	PhD Computer Science		Chen (Info., PhD)
P17	Sheng	MSc Geographical Information	School of Geosciences	Sheng (Geo., PGT)
P18	Chang	PhD Geology and Geophysics		Chang (Geo., PhD)
P19	Wendi	Master by Research Chemistry	School of Chemistry	Wendi (Chem., PGTR)
P20	Shuai	PhD Chemistry		Shuai (Chem., PhD)

Appendix G Excerpts from Interviews

P1. Xiao, MSc TESOL, Moray House School of Education

1. presentation 还是很简单的，随便说几句，就像准备雅思口语一样，自己写好先练，练熟了上去说两分钟就好。

Presentations are rather easy. It's similar to preparing for the IELTS speaking test. You just need to prepare your script and practise what you will say until you can say it fluently. Then you just need to go up there and speak for a few minutes.

2. 我一开始的时候真不知道什么是 lecture 和 tutorial, 还有 workshop 和什么 seminar, 就是你字典查的时候就是讲座、辅导班、工作坊, 都是不是特别对的上号你知道吗? 然后懵逼了一段时间以后才慢慢适应过来。因为像我们中国的话上课就是上课对吧, 就是一个 class, 所以有时候确实不是很清楚他们这边的这个上课的习惯。

At first, I had no idea what exactly the difference was between a lecture, a tutorial, a workshop, and a seminar. The meanings of these words are very similar in Chinese. I was really confused for a while until I got a grasp of it because a lesson is just a lesson in China. So, I'm not always clear about what we are expected to do in a classroom here.

3. 我都不敢跟我爸妈说。因为我同学、爸妈肯定觉得你在那里肯定天天说英文吧, 我和我的朋友们说好像很少吧, 你想去 TESCO 都是用自动的售卖机, 除非你碰到个人说句 Sorry。

I don't even dare to tell my parents because my friends and parents in China must think I am speaking English here every day, but my friends and I really think there are few opportunities to speak English. If you go to TESCO, you can use the self-checkout, unless you bump into someone, and then you can say "Sorry".

4. 就是一开始还会说要么都尽量说英语吧, 互相练习。但是这个是要有人配合的, 如果你的小伙伴就没有什么热情了, 你也很难持续下去啊。

In the beginning, we would try to speak English as much as possible and practise English with each other. But you need a partner to do this. If your partner doesn't have the enthusiasm anymore, it's very hard for you to continue alone.

5. 我其实之前在国内的时候对我的口语是很自信的, 但是因为那个时候我都是准备过的。但是在真的对话的时候你没时间准备 topic 什么的, 然后我就总是感觉没准备好, 也没自己想说的说得好。我其实也没有什么和外国人说话的机会。然后这种挫败感吧就会打击到我的自信, 说英语的时候就会焦虑。

I was actually very confident in my spoken English back in China, but that was mostly because I was always prepared. In real communication, you don't have much

time to prepare for the topics, and I feel like I'm often caught off guard, like I can't speak as well as I want to. I don't have many chances to speak to foreigners, and this feeling kind of crushed my confidence, which has made me rather anxious about speaking.

6. 我参加 salsa 社是因为想尝试下新鲜好玩的东西，也想交点朋友。但是我们基本就是跳跳舞然后就走了，所以我也不认识其他的人。就是有些人面熟吧。我们也没有特定的舞伴就一直换。所以尽管挺好玩的，但我还没有跟他们说过什么话，也没有交到什么朋友。

I joined salsa dancing because I wanted to try something new and fun, and I also wanted to make some friends. But we pretty much just dance and then leave, so I don't know other people there. Perhaps some familiar faces, but that's it. We also don't have fixed dancing partners because we constantly change partners. So, although it's been fun, unfortunately, I didn't really talk to anyone or make any friends there.

7. 我跟我外国朋友说，你永远不会知道我说中文的时候是多么开朗和聪明。

I told my foreign friend that you would never know how outgoing and clever I am when I am speaking Chinese.

8. 我就是不知道为什么有些人问一些，就是很明显非常傻逼的问题。可能答案就在 reading material 里，就你自己读就可以想明白的。我就不太喜欢吧，有些人他们是为了说英语而说点什么的感觉。

I don't understand how some people can ask things so obvious, like, they ask very stupid questions. The answer is sometimes in the reading materials, so they could have figured it out by themselves. I think some people just want to speak for the sake of speaking English.

9. 我是骨子里很讨厌被人比下去的感觉。然后有时候说出来的东西就没有我心中想说的那么好，久而久之我就不想说了，感觉自己越来越差，听到自己讲得这么差我特别烦。

I hate the feeling that I am not as good as other people in comparison, and I hate that I can't speak as well as I want to. After a while, I just don't feel like talking at all, and I feel that I am getting worse. I'm really upset when I hear myself speak English.

10. 我就是特别想社交啊，但是就是英语词穷让我特别烦。也有点恶性循环，因为就是去了些活动也没有什么有意义的对话，没有怎么提高然后还经常说不出来，然后下次可能就不太会想去了。

I really want to socialise, but it's upsetting that I don't know how to say many things in English. It is a vicious cycle because if I go to an event or something, and I don't

have a good conversation with someone, or I feel like my vocabulary is very poor, I just don't feel like going to another one.

11. 我不是那种看到不认识的人会主动说话的类型，但是很矛盾，因为我其实是希望有人主动来跟我说话的。

I'm not the type of person who would approach others to start a conversation. It's a bit of a dilemma because I do hope someone will talk to me first.

12. 就感觉这样的人是不是有病吧，就特别装逼，下了课和中国人说什么英文啊？旁边有没有外人。

I think there is something wrong with these people, like, total show-offs. What's the point of speaking English with Chinese people after class when there are no foreigners around?

13. 刚开始来的时候肯定紧张啊，就是想找中国小伙伴一起啊，然后室友什么都是中国人觉得挺好的，但是真的没想到班里这么多中国人你知道么？然后等你就是想出去找人的时候，人家也都有自己的朋友了，你就插不进去了。

I was nervous when I first arrived, so I wanted to hang out with Chinese students, and I thought it was great that all my flatmates were Chinese. But I really didn't expect so many Chinese people in class. When I wanted to go find some other non-Chinese friends, they all formed their circles, and it would be very hard for me to join them.

P2. Tian, PhD Education, Moray House School of Education

1. 如果你在英国学习但又不跟外国人交流，那你出国学习有什么意义呢？

If you don't have rich experience speaking with non-Chinese people when you are here, then what's the point of studying abroad?

2. 可能你在准备雅思的时候觉得还蛮难的，但是真正到了英国之后，就觉得其实当时雅思的内容很基础。真正的英语交流其实复杂很多而且也很难预测。

Many students think IELTS is difficult when they are preparing for it in China, but after you come to the UK, you will find out that IELTS is very basic. Real English communication is much more complex and unpredictable.

3. 我觉得更多的中国学生要去打破这个刻板印象，因为我们都是很有趣的人，跟之前的 generation 也很不一样。我的话，我是比较会说的那种，自从我来西方读书以后也是比较活跃的。这是一种提高我交流能力的方式吧，也是我想让外国人改变对我们的刻板印象的一种努力吧。

I think more Chinese students need to break this stereotypical impression because we are fun and we are different from the previous generations. In my case, I've been quite vocal and active since I started studying in the West. This is a way to develop my own communicative competence, and also an effort to change foreigners' impressions of us.

4. 这里它会更加注重上课讨论，它会觉得只是是讨论中产生的，这跟我们国内的教学方式是很不一样的。国内的话一般都是有一个 authority 的人来把这个知识传授给你。

Discussion is valued more here than in China because people here think knowledge is created through exchanges, which is very different from how we teach and learn in China. Back in China, there is usually a person with authority to teach and pass on the knowledge to you.

5. 我们本来就是在说一门外语，说得不完美是应该是很正常的。

We are speaking a foreign language after all. I think it's okay to be imperfect.

P3. Yoyo, MFA Film Directing, Edinburgh College of Art

1. 我们的课有些就是需要制作一些短片，而老师最后只给这部电影打分。但在制作电影的过程中你跟其他组员的沟通就非常重要，因为你在一个团队中工作的，而我又是导演。这意味着包括演员，摄影和其他所有人在内的整个团队都需要听我指挥。尤其是制作纪录片更难，因为一般你等一个精彩的镜头只会一闪而过，然后就不见了。所以如果你不能很清楚有效地跟其他人沟通，你就会错过那个瞬间。

We need to produce some short films for course work, and the teacher only grades the films in the end. But during the filmmaking process, communication with other group members is crucial because we are working in a team, and I am the director. This means the whole team, including the actors, cameramen, and others must follow my direction. It is particularly challenging to make documentaries because the perfect scene usually only appears once, for a short time, and then it's gone. So, if you cannot communicate with others clearly and efficiently, you will just miss the moment.

2. 我一个同学就是英语不好没法跟队友沟通，最后他们只好要另一个中国同学，是一名摄影，加入他的组。因为那个人的英语更好，他们才可以比较好的合作嘛。就是当整个团队都在等待你的指示，而你不能说清楚你想要他们做什么的时候是非常尴尬的。

He had problems communicating with his group, and in the end, they had to ask another Chinese student, a cameraman, who could speak English better to join them, so that they could function as a team. It's very awkward when the whole team is waiting for your direction, but you can't express yourself clearly.

3. 我感觉我说英文听起来就是中文。比方说我朋友他们会说 No way 或者 That's crazy, 我懂啊。但是我不知道为什么，就是轮到我说的时候，我就会说什么 I don't believe you, 就很不地道。

The way I speak English is very similar to how I speak Chinese. When my friends say things like "No way" or "That's crazy", I totally understand them. But I don't know why whenever it's my turn, I can only think of "I don't believe you," which is not very native-like.

4. 有一天我在外面等我朋友，然后有个同学就路过嘛，然后她就挺好的，问我我 direct 的那个电影怎么样了。但我就没有多想，我其实就是想跟她说，都好的没啥可担心的。然后我就说 It is okay. You can go now. 我当时一说完我就觉得不对。她也给了我一个尴尬的眼神。我知道这么说听起来很 rude，但是我其实就是想都说好的，换成中文就很正常啊，就很 nice 啊。

One day, I was waiting for my friend outside, and a classmate was passing by. She was very friendly and asked me about the progress of the film I was directing. Honestly, I didn't even think twice, like, I just wanted her to know it was going okay

and there was nothing to worry about. So, I said, "It is okay. You can go now." I felt very wrong immediately after I said it. She gave me a strange look. I knew it sounded rude, but I was trying to tell her it was going well. It would sound perfectly normal and much nicer in Chinese.

5. 我并不觉得我的口语能力提高了多少。不过，我觉得我确实更加适应跟外国人交流了，就一定程度上更加自然了。但你要说有什么具体的提高地方，我此时此刻也说不清。

I don't think my speaking skill has improved much. But, well, I do think I am getting used to speaking to foreigners, so it's getting easier to some extent. But I can't really point out which area I've improved exactly at this very moment.

6. 说实话我来之前都没有意识到我这么依赖字幕你知道吗，是来了以后才发现的自己居然如此依赖。像我们上课老师会放片子然后让我们讨论，一般英语片就没有字幕。这个我觉得有时候也会影响我的吸收效果，就是不能及时 get 到它的点，不知道在说什么。要是放一些别的国家的电影，我现在觉得哪怕有个英文字幕我也很开心。我特别害怕没有字幕的情况，就感觉总是半蒙半猜。

I didn't realise that I was so dependent on subtitles before coming to the UK. Our teachers often play films and ask us to discuss the films in class, and usually, there aren't subtitles. I think it impedes my understanding because I often cannot get the main point immediately without the subtitles. If they play films from non-English speaking countries with English subtitles, then I am super happy. I'm terrified without subtitles because I feel like I'm half guessing most of the time.

P4. Han, PhD Architecture, Edinburgh College of Art

1. 我要客户做了很多网站设计。有些人可能会认为我只是设计，像是绘制图片或使用一些软件，但实际上你必须跟客户要沟通，然后搞清楚他们想要什么，而且是在设计过程的前后整个过程中了解和满足他们的需求和要求。这就不仅仅是设计本身，而是和客户一起合作的一个形式。

I do a lot of website design for clients. Some people might think that I just design, like drawing pictures or using some software. But the thing is, you have to communicate well with the clients about what they want, find out their needs and meet their requirements before and during of the designing process. It's not just about designing, but also about working together with people.

2. 我觉得他们挺可惜的。如果英语说得好点的话肯定成绩要更好。

I felt very bad for them. Their grades would have been higher if they could have spoken English better.

3. 当时练雅思的时候我手机存了一些雅思的听力材料。有一次我清理手机内存，就把它放出来自己听了听。当时就觉得，哇，觉得他们读的特别特别的慢，而且还是那种比较标准的很容易听懂的口音。三年前考试的时候，我还觉得他们速度怎么这么快，就是感觉挺要求好高。现在就觉得说的好慢，都有点不真实。

I saved some IELTS listening materials on my phone when I was preparing for the exam. One day, when I was freeing up space on my phone, I pressed the play button, and I thought, wow, the speakers spoke so slowly and clearly with such a standard accent! When I was taking the exam three years ago, I thought they were speaking very fast on the tape, and I found the exam quite difficult. Now I think they speak so slowly that feels unnatural.

4. 首先你必须要有能来英国的这个能力，那么雅思就是你能力的一种体现。我觉得这个衡量标准很重要，因为你没有的话，很多人可能压根儿就不知道他即将面对的是什么，至少在语言方面他给了你一个要求。

First of all, you need to prove you have the capability to study in the UK, and your IELTS score is one way to demonstrate your ability. I think it's very important, without which many people have no idea what they will be facing. At least IELTS gives you a basic idea of the level of difficulty in the language area.

5. 你考试的时候基本上首先都是你在说，然后考官都是 native speaker，很标准很慢的问你几个问题。你其实不会考虑到什么很快的语速啊还有各种 accent 啊。但是现实生活中肯定不是这样的啊。

When you take the exam, it is mostly just you doing the talking. The examiners in the speaking part are all native speakers, and they ask you a few questions slowly

with a standard English accent. You don't have to worry about how fast they speak or their accents. But it's totally different in real-life communication.

6. 我自己读研究生的时候就是不太懂行内的东西，所以可能还处于被动的接受知识的状态。现在读博士的时候，就更有底气，敢跟人家去交流，人家看你的眼光也许也不一样了。

During my Masters study, I didn't know much about my field, so I was mostly just learning and receiving knowledge. But since I started my PhD, I've become more confident in myself and my research ability, and I'm more willing to communicate with others. People also seem to take me more seriously now that I am doing a PhD.

7. 他们说英语没有我想象中那么好。

Their spoken English isn't as good as I thought.

P5. Tangdou, LLM International Banking, Law and Finance, Law School

1. 我们有 presentation 的，但是不是很重要，都不算分的。

We have presentations, but they are not important because they are not graded.

2. 基本上你都不用说什么英文的，你想说都没啥机，那些老外都会跟你说 number 1, number 5 那种，太方便啦，你根本不用想。如果是打电话的话可能稍微难一点，但是也就是比较简单那几句。

You basically don't need to speak English at all because it's not really needed. For example, the foreigners will just tell you that they want number 1 or number 5 on the menu, so it's straightforward, and you don't have to think about it. If you are on the phone, it can be a bit more difficult, but the conversations are just the basic routine.

3. 我觉得他应该是来之前从事过法律工作很多年了，所以他都可以把老师说的跟他自己的工作经验联系在一起。但是我的话可能更多的还是新知识。

I think because he practised law for many years before coming here, he could relate very well to many things the teachers were talking about. But for me, it's mostly just new knowledge.

4. 我就是不在班里说啊，但是我们班同学是我挺好的，没那么差。但是我总把自己想得特别差。就感觉焦虑啊，怎么这么差呀，感觉明明就是班上垫底的呀。也可能是对自己要求太高了吧。可能是以前在中国上学的时候，没有这么差过。觉得有点不大适应，这个过程太痛苦了。

I don't speak in class, even though my classmates tell me that I'm doing well, not that bad. But I always think I'm terrible, and I'm anxious that I'm clearly at the bottom of the class. Maybe I'm expecting too much of myself. But I've never felt like that in China. The adjustment process is painful.

5. 如果外国同学也不见得显示出很强烈的跟你做朋友的意愿的话，肯定是会比较难交到要好的外国朋友吧。

If the non-Chinese students haven't shown a strong interest to be friends with you, it is very difficult to make international friendships.

6. 可能出国以前觉得外国人嘛，尤其是白人，英语都说的溜溜溜啊，但是现在发现其实也不是，他们有些不是 native speaker 的口音啊那也好像是一地鸡毛哈哈。

Before I came here, I was under the impression that all foreigners, especially white people, must speak English very fluently. But now I've realised it's not the case. Some other non-native English speakers, hmm, they also speak with very strong accents, ha-ha.

P6. Wen, PhD Law (International Investment), Law School

1. 国内的同学父母或者爸妈会觉得说有留学过的同学回去英语可以变得 666, 我觉得可能是一个错误的认识, 因为我觉得看你留过学英语好不好还是要看个人的。比方说确实有那些在英国这里也跟中国人扎堆, 平时中文不知道讲的比英文多多少的人。

My classmates and parents in China usually think that if you've studied abroad, your English will be excellent by the time you go back. But I think it's a misunderstanding because it totally depends on the individuals. For example, some Chinese students in the UK only socialise with other Chinese people, and they speak Chinese way more than English here.

2. 我感觉自己说英文的时候就自己会控制不住地担心我是不是 grammar 用错了, 尤其是刚来的时候, 感觉就是以前英语应试的后遗症。

When I speak English, especially when I first came here, I can't help myself but worry about if I'm making grammatical mistakes. It's like a post-exam disorder.

3. 有一次有一个外国人跟我说我有很特别的 Cantonese accent, 然后我就对我的口语觉得蛮在意的吧。有时候会担心说怕人家听不懂我说什么, 因为有口音嘛。所以, 嗯, 我会比较注意一点。

I was told once by a foreigner that I had a distinctive Cantonese accent, which made me more aware of my oral English. Sometimes I am afraid that others don't understand me because of my accent. So yeah, I try to pay attention to it.

4. 你的口音其实不是交流里最重要的事吧。这里的人说话都是有各种口音的, 外国人也好, 英国本地人也好。所以我觉得他们是不是不会这么 judge, 也习惯了所有各种口音的英语吧。一般来说, 如果你是在说你的 research 或者就是在谈你的想法的时候, 其实大家更在意的是你说的内容, 不是你英语有多好。

Your pronunciation is not the most important thing in communication. People here speak with all kinds of accents, people from abroad, as well as British people. So, I think maybe they are not that judgemental, and they are used to different accents. When you are talking about your research or just sharing your thoughts in general, it's less about how well you speak English but more about what you are saying.

5. 我导师就是这么跟我解释的, 说雅思只是个证明, 说明你的水平足够让你在这里学习, 够用就好。你的分数更高就更高吧, 但是不代表你学术能力很好。

My supervisor told me that the IELTS score is just to prove that your English is good enough to study here. Of course, the higher, the better, but a high score doesn't mean that your academic ability is strong.

6. 当你学术能力提高了，你就越会想去与其他人沟通，因为你更自信了嘛。

When your academic competence develops, you will be more willing to communicate with other people because you are more confident.

7. 她就是不知道为什么挤兑我们，碗也不刷，沐浴液什么就丢在那里，真的受不了。然后就是经常喝酒什么的，晚上也很吵。我感觉中国人就是比较安静，如果叫人来吃饭也是会马上收拾好的。我之前跟外国女生住的时候她们的习惯真的很奇怪，我中国室友都是把自己的东西摆的很干净，外国室友就是乱用餐具和烧菜的锅，用了还不给你洗，真的每天为这种事情烦，还跟他们说不清楚。

For some reason, a girl was just very mean to us Chinese people. She didn't do the dishes and left her shampoo and stuff everywhere, just beyond my tolerance. They also drank a lot and made much noise at night. I think Chinese students are quieter and better behaved. If we ask someone to come over for dinner, we will clean up afterwards. Some of my previous non-Chinese flatmates had bizarre habits. My Chinese flatmates and I would tidy up our things next to the kitchen sink, but the non-Chinese flatmates not only used our cookware and utensils but also didn't even care to clean up. I was sick of worrying about these things every day, and I couldn't straighten things out because it was very difficult to communicate with them.

P7. Meiyi, MSc International Business & Emerging Markets, Business School

1. 我们上个学期有个 group project, 然后我们就是要跟在哥伦比亚的客户 skype 做 business plan。我们的 final presentation 就是包括一个 skype meeting。我们这个学期是跟这边当地的 clients 合作, 所以会有比较多的那种定期的 meeting, 然后他们也会来我们的 final presentation。

We had a group project last semester, and we often needed to Skype with clients in Colombia to make business plans. Our final presentation also included a Skype meeting. We are working with local clients this semester, so we have regular meetings, and they will come to our final presentations.

2. 我之前来的时候口语确实非常的糟糕, 然后现在经过一年不到的时间, 也可以就是比较自如的交流……就是以前人家再说你基本只是听, 现在的话我也会跟他们聊几句, 他们也会多跟我说一些, 就是感觉更加能够融入进去。

I wouldn't say I've improved a lot, but I've certainly improved. When I first came here, my speaking was really terrible. But after just less than a year, I can now communicate in English more naturally and comfortably. I am no longer anxious or afraid. I used to just listen to others, but now I also talk to them, and they will also speak more to me. Overall, I definitely feel more involved in English conversations.

3. 我觉得雅思并不能准确体现你的英语水平, 但我觉得好的人自然就把它过了, 不好的人你连雅思要求都到不了, 你怎么出来混? 来了以后肯定也是很吃力的。

I don't think IELTS shows your English competence accurately, but I think if you are good enough, you will meet the language requirement without much difficulty. If you can't even meet the IELTS requirement, I don't think you can do well here. You will definitely struggle a lot.

4. 如果你英语讲得很清楚流利又很自信的话, 那别人可能就会觉得你很聪明啦, 可能是受过比较好的教育那种。

If you speak English fluently, clearly, and confidently, others probably think you are very smart and come from a very good educational background.

5. 我喜欢跟人家在一个比较小的私密的环境里交流吧, 所以喜欢一对一的那种, 不喜欢超过三个人的。我不知道为什么, 就是人一多我讲话就会紧张。

I like to talk to other people in a small and intimate environment, so prefer one on one or with no more than three people. I get very nervous somehow when I speak to a bigger group.

6. 其实我以前都没有意识到，亚洲有些国家他们英语其实也是官方语言，像是新加坡还有马来西亚这些国家。

I didn't realise that English is also the official language in some Asian countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia.

7. 他们(母语为英语的同学)平时玩的时候说的更快，那我就更难加入了。

The NESs speak even faster when they are just talking to each other, so it's very difficult for me to join them.

P8. Dai, PhD Management, Business School

1. 我还蛮喜欢教本科生的，因为我在教学过程中也学到很多，也是一个锻炼我 presentation skill 的机会吧。我以前还蛮怕做 presentation 的，因为我本身是一个非常害羞的人，而且我的声音很轻。但我觉得我现在好多了。

I like to tutor the undergraduate students because I've been learning through the teaching practice, and it is also an excellent chance for me to practise presentation skills. I used to fear doing presentations because I am naturally very shy, and my voice is very soft. But I think I am getting better at it.

2. 英语口语相比而言，跟以前差不多。

In comparison, my English-speaking skill hasn't changed that much.

3. 不管他们是喜欢英语还是不喜欢也罢，中国学生学习英语都是为了考试啊，要出国读书的话也是得考英语。一旦考试的这个压力不在的话，我觉得其实不会有太多同学会说真的是对英文有多么浓烈的兴趣会继续去学。

Regardless of whether they like it or not, most Chinese students learn English to pass the exams in China, and to pass the English requirement if they want to study abroad. Once that pressure is gone, I don't think many students would continue to have a strong drive to learn English simply for their interest in the language.

4. 我们每周都见一次，所以还是挺熟的。他们是我玩的最好的一批外国人了，而且我觉得我们关系都挺好的。当然我们在一起的话也会聊很多跟弓道无关的事。

We meet every week, so we are quite familiar with each other. They are the non-Chinese people I associate with most often, and I feel comfortable with this group. Of course, we talk about a lot of other things besides Kyudo.

5. 不管你是当着全班的面发言还是小组发言，都需要你的听力能力、口语能力、并且同时还需要分析能力、逻辑思考、critical thinking。有时候还是很难的，所以如果你想尽量最大化的去消化课堂知识，我觉得集中注意力听别人说什么也挺好的。

Oral participation in class, whether in front of the whole class or in group discussion, requires listening comprehension, speaking skills, as well as analytical, logical, and critical thinking skills at the same time. It can be very challenging, so if you want to take in as much as possible, it's a good idea to just concentrate on listening to the others.

P9. Hou, MPP Public Policy, School of Social and Political Science

1. 像上一周的话，我的 supervisor 让我到当地的那些店家，就是去问他们我们能不能把我们的 can 放在那里。对我这个志愿工作的话也算是一个突破吧，因为之前也没有这样逼着我去和当地人交流。我一开始很担心自己能不能讲明白我要做什么，后来觉得自己还可以。

Last week, my supervisor asked me to go to some local shops to ask them if we could leave our cans there for fundraising. It was a breakthrough for me on the job because I had never been asked to just go and interact with local people. At first, I was quite worried because I wasn't sure if I could clearly explain what I wanted to do. But I think I did pretty well.

2. 我来了以后一直对想要出国的小伙伴说，出国学习要慎重，尤其是来英国，一定要做好准备，不要没想清楚或者没有准备好就出来。因为你可能会发现你的学习比想象中难，然后你就没有时间出去玩去体验当地文化。你也会发现英语没你想象中提高的多，至少没有那么快。

I've been warning my friends in China who want to study abroad, especially in the UK, that they must think carefully and prepare well before doing so. Because you may find the programme much harder than you've expected, and you won't have time to go out and explore the local culture. You will also find out that your English may not improve as much as you hope or as fast as you want.

3. 我们有很多 guest speaker 过来讲 government policy，但是我基本都荒废了。就是还是那个问题，交流的第一步就是要听懂人家。你听懂了才能知道人家在说什么，才能进一步地进行更深入的交流。上个学期都是三个小时三个小时的 lecture，但是我们没有那么的一个老师在讲，大家一直听。我们的话就是一直有非常多的对话，我就是真的不知道他们在说什么，完全插不上话，我就觉得非常的浪费。但是如果对于我的其他同学来讲，他们肯定就觉得这样子很好。

Many guest speakers came to our classes to talk about government policies, but I basically wasted all the opportunities. We had many three-hour classes last semester, and they were very interactive. But I really didn't know what they were referring to most of the time. I was completely lost in the discussions, and I just felt it was a waste of time and money. But I guess it must be a wonderful learning experience for the other students.

4. 可能我以后工作需要用到英语吧，比方说我在国内一个比较 international 的环境里，但是估计可能性不大。

Maybe I will need to use English for my work, like, if I am in an international environment somewhere in China, but probably not.

5. 我经常感觉很失落，尤其是刚来的时候，我真的不知道该怎么办。每个人好像多混得挺好的，我就特别没有安全感，我也不想跟别人去 social，感觉会暴

露我的缺点。我其实在我本科大学是很 active 的，你知道，国内就是社团的 leader 啊这样。但是我在这里有时候就像一个人静静。

I often felt very down, especially in the beginning, and I didn't know what to do. Everyone else seemed to be doing alright and I just felt so insecure, and I didn't feel like socialising with anyone and exposing my weakness. I was actually very active in my previous university, you know, leading different student societies. But here, I just want to be left alone sometimes.

P10. Huang, PhD Sociology, School of Social and Political Science

1. 我也只能自己感觉吧，比之前好点，但是没有什么实质的或者量化的证据。

I haven't taken an IELTS exam lately, so it's just based on my own perception. I think my English has improved, like, I can feel it. But there is nothing tangible like a new test result to prove it.

2. 我们在国内看美剧英剧的时候，我们看的总是那些准备过的、受过专业训练的演员的英语，但是可能其实不是很 common。比方说像我看 Downton Abbey，他们都说的很清楚好优美，至少 upstairs 的人是这样的。但是现实生活中其实很多人不是这么说话的。

When we watch English TV shows in China, we always watch the prepared and trained actors' English, but maybe it's not that common. Like, I watch Downton Abbey, and they all talk very clearly and elegantly, at least the upstairs people. But in reality, many people don't talk like that.

3. 我觉得雅思作为一个考试可以一定程度上衡量同学们的水平，但是它肯定不是一个非常完美的考试，比方说就是不能体现日常生活中的那些交际，而且我知道有些 native speaker 还考不到超级高分。这种语言考试都有它的弊端，但是站在一个比较大的层面看，可能它的意义就更大一些。

I think IELTS as an exam can evaluate students' English competence to some extent, but of course, it's not perfect. For instance, it doesn't reflect a lot of the daily communication we have here, and I know some native English speakers can't get very high scores on the IELTS exam. There are problems with these exams, but I think they make sense maybe on a large scale.

4. 我觉得你准备与不准备雅思，其实差距还是挺大的。尽管你真正生活在海外会遇到的一些场景，好像又会雅思的关系不是那么大，但是也许你不这样准备应试更加不能够与人用英语交流。

I believe there is a big difference between before and after preparing for the IELTS exam. Although the real-life encounters with English communication can be quite different from the exams, your speaking ability could even be worse without such preparation.

5. 跟中国小伙伴的话我一般都是去吃火锅或者玩桌游吧。如果是跟我外国同学的话，我们一般就是出去 pub 喝一杯，或者看个电影什么的。我觉得跟不同文化背景的人 social，你需要尽量相对应的调整一下自己的交往方式吧。

I usually have hotpots and maybe play board games with my Chinese friends, and if I am with my foreign friends, we usually go out for a drink, watch a movie or something. I think it's just different ways of socialising based on different cultural norms, and I try to adjust to both.

**P11. Jinjin, MSc Comparative Literature, School of Literatures,
Languages and Cultures (LLC)**

1. 我觉得口语交流不仅仅是锻炼到了你的语言水平，其实也是你整个人的一個状态、一个人际交往的能力的提升。

I think oral participation not only improves your language ability, but also enhances your interpersonal communication skills as a whole.

2. 有些老师是有那个 office hours，你可以课后找他，然后有些老师是没有说的，那你不知道是不是就是说上课问问题还是课后去问。因为一般在国内的话，上课也不太有人问问题。如果有什么问题的话，大家也会下课问。但是这边有时候老师下了课后就没有人影了。

Some teachers told us about their office hours when we could go and ask questions in person, but some did not. So, I don't know if I should ask questions in class or wait until the class is over. Asking questions in class is not that common in China. We usually ask after class if we have any questions. But the teachers here are sometimes nowhere to be found once the class is over.

3. 雅思作为一个考试肯定有它的技巧，那你报个补习班好的老师就会教你一些实用的解题技巧。

Since IELTS is an exam, there are certain strategies for scoring higher. A good teacher in the IELTS preparation class can teach you those strategies.

4. 除非我很确定的答案，否则我是不会开口的。

I won't speak up in class unless I am very sure and satisfied with what I want to say and know how to say it in English.

5. 我们在引进国外的文学作品还有电影的时候会把名字都翻译成中文的。所以我有时候就是得好好想想别人说的作品我有没有读过看过。如果是中国文学作品的话，我觉得很少有外国同学真的很了解，至少不会像我们了解西方名著这样。所以讨论的时候中间就有一个隔阂在。

We translate the names and titles to Chinese when we introduce non-Chinese literature and movies to China. So, I often need to think really hard if other people are talking about something I've read or seen. As for Chinese literature, I think very few foreigners really know about it, at least not as much as we know about Western literature. There is definitely a barrier.

6. 有些同学是很积极的，我就是属于比较宅在家里那种。

Some students are just more active than me in general. I am the kinda person who likes to spend time by myself at home.

7. 我不是很喜欢去 pub 或者喝酒。我更喜欢跟朋友在家吃或者出去吃饭，可能去唱 K，但是不需要酒精。

I am not interested in going to pubs or drinking. It's probably a cultural difference. I prefer having dinner with my friends at home or in a restaurant, and maybe we do karaoke, where alcohol is not involved.

P12. Zhuang, PhD Comparative Literature, LLC

1. 能基本不出钱住宿舍还能结交很多国际友人，有这种机会去想别人学习，各方面有提高，特别好。

I can live in the student accommodation at such a low price, and I can make international friends. I think it's also an excellent opportunity to learn from others and improve my transferable skills.

2. 我觉得有很多学生完全可以在这里就是读书，直到毕业也可以不和外国人有什么交流。这里太方便了。如果你买东西，有中超啊，其他的都是自助结账，而且其实你和店员也不会有什么互动，顶多他问你句 “Do you have a bag?” 如果你要理发，你只要去中国理发店。如果你想出去吃饭，可以去中餐馆。有些学生也只和其他中国学生一起出去玩。毕竟，爱丁堡中国还是很多的。

I think many students can finish their studies without really interacting with any foreigners. It's just really convenient here. If you want to buy something, there are Chinese stores. Even if you go to other stores, you don't really interact with anyone anyway. Maybe they just ask, “Do you need a bag?” If you want to get a haircut, you can go to a Chinese barber. If you want to eat out, you can go to a Chinese restaurant. Some students just hang out with other Chinese students. After all, there are a lot of Chinese people in Edinburgh.

3. 肯定是有提升空间的，但是其实我现在一定程度上又还是对自己水平感得比较满意的，就不是很想特意花时间去提高了。

There is definitely room to improve my speaking ability, but in the meantime, I am pretty content with my current proficiency, so I don't feel the need to spend extra time working on it.

P13. Yong, MSc Signal Processing, School of Engineering

1. 我在餐厅打工主要就是为了赚点外快，然后在校外和住的地方以外做点什么呢。爱丁堡生活本来就挺贵的，而且我们 KB 那里还有我住的地方真的很 boring……然后打工的餐厅是你工作的时候包伙食的。

I work in a Chinese restaurant mostly because I want to make some money off campus and I don't want to be home alone all the time. It's expensive to live here, and the area where I study and live is too boring... The restaurant also covers my meals when I work there.

2. 我当时就是拿到一个话题就可以哗啦背一大串，考试的时候还要停顿一下，假装在思考。

I was so familiar with the topics in the IELTS database that I could just fluently recite a whole script for any topic that I got. But when I was taking the exam, I had to pause and pretend that I was thinking.

3. 我们班的同学一般都不会问问题的，我算是比较少数还能跟老师说点什么的吧。但是我也是因为知道只要是我不明白的问题，人家肯定也不明白所以才说的。

My classmates don't usually ask questions, but I am one of the few who do. I only speak in class because I'm sure if I don't understand something, most of the other students would have the same question.

4. 英语可能对于有些领域的人来说还是重要的，比方说国际关系啊、教英语，或者跨国公司吧。但总体上我觉得不算是很重要，尤其是口语吧，因为绝大多数的交流应该都是通过 email 的，或者其他书面方式。

English may be important for people who work in specific fields, like international relations, teaching English, or maybe in international companies. But generally, I don't think it's very important, especially your spoken English, because maybe much of the communication will be done in writing, like through emails.

5. 反正外国人本来就觉得我们中国人英语不太好。

Foreigners think we Chinese are not very good at English communication anyway.

P14. Hong, PhD Engineering, School of Engineering

1. 我还是蛮喜欢做 presentation 的，一开始虽然会紧张，但你多做几次就好啦。而且你 presentation 是为了得到人家的建议，让你更好地做你的 research，还有我觉得你解释你的 research 也是你作为一个 researcher 能力的一部分。而且我也不太喜欢背稿子，现在熟练了可以脱稿就脱稿，自然一点。

I like to do presentations now, although I was nervous in the beginning. As a PhD student, you are doing the presentations to get people's advice, so that you can do your research better, and I think being able to explain your ideas is also part of your ability as a researcher. I don't like to rely too much on scripts nowadays. I would prefer not to use any if I can, so I look more natural when I speak.

2. 我觉得这边当地人的 accent 其实一开始也满难懂的，现在好一点。不过其实我跟本地苏格兰人的交流也不多。但对于我们中国来的，你也知道在中国的话我们有很多不同的方言，所以英文也这样很正常。只是苏格兰口音真的太别具一格了，哈哈。我朋友在伦敦读书，他们来这边上次来玩，在餐厅里根本听不懂服务员在说什么，还蛮搞笑的。而且就算是在伦敦，他们说周围也很少有人是像电视里那种说话的方式。

I think the local accent here is really hard to understand at first, but now it's easier. Actually, I don't really communicate with Scottish people very often. But I mean, I am from China, and in China you know, we also have many Chinese dialects, so it's normal for English, too. It's just the Scottish accent is so different, ha-ha. When my friends who study in London came here for a visit, they didn't understand the restaurant staff at all. It was very funny. And even in London, they tell me very few people around them speak like those people in TV.

3. 就我以前如果听不懂人家说什么的时候，我就笑笑过然后当做听懂了。但我现在的话可能就会让他们帮我解释一下说清楚一点，因为如果我感兴趣的话，我会想听懂他们所说的全部，然后也跟他们一起聊。

In the past, when I didn't understand something that other people said, I just smiled and pretended that I understood. But now maybe I will ask them to explain or clarify for me because if I'm interested, I'd like to know everything they've said and perhaps discuss more.

4. 你就是看人家啊，人家笑你也笑，虽然你可能没有 get 到。语言交流，这种尤其很文化背景有关联的东西，听不懂就是三分靠听力七分靠演技。

You can just observe other people. Laugh when they laugh, even though you might not understand the humour. To deal with this type of English communication which involves cultural knowledge, 30 percent depends on your listening ability, and the rest 70 percent relies on your acting skill.

5. 我的话一开始还是跟外国人玩的比较多，但是现在时间久了还是更多跟中国人玩。不是说不能跟外国人交流，而是最本质的那种亲近感没有。我感觉不少中国人都是这样的。

I hung out with foreigners more frequently at first, but now I spend more time socialising with Chinese people. It's not like I can't communicate well with people from other countries, but I just feel that I have more fun, and I share cultural understandings with fellow Chinese friends. I noticed it's the case for many Chinese people.

6. 也许好的英语能力对你的工作本身来说并不重要，但随着中国变得越来越国际化，以后会有很多机会跟其他国家的人或者公司开展业务或者合作。你需要做的是确保当有这个机会的时候，你的老板会先考虑你，然后你已经其实做好了准备。

Maybe good English language skills are not essential for your work, but as China becomes more international, there will be many opportunities for Chinese people to do business or work with people and companies from other countries. You need to make sure that when the opportunity presents itself, your boss will think of you first, and you will be ready.

7. 我以前会把自己的 presentation 录下来，然后自己去听回放，看我有什么问题，然后怎么样可以提高我的口语。比方说，我感觉我自己以前说的很快，然后有些就是发音不是很清楚，尤其是句子结束的时候吧。所以我现在就是刻意的会说的慢一点，有意识的去想我是不是说的清楚。

I used to record my presentations, and I would re-watch them and think about what problems I had, and how I could improve my speaking. For example, I think I used to speak really fast, and sometimes my pronunciation was not very clear, especially towards the end of a sentence. So now, I would try to slow things down and think about if I'm speaking clearly.

8. 我觉得他们应该高兴啊，我们在说他们的语言。如果是我的话，外国人用我的母语跟我交流，那我肯定是很自豪的，而且很友好。

I think they should be happy that we are speaking their language. I will be very proud and friendly if foreigners try to speak to me in my mother tongue.

9. 我们周五有一个 Friday night pub 活动那种，就是大家去 KB 的 pub 喝喝酒聊聊天，闲扯一下。但是不是说很疯狂的喝的那种，就是放松一下随便聊聊。

Our group has a Friday Night Pub event. We go for a drink at the pub in Kings Buildings, chit-chatting, you know. No crazy drinking whatsoever, just relaxing and talking.

P15. Xin, MSc Artificial Intelligence, School of Informatics

1. 我可以肯定老师是没给评分的，因为他就杵在那儿，也没有记笔记。他就 presentation 好了以后问了我们几个问题。然后我说的那个一直不来 group work 的也没有来 presentation，那个老师居然问都不问一下是谁没来。就是很无语，懵逼无解。

I'm sure it was not graded because the teacher was just standing there like he did not even take notes. He just asked us several questions after the presentation, and that was it. The student who had not participated in the group work did not show up for the presentation, and the teacher did not even ask who it was! I'm speechless. Unbelievable!

2. 不管你再怎么忙，时间挤一挤还是有的，但是主要是我觉得很多人可能觉得没有这个必要，而且中国人可能比较害羞，就是你不是说很强烈的让他去做什么事儿，他是不会主动做的。

No matter how busy you are, there must be some time for you to socialise if you want, but I think many Chinese students may feel that it is not necessary. More importantly, Chinese people are usually shy and less active compared to Westerners. So, unless you are pushing them to do something, they probably will not take the initiative to do it, especially when there is no instant gain.

3. 基本上就只听过美国人和英国人那种比较标准的英语，还有就是中国人的，都没有怎么听到过其他国家的口音。哦，就是雅思的时候还给放点什么澳大利亚的。所以一开始特别不习惯。

I've basically only heard the standard British English and American English, as well as speaking English with a Chinese accent. So, I haven't really heard any authentic English spoken with other accents. Oh, I've heard some Australian English during the IELTS exam preparation. So, it felt quite odd to listen to other accents at first.

4. 我是比较会做题的那种，比较擅长阅读，但是那个不能说明我真正的阅读水平如何。只是因为我会做题，会找套路。可能整篇文章下来我题都答对了，但是我不是很清楚这边文章真正在讲什么。

I'm just really good at taking the exam, especially the reading section, but it doesn't reflect my real ability. I am just skilled at finding the clues and answering the questions. But even if I get all the answers correct, it doesn't mean I understand what the article really is about.

5. 我比较宅不怎么社交出去，感觉还挺贵的。每次出去一趟随便就可以花个 20 镑，吃的喝的还有其他交通什么的。我也不算很有钱。

I don't socialise very much because it's not cheap to go out. You can easily spend £20 every time on food, drinks and other things like transport, but my budget is a bit tight.

6. 我觉得这样总是和其他专业的人一起上课，那我们选个专业有什么意义呢？

I don't know what's the point of even choosing a programme if we are having classes with students from other programmes all the time.

P16. Chen, PhD Computer Science, School of Informatics

1. 代码语言就是全球通用的，这里跟国内我们用的一样的。像我们领域的话，更多的是用公式和画图交流最有效。所以其实对英语水平要求不是很高，尤其是口语。

The language of coding is universally understood. It's the same as what we would use in China. In my area, we communicate with mathematical formulae and computer graphics most effectively. So, actually, there is not a high requirement for high English proficiency, especially oral English.

2. 我喜欢去看电影，刚来这里的时候还办了会员卡，但他们放英语电影就没有字幕。我看大片就是看动作效果很不错，但我觉得我每次都错过了一些故事情节，还有一些笑话和俚语。所以有时候我就在家再看一遍，那字幕的那种。

I got a membership card at the cinema because I like to see movies. But unfortunately, there aren't subtitles. I like the action effects, but I feel that I missed some of the storylines every time and, of course, jokes and slang, too. So sometimes I will watch them again at home with subtitles.

3. 我来之前还挺期待就是跟这边说着流利标准英语的人沟通的。我自己想提高口语，因为我还是挺担心自己的口语的。但爱丁堡其实非常的国际化，我也遇到过很多外国人都是操这各种口音，包括我老板也是。所以我现在就不会担心自己的英语了。

Before I came here, I was really looking forward to speaking to people who would speak fluently with a standard English accent. I wanted to speak better English, and I was anxious about my own speaking ability. But Edinburgh is very international, and I've met many foreigners with different accents, including my boss. I'm no longer worried about my English anymore.

4. 如果是因为我英语口语不好，使我跟我导师交流很有问题，说着他们明说让我去练练口语，那我肯定会很紧张，也会去努力提高。但是即使目前我的口语远远谈不上很好吧，我们交流是没有问题的，而且我们的话有很多其他方式可以辅助交流。

If I have a major problem communicating with my supervisors, or if they ask me to work on my speaking, I will probably feel very nervous and work harder to improve my speaking. Although it's far from perfect, we communicate just fine so far, and we also have all the tools to assist our communication.

5. 我觉得可能就是人文学院的同学本身就比较积极活泼，比我们这种理工科的学生更加会玩。

I think people in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences are more active, and they are better at socialising, compared to people in my school.

P17. Sheng, MSc Geographical Information, School of Geosciences

1. 就不是很互动的，因为本来就是事先写好的一个口头的 report。而且比写论文简单，因为你写的时候用的单词要来的复杂。

It's not very interactive so it's like a verbal report, actually easier than writing a paper because you need to use more complex words when you write.

2. 我感觉我现在用的词汇基本都是大学以前学的。我的写作能力确实提高了很多，但是我口语用的单词就是还是很简单很贫乏。

I feel like I'm using most of the vocabulary I learned before university. My writing has improved significantly, but somehow the words I use in spoken English are still very simple and plain.

3. 有时候我说了什么，然后我意识到可以用一个更好的表达，但是我总是首先直觉地去用跟中文很相似的表达方式。我记得有一次跟我一个同组的同学说 I don't want to disappoint you, 我不想让大家失望嘛。然后后来有一天，我听到 I won't let you down 这个表达，我就感觉，为什么我想不到这个呢？就感觉地道很多。

Sometimes after I've said something, I then realised I could have used a better phrase, but I always seem to speak intuitively in a way that is more similar to Chinese. I remember I once told my group member, "I don't want to disappoint you". Then the other day, I heard "I won't let you down", and I was like, why didn't I think of using this phrase? It's so much more native-like.

4. 我一个外国同学跟我说，我觉得你英语这个学期好多了，你自己有没有注意到？我说我没有。但他跟我说他觉得我的口语流利很多，而且就是用词吧，更加准确了。可能他之前有注意到我有时候用单词有点乱用吧。

One of my foreign classmates told me, "I think your English is much better this semester. Have you noticed that?" I said I hadn't. But he told me that he thinks my speaking is much more fluent, and I use words more precisely and appropriately. Maybe he had noticed I used to say words that were not very suitable for some contexts.

5. 但老师上课偶尔讲一个什么笑话，想提升一下气氛。我感觉有时候笑不出来，就是 get 不到笑点啊。

If a teacher tells a joke to lighten the mood in class, I feel that I can't always laugh at it with my peers. I just don't get what the funny part is.

6. 有些中国学生吧，就可能不是很重视上课参与交流的这个问题，他们反而可能会觉得那些比较喜欢发言的人是在找存在感，除非就是有人说了什么让人觉得也是很高级的点，然后可以促进帮助其他同学学习，那觉得还是 ok 的。

Some Chinese students may not value oral participation in class. They see it as someone seeking attention and claiming their sense of presence unless they actually say something brilliant that can contribute to the class and benefit other students' learning.

7. 我室友有商学院的，也有心理学的，但他们都没有我忙。我们是 deadline 一个过了还有一个 deadline，所以感觉整个厨房进进出出虽然有交集吧，但是经常就是错开了，也没有一起玩。所以我们的交流就仅限于挺简单的那种程度。

I have flatmates who are studying business and psychology, but I don't think they are as busy as I am. I have one deadline after another. So even though we meet in the kitchen sometimes, we don't really spend our free time together hanging out. I have flatmates who are studying business and psychology, but I don't think they are not as busy as I am. I have one deadline after another. So even though we meet in the kitchen sometimes, we don't really spend our free time together hanging out. Our conversations remain basic and superficial.

P18. Chang, PhD Geology and Geophysics, School of Geosciences

1. 我跟我导师的交流就不是很顺，效率低吧，感觉挺影响我写论文的。对于我们这种不是 native speakers 的，我觉得有时候就是不能完全表达自己吧，总有些跟自己想说的有点偏差。

My communication with my supervisors is not as efficient as I hoped, so I feel like it's been a problem for my thesis writing. For non-native English speakers like us, I think something is often lost in communication, and you can't explain yourself one hundred percent.

2. 我自从加入了博士联盟以后，讲英语的机会比以前多了一些。就是我们每次搞活动的时候，比方说 seminar，你就要和很多不同的人去交流，可能是邀请的 speakers 和 guests，或者其他主办承办方像是我们苏格兰一些合作伙伴、市政厅，EUSA，负责 catering 的，还有其他各种。然后可能到时候还要处理一些问题和紧急情况。

I've had more opportunities to speak English since joining the Doctorate Association. Whenever you need to organise an event, a seminar for example, you need to interact with a lot of different people, such as the speakers and guests, other organisation bodies like our Scottish partners, the city council, EUSA, the catering company, etc., and you also need to deal with some issues and emergencies.

3. 你无法跟他们在一个水平 argue 或者达到同一个深度，因为他们不但熟悉这方面的内容，而且是在说他们的母语英语。尽管我挺关心政治话题的，我也想知道美国同学的想法，但我关于政治的词汇很贫乏啊，所以就说的很慢。那我也不想表现得很蠢，尤其是他们说的超快还有点咄咄逼人，所以就尽量对这种话题避之不谈。

You can't follow their arguments and reach the same level of depth because they are familiar with the issues, and English is their first language. Although I am interested in these political issues, and I do want to know about American students' perspectives, I don't know many of the political terms in English, so it slows down the discussion. I don't want to appear stupid. It just makes me want to stay away from these topics, especially when they talk very fast and get aggressive.

4. 我觉得他们这边人都很喜欢健身，我来了以后也开始跑步，一直都有参加一个 club。然后和他们一些人比较熟悉了就会交流比较自然。

People here like to work out a lot, so I started running. I've been a member of a jogging club for a long time, so I know the members well, and I am comfortable talking to them.

5. 大多数中国学生是会担心说的不对或者觉得说错很傻，因为可能觉得会是让人觉得你不够聪明，或者没有好好学吧，就是跟不上。而且如果你的英语不好的话，你可能也很难去 question 老师或者人家说的，也就挺尴尬的。

Most Chinese students are worried about saying something wrong or stupid in class, because maybe it shows that you aren't smart enough to keep up with the class or you haven't worked hard enough. And if your English is not very good, you may not be able to question what others have said, which is also embarrassing.

6. 认识的外国人也很多，但是深入交往的基本只会是中国人。

Maybe you've made many foreign friends, but the ones you will have true and deep connections with are almost exclusively Chinese.

P19. Wendi, Master by Research Chemistry, School of Chemistry

1. 有时候我是需要跟别人一起在 lab 做实验的，所以你就很需要跟别人沟通流畅，否则还可能引发很严重的结果。

Sometimes I need to work with other people in the lab on the same experiment, and it's very important that we have smooth communication. Otherwise, even something dangerous could happen.

2. 有些东西是可以交流的，但是有些话题我感觉听不懂就是听不懂，像是他们什么运动啊什么的，都是英国当地比较有名的但是国内不太关心的。

There are things we can talk about, but there are also topics that I don't think I will ever be able to discuss with them in English, like, when they talk about rugby. It's popular here, but nobody plays rugby in China, so I don't know anything about it, and I don't care about it.

3. 当我听到他们说去哪里玩了啊，就算我不知道去了哪儿，我还是会听他们讲旅途的事情，问他们那里的风景啊当地的美食之类的。如果我听不懂他们说什麼的话，我肯定会问的。

Whenever they talk about their trips somewhere, even though I may not know where it is, I will listen to their interesting stories and ask them about the scenes and food in that area. If I don't understand something, I will definitely ask.

4. 我觉得跟别人聊天不是你唯一可以提高英语的方式吧。我觉得如果一个人够 motivated，他自己也能提高。像我的话，我就是看英剧美剧啊然后自言自语，模仿他们说话的方式。我觉得是有用的。

I don't think speaking with other people in English is the only way to improve your speaking. I think if you are motivated, you can improve on your own. I just talk to myself after watching TV shows in English and imitate how the actors speak. I think it worked for me.

5. 我不是很 care 人家怎么看我。因为我就是觉得自己是过来学习的，所以我肯定会用最快最有效的方式去解决。我反正读完 PhD 就要回国的啊，在这里就是向最优秀的人学习。那为什么要浪费机会呢？我觉得就是要脸皮厚一点，干嘛要自尊心那么强。

I don't care about what they think of me. I am here to learn, so of course, I will seek out the most effective and efficient way to learn. I will leave here after I finish my study, and I am here to learn from others, the best. Why waste the opportunity? My face and ego mean very little in this case.

6. 我周围都是大牛啊，都比我知道的多更有经验。我就是随时随地回去请教他们问题。

I am surrounded by people who are more knowledgeable and experienced than me.
I'd like to ask them questions whenever and wherever.

7. 我觉得即使不是完全听得懂人家在说什么，听听也好的啊。

Even though I don't understand everything they say, I don't mind just listening.

P20. Shuai, PhD Chemistry, School of Chemistry

1. 我在说我不好的情绪的时候，总是用 unhappy 啊，upset 这种单词。但是我感觉它们就是听起来比较 low。就是我也知道比较高级的单词像是 frustrated 啊，anxious 这种，但是我自然地在用英语交流的时候好像总是不会去说这种单词。

When I talk about my negative emotions, I always use words like “unhappy” and “upset”, but they sound quite “low”. I mean, I do know better words like “frustrated” and “anxious”, but I don’t seem to say those words when I am having a conversation in English.

2. 我英语基础不是很好，尤其是口语。我因为是农村长大的，跟那些大城市里的不一样。我可能到大学之前吧，都没有看过英语节目。教我英语的老师，他们的英语也不是很好，尤其是口语很弱的。他们的话讲的肯定是很重的 Chinese accent，然后有些单词其实我第一次学的时候他们就是读错的。小地方的英语老师师资真的是一个很现实很严重的问题。

I didn’t have a very good English foundation, especially my spoken English. Unlike those who grew up in the big cities, I grew up in a village. I never watched any English shows until maybe university. I learnt English from my teachers, but they were not very good, and their oral English was very weak. They spoke with a very strong Chinese accent, and some words were pronounced wrong when I learnt the first time. The ability of English teachers in small cities is a real and serious problem.

3. 我们的组员都是来自世界各地的，我们就是有这么一个共同的兴趣，就是好好利用这边这个国际化的环境啦。通过各个国家的小伙伴了解一下不同的文化啦，也提高一下我们国际交流的体验。

Our group members and participants come from many different countries. We all share an interest in making the most use of this international environment, getting to know different cultures through the people from those cultures, and enhancing our intercultural communication experience.

4. 第一次来的时候做 presentation 我真的蛮紧张。那个时候我先在我们组里内部做了一个 presentation，就是叫他们帮忙看一下，然后那次做的哇塞，真的是太糟糕太糟糕了……用英语做 presentation 就是真的问题很大，但是我是准备好好提高的。后来他们给了我很多意见，我也改了很多。等到正式讲的时候他们也去听了，然后说 It’s so much better. 那我觉得自己练练也是可以提高的。稍微丢脸一下我觉得也没什么，因为从长远看，他们会忘记，而你自己是受益的。

I remember I was so nervous the first time I did a presentation. I asked my colleagues to listen to me speak prior to the formal presentation, and it was, oh my god, really terrible...Speaking English was a big problem for me, but I was ready to tackle it. They gave me a lot of advice, and I tried to practise accordingly. Then, when it came to the actual presentation, my colleagues also attended, and they told me that “It’s so

much better”. So, I feel that I can really improve if I try, and losing some face is totally worth it because they won’t care about it later, but I have benefited a lot.

5. 然后第三年我们化学系都要在全系所有人面前做一个报告，我觉得也挺好的。那年十几个同学，我是上场唯一一个和观众互动，开了个玩笑，然后那个主持人还特意表扬我了！

In our third year, we needed to do a presentation in front of the whole school. There were about ten student presenters, and I was the only one who was interacting with the audience by telling a joke. Even the host appraised me for that!

6. 你一定要多去，要 available，这样人家下次才会再邀请你啊。

You should join them often. Make yourself available, so people will invite you again next time.

Appendix H Focus Group Participants

Masters Group

Code	Names	Programmes	Schools	Abbreviations
P1	Xiao	MSc TESOL	Moray House School of Education	Xiao (Edu., PGT)
P7	Meiyi	MSc International Business & Emerging Markets	Business School	Meiyi (Biz., PGT)
P13	Yong	MSc Signal Processing	School of Engineering	Yong (Eng., PGT)
P15	Xin	MSc Artificial Intelligence	School of Informatics	Xin (Info., PGT)
P19	Wendi	Master by Research Chemistry	School of Chemistry	Wendi (Chem., PGTR)

PhD Group

Code	Names	Programmes	Schools	Abbreviations
P2	Tian	PhD Education	Moray House School of Education	Tian (Edu., PhD)
P4	Han	PhD Architecture	Edinburgh College of Art	Han (ECA, PhD)
P14	Hong	PhD Engineering	School of Engineering	Hong (Eng., PhD)
P18	Chang	PhD Geology and Geophysics	School of Geosciences	Chang (Geo., PhD)
P6	Wen	PhD Law (International Investment)	Law School	Wen (Law, PhD)

Appendix I Extracts from Focus Groups

1. Masters Students Focus Group

Extract 2 – Masters FG

- Xin 我也觉得有些中国人跟外国人说话也就是为了练英语，也不是真的想交朋友。
- Xiao 我们不要让他们觉得我们跟他们讲话就是很功利地想提高英语而不是做朋友。如果真的要跟他们练，那还是给点酬劳比较好。
- Wendi 对的，所以 buddy system 可能对我来说有用，他们 native speaker 做这个有提高什么吗？就算他们可能一开始觉得挺有意思的，但我觉得还挺 boring 的，所以他们随时可能退出。
- Xin I think some Chinese people talk to foreigners simply for the purpose of practising English, not to make friends.
- Xiao We shouldn't let foreigners think we only want to approach them because we want to practise English with them, rather than having a genuine interest in making friends with them. If they are there to help us with spoken English, then they should be paid.
- Wendi Right, the buddy system is good for non-native speakers, but what do native speakers gain from this? Maybe they think it's interesting at first, but I think it can be quite boring, so they may just quit anytime.

Extract 4 – Masters FG

- Yong 对对对。我觉得就是学校也有一些社团什么的，或者英语中心，比方说可以组织 workshop，每周或者每两周一次，然后以你愿意来的人就过来，但是主要是自发自愿的。我觉得要思考的是怎么把 topic 定的好一点，把组织搞得好一点。如果真的先把这个搞得正式一点的话，你最后也可以发一个证书之类的。比方说你每周都来很积极，最后可以给你一个证书。我觉得如果学生有的话应该也会挺开心的，但是跟毕业什么无关，也不需要考试。
- Meiyi 对，我觉得这个想法真的很好。因为像我们商学院也有一个类似的 Edinburgh award，我们学校颁发的，比方说我每周去上两次课，最后可以拿到那个东西，我觉得也是很宝贵的一个经历，然后又获得学校的书面上认可，就很不错。

- Wendi 我觉得这个想法是很好..... 我觉得这个东西而且最后如果在中国职场上，比方说你面试找工作可以用到的话，那效果会更好。因为毕竟来的国际学生中国的很多，但不是说每个人最后都可以拿到毕业文凭以及学校发的其他的关于活动的证书。那你有的话就是和人家不一样了，因为我觉得国内找工作竞争还是很激烈的。如果你有证书的话，也是你的一种能力的彰显吧。
- Yong Yes, yes. I think the university, like some societies or the English centre, can organise workshops, once a week or once every two weeks. Whoever wants to come can come for free, and it's important to make sure it's voluntary. They need to think about how to design the topics, and how to organise the activities better. If you want to organise them well, you can award the attendees something to make it more formal. For example, if a student attends every week and is very active, they can get a certificate, and I think most people would be quite happy to get one. It doesn't need to be a requirement for graduation, and there shouldn't be any tests.
- Meiyi Right, I think it's a great idea. Because we have something like this in the Business School called the Edinburgh Award. I attended two classes every week and I got an award in the end. I think it's a precious experience, and it's great that I can get the university's acknowledgement on paper.
- Wendi I also think it's a good idea... I think if this certificate can be used in the job market in China, like if it's useful when you are seeking jobs, that would be better. After all, so many Chinese students study in the UK, but not everyone can graduate with other certificates. So if you have one, it would be something to show your other abilities and make you stand out, making you more competitive.

Extract 8 – Masters FG

- Wendi 我觉得最大的问题是去的人可能英语都不好。
- Xiao 是的，我也有参加过那种所谓的 international event，但是你基本会是跟其他的中国人在一起。
- Meiyi 可能就是说这种场合下你很难说特意主动去跟人家交流。可能也有打个招呼吧寒暄或者随便讲点，但是很难有深入交流。
- Yong 对的，尬聊。
- Wendi I think the biggest problem is that people who go to these events are not very good at English.

Xiao Yes! I've also been to these so-called international events. You will most likely just stay with the people you go to the event with.

Meiyi It's difficult to initiate communication in these situations. Maybe you will greet a few non-Chinese students and chat about something superficial, but it's very difficult to have in-depth conversations.

Yong Yeah, it's kinda awkward.

Extract 9 – Masters FG

Yong 如果是收费的话最好还是学校组织的，那就比较官方。

Xin 我也觉得，因为尤其是像中国留学生，我觉得会相对来说更相信学校。

Meiyi 对，学校组织的话可能积极性比较高吧，而且也会觉得说学校活动蛮丰富多彩的。

Yong If they need to charge a fee for participation, it's better to be officially organised by the university.

Xin I think so, too. Especially for international students like us, we would trust the university more than other organisers.

Meiyi Yeah, students are probably more motivated if the events are organised by the university departments, and they will also appreciate that the university is providing all sorts of interesting events.

Extract 10 – Masters FG

Xiao 我之前参加过一个 Facebook 上看到的活动，就是一个做风筝的活动。其实这种活动跟英语提高八竿子打不到边，但在那个过程中我觉得还是挺锻炼的，口语可以有提高。我觉得可能这种形式比较好，就是不用打着提高英语的旗号，就是你要做点什么觉得最后是有收获的，那参与的人可能觉得会有意思。

Xiao I've participated in an event I found on Facebook, and it was about making kites with the locals and other international people. The event had nothing to do with English development, but I think I actually developed my speaking ability in the process. I think this is a good way to do it. I mean, you don't need to advertise English improvement, but you need to have an interesting

focus so that participants feel that they've gained something out of it afterwards.

Extract 12 – Masters FG

Xiao 有些课其实你不用真的人去，因为网上有 lecture video 的。但是真的人与人那种交流是不一样的。

Meiyi 我觉得不管是课外还是课内，就是你有这种跨文化的交流都是很宝贵的经历吧。如果有机会的话，社团或者宿舍的那种日常的交流也很好。

Xin 对啊，你交了这么多钱，其实一部分是学习，另外一部分是这段经历。

Xiao 嗯。很多同学很快会忘记他们在英国课堂上学到的东西，但是大多数应该会记住他们在这边和其他来时不同 culture 的人接触交流的经历吧。

All (点头) 嗯嗯。

Xiao You don't need to physically attend some lectures because some lecture videos are available online, but the real human interaction is different.

Meiyi I think this kind of intercultural communication is a precious experience, no matter in class or outside class. If there are opportunities, the everyday communication in student societies and accommodation is also very good.

Xin Yeah. After all, we are paying so much to study in the UK. Part of the fee is for study, and the other part is for the expected intercultural experience.

Xiao Right. Many students will soon forget about what they've learnt in class during their studies in the UK, but most will always remember the interactions they've had with people from other cultural backgrounds.

All (Nodding) Yes, yes.

Extract 13 – Masters FG

Meiyi 可能你说英语的 accent 还是那样，你的词汇也没有扩大太多，但是你说的更加流利了或者你可以自信地跟不同背景的人沟通，我觉得也是在语言方面很大的收获。

Meiyi Perhaps your English accent is still the same, and your vocabulary hasn't expanded much. But if you think you can speak much more fluently and

confidently when you talk with people from other countries, I think it's a great progress in the enhancement of your language ability.

Extract 16 – Masters FG

- Yong 如果一开始上课的时候老师就说清楚我们课上就是说英文的，那即使我偶尔说中文，也会感觉说我们其实不应该在课堂里说中文，然后再说回英文。
- Xiao 对，我觉得应该有有一个 general 的规定吧，那就算有人想说英语也不觉得怪怪的，怕被人家 judge.
- Xin 如果感到有难度的话也可以偶尔用中文代替，就是还是可以允许，总体用英语。
- All (点头) 嗯嗯。
- Yong If we are told that we are supposed to speak English in class, even though I may change back to speaking Chinese for a bit, I will think that I shouldn't really do that and switch right back to English.
- Xiao Right. I think there can be a general policy, so people who do stick to speaking English will not be judged.
- Xin And if it's too difficult, occasional use of Chinese should be allowed.
- All (Nodding) Yes.

Extract 20 – Masters FG

- Xin 其实如果没有要求的话，你说不说英语都无所谓。只是说如果你觉得这个对你来说很重要或者有兴趣的话，也是你自己要创造这种动力。
- Yong 对。因为在这里每天没什么人会跟你说英语。如果是在我这种专业的话，你可能经常连个能说英语的人都没有。所以你自己的动力就很重要。
- Xin If there is no requirement to speak English, it doesn't matter if you speak English or not. But if you think it's important or interesting to you, then it's up to you to stay motivated.

Yong Right, it's not like someone else is always talking to you in English here. You often don't have anyone to speak English with, especially in programmes like mine. So, keeping yourself motivated is very important.

Extract 21 – Masters FG

Wendi 就是让你可以提前适应，不会来的时候有手忙脚乱的感觉。

Meiyi 对，我也觉得，就是短期的话可以很快的融入。语言这个东西本来就是要靠练和积累的。那如果你开头早的话，就会为第一学期节省一些时间，就是为未来做准备。

Yong 对，一样。我觉得做好准备过来比较好，因为你也不知道一开始过来会遇到什么样的事情。如果你准备比较充分的话，遇到什么紧急事情也会应对的比较好。

Xin 我觉得他们把我想说的都给说了，就是同意他们的观点。

Xiao 我也同意他们的，不过我想加一点，因为我以前是教口语的。我觉得行前准备的话一个语料库我觉得很重要，就是因为你在对症下药，增添关于留学生活海外生活的语料库，我觉得是很重要的一个点。

Wendi It's to help you adjust in advance, so that you won't feel like totally lost when you first arrive.

Wendi It's to help you adjust in advance, so that you won't feel totally lost when you first arrive.

Meiyi Yes, I think so too, to adjust faster. Language is something that you need to practise and accumulate. If you start early, you can save time during the first semester and also prepare for the future.

Yong Right. I agree. I think it's better to arrive well-prepared because you don't know what will happen. If you've thought about things and prepared in advance, you will probably remain calm when something happens.

Xin They've said what's on my mind. I agree with them.

Xiao I agree with them as well, and I want to add something because I used to teach English in China. I think it's important to work on a language database focusing on your weakness before leaving China, especially on topics relevant to overseas study. I think it's imperative.

Extract 22 – Masters FG

Wendi 来英国之前每天看英剧看了大概两个月。我就是看剧的时候会遮住字幕，然后就是自己分析他们在说什么。我觉得这真的蛮有用的，就是会让我去习惯听英语。

Xiao 一看就是好学生！

Meiyi 支持。学校可以开设，但是最后还是学生自己的坚持的动力。

Wendi I watched English TV shows every day for two months before I came to the UK. I covered the subtitles when I watched the episodes, and I tried to figure out every sentence. I think it really helped me get used to listening to English.

Xiao Sounds like a good student!

Meiyi Yes. I think the university can provide support, but at the end of the day, it's up to students' own autonomy.

Extract 24 – Masters FG

Xiao 我觉得有些人就是懒，包括我。有些可能是不知道去哪里找，但是其实都是能找到的，如果你真的想找的话。

Xin 我也觉得。有时候就是在家太舒服了，然后就懒得出去寻找这些锻炼的机会。

Yong 但学生可能因为课业负担太重已经很辛苦了。可能他们没在学习的时候就想在家好好休息一下。

Wendi 那也有可能。但是呢，很多时候中国同学就是很被动。我们总想着学校告诉你你需要做什么，然后什么在哪里你去找资源。

Xiao 对，其实 Facebook 上有很多在爱丁堡当地的活动，不仅仅是在爱丁堡大学的。就是你得自己去找。

Meiyi 嗯，你可以在这边不同的 programme 去做志愿者啦。但是很多中国学生是不用 Facebook 的。

Xiao I think some people are just lazy, including me. Perhaps some people don't know where to look for this information, but you can find it if you really want to.

- Xin I agree. Sometimes you just give in to the comfort at home and don't bother to go out or look for these opportunities.
- Yong Students may be very tired because their workload can be quite heavy. So perhaps they just want to rest when they are not studying.
- Wendi That's possible. But still, most Chinese students just prefer to be given things. We hope the university will tell us what we need and where to find the services.
- Xiao Yes. There are actually many local activities advertised on Facebook, not just the university. But you have to find them by yourself.
- Meiyi Right. You can go volunteer in different local programmes. But many Chinese students don't use Facebook.

Extract 26 – Masters FG

- Meiyi 我觉得是个好想法吧，但是很难去真的实现。
- Wendi 嗯，因为学生一旦毕业的了，其实就没有母校什么事儿了。所以他们为什么要去特意提高这些出国的学生的英语呢？那种培训机构也是一样的，因为这个投资没有什么利益。这件事可能对于你个人来说很重要，但是中国是不会有机构愿意去做这件事的。
- Yong 我觉得她说的对。这就是为什么像雅思这种班就非常火爆，但是我们从来没有看到过什么海外学习准备班啦，因为大多数人觉得没有什么必要，而且肯定也不会愿意花很多钱在这种班上。
- Xiao 是的，而且如果这个大家真的重视的话，那早该有很多类似的班很有名了。
- Meiyi I think it's a good idea, but it's very unlikely to be implemented.
- Wendi Yes, because once the students graduate, they are not the Chinese universities' concern anymore. So why would the universities invest in improving their English ability? The same goes for the language preparation schools. There is just too little profit. Maybe it's important for the students themselves, but no institutions in China would want to do it.
- Yong I agree. That's why IELTS lessons are so popular, but we rarely see any lessons that are designed for overseas study preparation because most people think it's unnecessary, or at least not willing to pay a lot of money for it.

Xiao Yeah, if it's that important, it would have been very popular already.

Extract 32 – Masters FG

Meiyi 很多中国学生在读研之前可能从来没有出国过。我指的不是那种简单的旅游啦。很多人可能对于英国的生活的想象可能就是源自看剧啊，但是他们可能想的和真实的情况是有很多偏差的。我觉得其实还是要去学学怎么和外国人交流吧，不仅仅是和 native speaker，因为你在这里的话可能会遇到来自世界各地不同国家的人，很多都不是 native speaker 的人。

Xiao 对，我觉得我们中国学生的话，应该要更加 open-minded 一点，然后要胆子放开。我感觉很多中国学生其实还是跟中国人玩得多，因为你最熟悉这个感觉嘛。但是呢，还是有不少人其实是渴望建立这种国际化的友谊的，然而他们又不去为此做出努力。而且很多人是不是觉得自己做不到吧，可能觉得自己英语说得太烂了，但是可能只是他们自己这么认为。

Wendi 我同意你的观点啊。我发现不少中国人来了国外读书但是他们还是会看中国的电视剧啊什么的。这个就相当奇怪。我觉得你就要出去，去交外国朋友啊，去了解不同的文化啊，去和不同的人交流啊。你越是见多识广了，你越会发现自己其实知道的还很少。

Meiyi Many Chinese students have never been abroad until their Masters' study. I don't mean just travelling. They may have an imagination of what living in the UK is like from TV shows, but maybe they have the wrong idea of what it's really like. I think it's important to try to understand how to interact with non-Chinese people, not just with native English speakers, because you may meet many non-native English speakers here from all over the world.

Xiao Yeah, I think we Chinese students need to be more open-minded and more courageous. I feel that many Chinese students still hang out with only Chinese people because we are most comfortable with it. But actually, I know many also eager to have intercultural friendships, but they don't make an effort. And many think they can't do it because they are not very good at speaking English. But it's just in their minds.

Wendi I agree. Actually, many Chinese students still watch Chinese TV shows when they are abroad. It's very strange. I think you need to step out there, make international friends, learn different cultures, and actually talk to different people. The more you see, the more you realise you don't know.

Extract 35 – Masters FG

- Meiyi 其实你尝试一下在讨论中学习的这种模式也挺好的，毕竟你在国外学习，应该要有这种积极尝试的心态吧我觉得。
- Xin 是，是可以尝试，不过英语如果不溜的话还是觉得心里很不爽，说不清楚。
- Meiyi 熟能生巧嘛，你多说会溜起来的。
- Yong 那也要有这个环境有人跟你说啊。否则就你一个人也挺傻的。
- Meiyi Actually, students can try to experience this kind of discussion-based learning style. After all, you're studying abroad now, and I think you should have this positive attitude to try to study in different ways.
- Xin Yes, of course, you should try. But if your spoken English is not fluent enough, it is quite annoying because I can't make myself clear.
- Meiyi Practice makes perfect. Speaking more can help improve your fluency.
- Yong You need people around you who are also willing to speak with you in English. Otherwise, you will look stupid.

Extract 36 – Masters FG

- Wendi 不少外国人对于中国的印象有点过时吧。他们并不了解现在的中国是什么样的，对我们的文化也一无所知。
- Meiyi 对，我感觉这里有不少人对中国的认识是有误区的。他们可能觉得中国人都是这一个样子的，然后你也很难跟他们解释说他们错了。
- Yong 他们可能也是被洗脑了。
- All （咯咯笑）
- Xiao 嗯，但我感觉吧，就是当地人可能根本就不 care 外国的文化吧。他们可能自我感觉良好，因为大家都要来英国啊，可是我觉得很多过来的人才其实也是带来了他们自己文化的精髓的特色。
- All （点头）
- Wendi Many foreigners are still under the impression of old China. They don't know about modern China, and they don't know about our culture.

Meiyi Yeah, I feel that China is misunderstood a lot here. They think of Chinese people in a certain way, and it's very hard to explain that they are wrong.

Yong So maybe they are also brainwashed.

All (Chuckle)

Xiao Yes, but I get the feeling, like the local people don't really care about many other cultures. They think they are so great because people come to the UK, but I think many people who come here also bring their great cultural legacy.

All (Nodding)

Extract 38 – Masters FG

Xin 很多外国人说英语的速度真快，而且口音还重。但他们不知道哪里来的自信。

Yong 对啊，我觉得如果中国学生觉得自己英语不是很好的话，他们会说得比较慢吧。但是很多其他国家的学生，尤其是西方的，他们讲的超快。

Meiyi 还有南美的。

Xiao 还有印度人。

Yong 对对，印度口语，靠，听不懂。

Wendi 还有有些 native speakers 也是讲得很快，而且他们还喜欢用一些外国人不太听得懂的习语。

All (点头)

Meiyi 我知道有些人是真的习惯性说话很快，而且这个是很难改的。但是我还是感觉我们应该都尽量在国际交流中去迁就一下有不同母语者的情况吧。

Xin Many foreigners speak so fast, with such thick accents. They somehow seem very confident.

Yong Yeah, I think if a Chinese student doesn't think their English is very good, they will speak slowly. But students from many other countries, especially the West, speak so fast.

Meiyi And South America.

Xiao And India.

Yong Yeah, Indian accent, so hard to understand.

Wendi And native speakers, too. They sometimes speak so fast and use expressions unfamiliar to non-native speakers.

All (Nodding)

Meiyi I know people all have speaking habits, and it's hard to change. But I think we should all try to make an effort in intercultural communication when there are people who speak different first languages.

Extract 39 – Masters FG

Xiao 他跟我说哦：“你什么时候能说 proper English? 我都不知道你怎么能在中国当上英语老师的。”我听了真的气死了！他们可能一开始还对你比较耐心吧，但是过一段时间就明显比较烦了。但是问题是我英文也没有那么差好吗？我以前也有教英语啊。当时他这么说我真的感觉挺伤人的。

Yong 这么说是不太好。像我们的话是不会这样去嘲笑在学中文的外国人的。

Xiao ... He said, “When can you speak proper English? I don't know how you could become an English teacher in China.” I was so mad! They may show some patience at first, but after some time, they will be very annoyed. But my English is not that bad, okay? I used to teach English. It was very hurtful he should say that to me!

Yong That is not nice. Like, we would never make fun of other people who try to speak Chinese to us.

Extract 40 – Masters FG

Meiyi 我觉得老师们应当鼓励学生 speak up。比方说给我们更多的机会去尝试，或许可以叫我们如何积极参与发言。因为不是所有学生都会说熟悉上课这样的沟通方式的。

Xiao 嗯，比方说如果有一个 task 的话，他们可以把要求说得更清楚一点，给个 example 啥的，因为他们也许觉得说这个是很常见很简单的，但我们其实并不是很清楚该怎么做。

Xin 是的，而且有些老师自己好像对 instruction 也不是很清楚。

Wendi 对，但是他们也不应该说要 force 学生去完全改变自己的学习方式。如果说我就是喜欢我这样的，那他们也管不着。

All （点头）嗯嗯。

Meiyi I think teachers can encourage us to speak up. For example, give us more chances to try and maybe demonstrate how to do it first because we are not familiar with this type of communication before.

Xiao Yeah, like if there is a task, maybe they can explain it more clearly with examples because maybe they think it's very common and easy to understand, but we aren't sure what to do.

Xin Yeah, sometimes some teachers and tutors don't seem to be very clear about the instructions, either.

Wendi Yeah, but in the meantime, they shouldn't force us to like, completely change ourselves. If I'm happy the way I am, then it's also none of their business.

All (Nodding) Yeah.

Extract 42 – Masters FG

Meiyi 小组讨论的积极性会比全班一起说要好很多吧。毕竟小组的话就是没有那么的压力。

All （点头）嗯嗯。

Meiyi I think students are much more interested in speaking in small groups than to the whole class because there is less pressure.

All (Nodding) Yes, yes.

2. PhD Students Focus Group

Extract 1 – PhD FG

- Chang 我觉得第一反应是学校这方面的活动应该已经有不少了吧，但是好像真正效果比较好。我对这个持怀疑态度。
- Han 我觉得太 general，我们要好好想想，如何把不同的活动区分开来是个问题。
- Wen 可能学校是有一些社团什么的，而且都是有讲关于提高文化交流，如果有一个专门是跟口语有关的，就是比较清楚的话，那我觉得还是有意思的。我觉得说不好吧。
- Hong 我觉得活动办不办的好，其实主要还是看人，还要看组织的怎么样。所以肯定它的出发点吧，但是可能持怀疑态度。
- Tian 我不知道谁是它的受众。我感觉只是提高英语的话对我吸引力不是很大。
- Chang Aren't there already some activities like this? But I doubt the effectiveness, so I am sceptical about it.
- Han I think it's too general. We need to think it through, differentiating different types of activities for different purposes.
- Wen Maybe the university has some societies about intercultural communication. I think if there is one about spoken English, that can be interesting. But it's difficult to say. I am not sure.
- Hong I think it really depends on the individuals, plus the way they're organised. I like the idea, but I doubt how it can be well implemented.
- Tian I'm not sure who the target groups are, but I don't think I'm interested in activities that just focus on improving English.

Extract 3 – PhD FG

- Han （我不知道你们知不知道那个学生社团做的 TANDEM 啊，他们就是让不同国家的同学互相交换学习英语和其他语言，）我也去过。但是我觉得做的不太好，因为我们毕竟不是专业的，也没有什么资料，其实有点无从下手。而且他们很多都是小语种的那种欧洲语言，我们也不感兴

趣。而且我们就得找那种对中文感兴趣的，英语为母语的人，挺局限的。

Tian 而且这边人的口音也是五花八门的，也不一定标准。

Chang 嗯嗯。不要学个苏格兰英语哈哈。

Wen 而且我觉得这个没有什么保证，就不是一个长效机制。其实很大程度上取决于你们是不是看对眼。如果对对方没什么兴趣，你想什么时候退出都可以，也挺尴尬的。

Hong 难度不亚于相亲成功啊！

其他人（嘿嘿笑）

Han ... I've tried it, but it's not very good. Because the students are not professional language teachers after all, and there aren't any materials, so it's quite hard for us, like, we didn't know where to begin. I think most of the languages there are other European languages that I'm not interested in. To improve English there means you need to find a native English speaker who is also interested in learning Chinese. Quite limited options.

Tian And local people also speak with different English accents, not necessarily standard.

Chang Ha-ha, maybe you will end up with a Scottish accent.

Wen The event you are talking about, I don't think there is a guarantee in the long run. It really depends on if the two of you get along. If you don't like each other, you can quit anytime. It can be quite awkward.

Hong It's as hard as successful blind dates!

Others (Giggling)

Extract 5 – PhD FG

Hong 有些人就是来这边然后拿个文凭。英语提高本来就不是他们的目的吧，至少不是最重要的目标。但你也不能说他们是不对的。

Wen 对啊，每个人都不一样的。有些人他们跟中国同学 social 也是很开心，虽然我个人会觉得是浪费了在国外读书时候的一些机会啦。

- Tian 我觉得中国学生大多数还是需要提高英语口语的，然后学校也是要在在这方面做一些努力，但是不能说强制。
- Hong Some people just want to come here and get a degree. English development is not their goal, at least not an important goal. You can't really judge them on that.
- Wen Indeed, everyone is different. Some Chinese students are perfectly happy socialising with other Chinese people, although I think it's a waste of opportunity when studying abroad.
- Tian Yeah, I think Chinese students, in general, have the need to improve their English-speaking ability, and the university should make an effort to support them, but it cannot be made compulsory.

Extract 6 – PhD FG

- Tian 我觉得这是一种可迁徙的能力，transferable skill. 它不光是你讲英语的能力，也是一种综合能力。我的理解是，它教你如何去做 presentation，或者如何在一个 team 里面更好的交流，我觉得确实是有技巧的。我觉得是可以迁徙的能力，而且我觉得这个是中国很多学生很欠缺的一种能力，public speaking 和 presentation 的能力，总的来说应该是我们教育体制中比较欠缺的。你看人家外国小孩从小就开始 present，也是让你增加自信的一种方式。我们中国更多的是一种老师对学生的教导，这边比较喜欢这样的教育方式。。。。我觉得不仅仅是英文，就是中文，中国人都需要训练。因为我们长大的环境中这个不是一个强调的能力。
- All （点头）嗯嗯。
- Tian I think communication is a transferable skill. It's not only about your ability to speak English but also a comprehensive ability. It's great to have someone coach you on how to do presentations or communicate better in teamwork, but I think there is more. This kind of transferable skill is what many Chinese students lack. Public speaking and presentation skills overall are neglected in our education system. Children here practise presentations since their childhood, which is a way to develop their confidence. In China, we tend to have the teacher leading students' learning, which is different from here...I think we need to practise not only in English, but also in Chinese because the environment where we grew up doesn't emphasise this important skill.
- All (Nodding) Yes, yes.

Extract 7 – PhD FG

Wen 我觉得我刚刚听到他讲了以后，我想到就是关于如何做 presentation 这个吧，我是上过这个课的。如果要做 tutor 的话，也是有课就是教你怎么带课这样。就是如果针对特定场景其实是有效的。因为博一不是要做那个 presentation 嘛，我们当时法学院当时是要求我们每个人都要去上那个课，然后上完以后确实很多同学都有感觉自己的 presentation skill 提高了很多。都是外国人，包括本地人。然后当时觉得自己确实有待提高。我觉得可能针对某种场合的这种交流能力的提高会更加比较有效。

Wen After listening to him, I remember taking the workshops on how to do presentations. I think there're also workshops on how to be a better tutor. These workshops are effective because you are developing specific skills. Before our first-year progression board, Law School asked all of us to attend the presentation skill workshop. Many students really considered it very useful, and they were all foreigners, including local students. I realised there's much room for my improvement. I think it makes great sense to develop communicative ability with some skills for specific contexts.

Extract 11 – PhD FG

Han 我还是很喜欢桌游的。我觉得其实有时候在这种游戏的过程中你可以学到不少东西，就是沟通方面。因为你要跟别人讲规则啊，去解释，去 negotiate，有时候还有 team work，其实还是很有帮助的。

Han I like to play board games. I think you can actually learn a lot from this process, especially in communication, because you need to talk about the rules, explain things, negotiate, and sometimes have teamwork.

Extract 14 – PhD FG

Chang 我觉得学生进来名校，他们的英文应该本身就是有保障的，you are supposed to be good at it.

Han 不见得哦。那你们觉得学校有些专业要不要提高入校的雅思门槛呢？

Tian 什么叫名校？就是要有严格标准的，我觉得还是需要高门槛，生源好是一回事那你也要保证你的生源招进来的是有这个能力去对付你对他的 expectation 的。

Hong 不过雅思也不能保证他们的真实英语水平。

- Wen 但是至少是个标准啊。但是我觉得这样会断了学校一部分的财路。
- Chang I think the students who are accepted by the UoE should be very good at English. You are supposed to be good at it.
- Han Not necessarily. So, would you suggest some programmes raise the entry requirement for IELTS?
- Tian What does it mean by a prestigious university? It means high educational quality. I think raising the bar is a good thing. You need good students to achieve the academic expectations.
- Hong But IELTS results can't guarantee their actual English ability in real life.
- Wen At least it's a useful standard. My worry is that raising the bar may cut off some income for the university.

Extract 15 – PhD FG

- Tian 但是我觉得学校可能也有一点责任的，就是因为他们可能现在开放国际市场以后，为了招很多的中国人，赚这个钱，它这个 standard 是不是越来越低？有调整过，有反思过么这个么？比方说那个语言班吧。其实雅思考试真不难，这些同学没有达到目标，然后来英国上个贵的要命的语言班，这不是变相的收费和降低这个 standard 么？我可能这么说有点偏激，学校是不是需要做这个反思，就是现在这样子招生的情况，他应该可以预料大学这个语言环境跟以前已经是不一样了。我们知道有些专业那几乎全都是中国人啊，他们都没有外国同学了。那么这样的情况下，是不是学校有责任保证学生在校的有充足的机会提高英语，毕业的时候不要回去以后给人家的印象是，他们英国回来英语也不咋地，就是其实长此以往是对学校打脸。
- Hong 有道理。
- Others (点头) 嗯嗯。
- Tian But, I think the university has some responsibility because they've opened the international market and recruited many Chinese students to make money. So, is the standard getting lower? Has the university reflected on the influences of this change? Take the pre-sessional English language course, for example. IELTS is honestly not that difficult compared to the real use of English in the UK. These students did not meet the entry requirement, but they could attend this super expensive programme. Isn't that a different way of making money and lowering the standard? Maybe I'm being a bit critical here, but shouldn't the university reflect on recent changes in the language

environment given the recruitment strategy? We know there are programmes full of Chinese students, especially in some PGT programmes. They have no foreign classmates. Isn't it the university's responsibility to make sure the students have plenty of opportunities to improve English, so that when they return to China, they won't give others the impression that they can't speak English well after studying in the UK? Otherwise, it will damage the university's reputation in the long run.

Hong Yeah, it makes sense.

Others (Nodding) Agree.

Extract 17 – PhD FG

Han 那像你们这样挺好的，像我们 PhD 的话，因为我们没有固定的办公地点，然后我的导师也教其他的学生，但是所以基本上都是各干各的，我很少能见到所谓的同学或者同事。

Hong 真哒？就是很少见 colleague？

Han 对对，虽然我们 ECA 楼上可以租那个 study space，但是我们基本上没有要固定去的场所，不像是办公室，所以大家也不太熟，因为大家都在研究不同的东西。

Han It's nice what you guys have. We don't have a fixed workplace, and my supervisor also has other students. So we basically just work by ourselves individually. I rarely meet other students or colleagues.

Hong Really? You rarely meet your colleagues?

Han Yeah. Although we have a study space in the ECA building, there isn't a specific room or office allocated to us for work. So, we don't really know each other because we work on different things.

Extract 18 – PhD FG

Wen 我觉得更重要的是给有兴趣的人一个平台，一种提高的方法和渠道。因为我遇到一些人，他们上课周围都是中国同学，回去又都是中国 flatmate，平时出去聚会都是中国人，所以他们就会说感觉在英国每天都在说中文，就是说英文的机会其实很少，口语交流的话。

Wen I think it's very important to provide a platform for people who are interested. Provide a way, a channel for them to improve. I've met some Chinese students who're surrounded by Chinese students in class, and they're surrounded by Chinese flatmates at home. They only go out with Chinese students, too. So, they feel like they are speaking Chinese every day in the UK. I mean, they have few chances to speak English.

Extract 19 – PhD FG

Wen 但是比方说学校这么多社团，可能是很多人没有好好利用这个平台和这个环境。但是说实话，有些活动包容性需要更强一点吧，不能只是说大部分人都是 native speaker，那如果交流的话对不是 native speaker 的学生其实会有一些压力。

Wen But there are some opportunities, like university societies. Maybe some students haven't fully used such opportunities, but honestly, some events need to be more inclusive, such as not having just native speakers, which is intimidating for non-native English speakers to participate.

Extract 23 – PhD FG

Tian 学习中有主观能动性可能对中国学生来讲有点挑战，因为我们的教育体系不是特别强调这个。我们的强项是 following instructions，像是一步步完成课程大纲，但是不会说很多 explore 新事物，或者挑战权威。

Hong 对，就是不怎么思考“我需要什么？”

Wen 可能 PhD 会好一点，因为我们需要自己去 lead 自己的 research。

Han 我觉得学校可能不一定也需要做什么新的活动，可能更好的去提高一些活动的 visibility，或者好的可以多办，增加在中国同学中的推广。有些人可能不去是因为不知道。

Tian 我觉得我们中国人有时候就是习惯别人告诉你什么东西是好的，什么东西在哪儿，你才会去做。但是我觉得西方的教育环境就是你要自己去思考，自己去找资源，它对人的主动性要求更高。所以我觉得我们很多中国同学在英国还不能提高英语交流能力的原因之一，就是因为他们的学习方式跟思维方式还没有转换过来。所以又回到我刚才说的，这不仅仅是交流能力，这更是一种综合的学习跟找资源的能力。你要是有这方面的能力，那你在英国提高英语是太方便的事儿了！

Others (点头) 嗯嗯。

Tian To be proactive in learning may be challenging for Chinese students because this is not emphasised enough in our education system. We are usually very good at following instructions, like completing the curriculum step by step, but not exploring new things or challenging authorities.

Hong Yeah, we don't really think about "What do I need?"

Wen Maybe PhD students are a bit better because we need to take the lead in our research.

Han Right. I think maybe the university doesn't need to create more events on purpose but focus on what they are doing now and make them better. If they are doing something well, they can do it more frequently and promote its visibility among Chinese students. Some people don't go to the events because they don't know about them.

Tian ... I think we Chinese students sometimes are just used to other people telling us what is good, where to find it, and then you would do something. But I think Western education asks you to think by yourself and find resources by yourself, which requires a person taking the initiative. So, I think it's one reason so many Chinese students can't improve their English communication ability, because their learning and thinking styles haven't changed. But, if you have this ability, then it's easy to improve English speaking ability in the UK.

All (Nodding) Agree.

Extract 25 – PhD FG

Han 就是 cheers 这个单词啊，我是来之前就知道的。你知道在英国，他们很喜欢用 cheers 当做 thanks 的意思，但一般我们中国人的话会知道是喝酒水的时候举杯说 cheers。然后我当时就是看了很多英剧嘛，我就看到这个词几次，觉得挺有意思的，然后我就查了下啥意思。来了以后发现这边真的说很多 cheers。

Tian 我的话是比较关注新闻。我来之前是经常会听 BBC 啊和其他节目。我觉得我们需要关注你所在的地方周围都发生着什么事。

Han I learnt the word "cheers" before I came here. You know, "cheers" is commonly used as "thanks" in the UK, but most Chinese people only use this word when making a toast. When I was binge-watching British shows, I heard this word a few times and I thought it was interesting, so I looked it up and learnt the other meaning. People really say "cheers" a lot here.

Tian As for me, I like to keep up with the news. I was always listening to BBC and other programmes before I came here. I think it's important to know what's going on where you live.

Extract 27 – PhD FG

Wen 就是你的英语已经到了比较好的程度了以后，你有没有提高什么的，是很难知道的。

Chang 也没有考试。

Tian 就算有提高，可能也未必是考试能发现的。

Wen When your English has reached a certain level, it's difficult to pinpoint what you have improved over a period of time.

Chang And there are no exams to assess the improvement.

Tian Even if there is any improvement, I'm not sure if they will show in exams.

Extract 28 – PhD FG

Chang 我是一直有比较注意积累我的词汇的，我会有记录新词的习惯。。。即使我参加哪个活动，每次可能就遇到一个新词或者学一个新的表达方式吧，我都会觉得挺开心，因为我觉得就是自己有进步，有得到新的东西。

Han 哇，那你这个习惯真的很好，我也尝试过，一般人坚持不住的。

Hong 是啊是啊。

Chang I've been trying to develop my vocabulary for a long time. I keep notes of new vocabulary... Even if I just learn one new English word or phrase each time from an event, I'll be very happy. I'll feel that I've gained something out of the experience, and I am improving myself.

Han Wow, it's a great habit. I've tried before, but it's very hard to keep doing it.

Hong Totally.

Extract 29 – PhD FG

- Han 有些同学是会更加看重在国外的日常生活体验而不是学习方面的，所以他们的话可能就会更加想在生活方面多说说英语。
- Wen 是的，人各有异嘛。像我的话，我刚来的时候特别想跟外国人交流，但是现在无所谓了。就是有些人可能刚来一开始比较想跟外国人说英语，也有人是来了安顿下来以后才会有这样的需求。人的想法是会变的。
- Han Some students may prioritise their overseas living experience over their learning experience, so they may have a stronger desire to speak English for socio-personal purposes.
- Wen Yeah, everyone is different. When I first came here, I really wanted to speak English with foreigners, but not anymore. Maybe you really want to speak English at first, or maybe you become more interested after getting used to the life here. My point is that your desires can change.

Extract 30 – PhD FG

- Wen 就是如果遇到一个老外真的想跟你聊中国的事，有时候我觉得也很难去解释或者翻译我知道的东西。有时候可能是语言问题，有时候可能我自己对某样东西也不懂吧。
- Hong 我明白你的意思。就是假如说你问我有关于中国文学的东西，像是四大名著啦什么的，我都不很清楚他们英文的标题是什么。而且你就是，很难真的去很好的解释这种中国名著的核心思想给外国人听。说实话，我自己也不确定我中文是不是都解释的清楚。这本身就是个问题。
- Chang 四大名著，啊，其实我也不知道他们英语名叫什么。
- All (咯咯笑)
- Wen It's very embarrassing if a foreigner really wants to know something about China, and I find it very difficult to explain or translate what I know. Sometimes it's a problem with my language, but sometimes it's something I haven't really thought about by myself.
- Hong I can understand what you mean. If you ask me something about Chinese literature, even the Four Great Classical Novels, I'm not sure if I know the correct translation of their names in English. I think it can be quite difficult to explain their main themes in English. I don't even know if I can explain clearly in Chinese, to be honest. It is a problem.

Chang The Four Great Classical Novels... Ah, I also don't know their names in English.

All (Giggling)

Extract 31 – PhD FG

Wen 我是有录我 supervision meeting 的习惯的，但是我真的不太喜欢听到自己说英语的感觉，哈哈！我知道我口语经常就是句式有问题或者语法有错。

Chang 对的，我知道。你自己听自己录的声音觉得很奇怪是不是？我一开始也是觉得很奇怪的。我感觉我说英语的时候语调不太好，就是很平的那种。

Wen I also record my supervision meetings, and I don't like listening to myself speak English, ha-ha. I know I often speak with incorrect sentence structures and poor grammar.

Chang Yeah, I know. It's strange to hear your own voice recorded, right? I was surprised at first. I think the intonation of my spoken English is not very good, rather flat.

Extract 33 – PhD FG

Tian 。。。就是上课的时候没有 contribution。但是我觉得这个也不仅仅是一个语言问题，更多的是一个学习文化跟课堂习惯的问题。我们上大学就是习惯于灌输式的学习方式，但是这边知识产生的方式就是通过 discussion，而不是自上而下的流动，是平行的流动。

All (点头) 对。

Tian 所以我觉得这是一个比较高层次，比较有深度的问题，而不仅仅是一个语言问题。我觉得我们应该让学生知道，这种讨论就是学习的一部分，它不仅仅是走一个流程。而且我觉得有时候我们中国学生，他甚至不在听同伴在讲什么，因为他可能觉得这不是知识，只有老师在上面讲的才是知识。

All (点头) 嗯嗯。

Tian 所以我觉得这个很全面的思想的转变。

- Wen 我觉得他说的是真的，因为说实话，如果你一定要中国同学回答问题，其实我觉得大多数人还是都回答得上来的，只是他们习惯性的选择不说而已，不管中文也好，英文也好。
- Tian They think Chinese students don't contribute in class. But I think it's not just a language issue, but more about the culture of learning and different habits in class. Chinese universities are used to teaching students and giving knowledge. But here, knowledge is generated through discussion, not top-down or hierarchical.
- All (Nodding) Right.
- Tian It's a very complex issue, not only about language. I think we should let the students know that discussion is part of learning, not only to fulfil a process. I think some Chinese students don't even pay attention to what other students are saying because they may think that is not knowledge, and only what the teacher says is knowledge.
- All (Nodding) Yes, yes.
- Tian So it's an overall change of mindset.
- Wen I think he's very right. Honestly, if you have to ask a Chinese student to answer a question in class, I am sure the majority would be able to answer or say something, but they habitually choose not to talk, regardless of whether in English or Chinese.

Extract 34 – PhD FG

- Chang 虽然我同意说中国同学要去懂得西方的这种学习方式吧，但是我觉得找到你自己最适合的学习方式也是很重要的。
- All (点头)对对。
- Wen 学习方式是有很多种的，你可以去尝试别人的，但是最终其实只有你最了解自己。
- Hong 是的，我就知道其实有些外国人其实也不是特别的积极吧，但是他们非常聪明，就是比较安静，有点像中国人。
- Tian 我同意。你可以说 knowledge 在这里是在 discussion 通过讨论形成的，但是他们也鼓励每个人的独立思考的过程，好比说你不能就是说，你得做大量的阅读或者 experiment，对吧，有这么一个自己研究的过程。

Chang Although I agree that Chinese students need to understand the Western way of learning, I think it's also important to find out how you learn best.

All (Nodding) Yeah, yeah.

Wen There are many different learning styles. You can try other people's styles, but I think at the end of the day, you know yourself best.

Hong Yeah, that's true. I also know foreign people who are not very active contributors, but they are very smart and quiet, like Chinese people.

Tian I agree. You can say here knowledge is generated from discussions, but people are also encouraged to do individual independent thinking, like, you can't just talk, you also need to do a lot of reading and experimenting, you know, learning by yourself.

Extract 37 – PhD FG

Wen 我感觉我周围的外国人对中国文化还是停留在一个过去的印象，至少不会像我们了解他们的多。

Hong 主要他们很多也不是很 care。

Han 对。但我觉得这样其实对他们不好。因为毕竟现在是全球化的时代，跟我们这些不远万里来求学的人来说，我觉得这边欧洲人应该多出去看看，提高自己对外部的一种与时俱进的认知吧。

Chang 同意。有些 native speaker 可能觉得说英语是我们的弱势，但是至少我们是会说两种语言的。

Wen I think many foreigners around me have an outdated image of China. At least they don't know about us as much as we know about them.

Hong They probably don't really care.

Han Yes. But I think it's actually not very good for them because it is an era of globalisation. Compared to us who travel this far to see Europe, I think the local people need to go out more and also develop an interest and updated understanding of other cultures.

Chang I agree. Some native speakers think English is our disadvantage, but at least we are bilinguals.

Extract 41 – PhD FG

- Tian 而且我觉得有些老师吧，他们应该表达的更清楚点，因为有些人的口语确实比较重，而且可能习惯性说的很快。可能他们就是习惯性这么说话，但是在这个非常国际化的环境里，他们还是要考虑到不是每个人都能这么习惯他们说话的方式的。
- Han 这个应该是一个相互的努力。我们在尽力去表达自己，那他们应该也要有所表示。
- All （点头）嗯嗯。
- Tian Also, I think some teachers can try to speak more clearly, because some have thick accents or speak so fast. Maybe they are just used to how they speak, but in such an international environment, they need to consider that not everyone can understand them easily.
- Han The effort should be mutual, both ways. We try our best to speak English, and they should also try to accommodate to students.
- All (Nodding) Yeah.

Appendix J Core Questions in the Informal Conversations

1. With Chinese students

- What do you think this study abroad experience mean to you?
- Do you feel like your English has improved since you've started study? How so?/ Why not?
- Now that you are experiencing what it is like to live and study in the UK, do you think you would do anything different regarding preparing for this journey from the language aspect?
- If you could give one piece of advice regarding English learning to the students who are considering studying abroad, what would it be?

2. With non- (Chinese) students

- What kind of impression do you have regarding Chinese students' English ability based on your knowledge or personal experience?
- Do you find the Chinese students you've interacted with very similar in general or quite different? In what ways?
- How to you perceive them being non-native English speakers might have an impact on their living and learning here?

Appendix K Development of Interview Coding and Thematic Frameworks

First Thematic Framework

1. Needs for oral participation

1.1 Academic

1.1.1 Disciplines

1.1.2 Level of study

1.2 Socio-personal

1.2.1 Accommodation

1.2.2 Daily communication with friends/acquaintances

1.2.3 Relationship

1.2.4 Communities & societies

1.2.5 University related services

1.2.5 Local services

1.3 Professional/ Work-related

1.3.1 During study

1.3.2 Post-study work

1.4 Overlap of needs

1.4.1 Necessities

1.4.2 Lacks

1.4.3 Wants

1.5 Objective & subjective needs (merge with 1.4?)

1.6.1 objective needs

1.6.2 subjective needs

2. Factors influencing the needs

2.1 Change of attitudes

2.1.1 different stages

2.1.2 familiarity of the context & relation with others

2.1.3 affection/ emotion of oral participation in English

2.1.4 cognition/ perceptions of oral participation in English

2.1.5 associated experience

2.1.6 student/researcher role

2.2 Previous experience

2.2.1 EAP experience

2.2.2 Intercultural experience

2.2 Integration with other skills

2.2.1 development of other language skills

2.2.2 whole personal development

2.2.3 development of intercultural competence

2.3 Clash of needs

2.4 Personality

2.5 Perception of English (conflicting)

2.5.1 in general – association with success, opportunities

2.5.2 specific role – instrumental function

2.5.3 identity – ownership vs. outsider

2.6 Motivation

2.6.1 Study/research – oriented

2.6.2 Social experience – oriented

2.6.3 Skill development – oriented

2.6.4 Extrinsic

2.6.5 Intrinsic

2.6.6 Peer pressure

2.7 Behavioural choice

2.8 Interlocutors

2.9.1 Other Chinese

2.9.2 Non-Chinese NNEs (“Non-nativeness” Galloway)

2.9.3 NESs

3. Addressing the needs

3.1 Personalization

3.2 Students

3.2.1 awareness of the potential mismatch and expectation

3.2.2 willingness to adjust and try

3.2.3 be pro-active, take responsibility

3.2.4 develop reflexivity

3.2.5 be good listener and speaker

3.3 “Teachers” (lecturers, tutors, supervisors, anyone who “teach”)

3.3.1 increase incentives

3.3.2 guidance role: encourage & emphasise from authority

3.3.3 intercultural awareness

3.4 Institutions create opportunities

3.4.1 programme, school, college & university

3.4.2 university student union

3.4.3 accommodation community

3.4.4 international office (Edinburgh Global)

3.4.5 postgraduate office recruitment

3.5 In-session ESP

3.5.1 more focus on oral communication

3.5.2 various communicative skills practice & training

3.6 Pre-departure preparation

3.6.1. students familiarize with the university & programmes

3.6.2. students be aware of potential challenges

3.7 Environmental constraints

3.7.1 teacher availability

3.7.2 student availability

3.7.3 challenge of organising events & providing service

3.7.5 challenge of organising buddy system

3.7.6 potential conflict of interest

Appendix L Thematic Framework on Environmental Constraints

This thematic framework on environmental constraints was based on the focus group analysis.

1. Institutional constraints

- Financial resources
- Organisation of activities
- Space arrangement
- International students outnumber home students
- Expectation of its graduates
- Language environment in the programme
- Institutional policy - IELTS requirement
- Opportunities for speaking English

2. Individual constraints

- Belief in language learning and perception of English
- Workload and availability
- English language ability
- Personal interests and motivations
- Language learning styles
- Willingness to communicate
- Intercultural communication experience

3. Social constraints

- Culture of learning in China and the UK
- Culture of communication in China and the UK
- Chinese collective cultural characteristics
- Opportunities for intercultural communication

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– Charles (School of Engineering)

It offers a lovely environment to discuss various interesting topics. The discussions really drive me to reflect on things that are usually taken for granted. This is also a great opportunity to practice my language skills as well as social skills. I enjoyed it very much. I appreciate DA and Alice for organising the event.

– Jianbin (School of Informatics)

It is a great opportunity to sit down with PhD students from other schools and talk about various interesting non-academic topics. I enjoy this kind of discussion very much. Additionally, I have also expanded my social network by attending the PhD Roundtable event.

– Helen (School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences)



“a great opportunity to sit down with PhD students from other schools and talk about various interesting non-academic topics”

The PhD Roundtable is an excellent chance to practice your oral English and explore the “real world” outside academia. I really enjoyed it. Highly recommend!

– Chuchu (School of Education)

The interaction atmosphere at the PhD Roundtable is very friendly and relaxing. It is a joy and a very different experience for me to communicate with other PhD fellows and talk about our everyday life philosophy.

– Felix (School of Geosciences)

The PhD Roundtable is ideal for PhD students from different fields to gather around and engage in meaningful discussions on social and political topics. The event is well organised and the facilitator Alice is very skilful at moderating the discussions. I also made some new friends during the event and I certainly learnt from their opinions.

– Ethan (School of Engineering)

PhD Roundtable is a great event that provided me opportunities to discuss various interesting and critical non-academic topics. Not only did it improve my English-speaking skills, it also expanded my social network by introducing me to other PhD students. The topics chosen by Alice have also widened my vision regarding the significant discussions being held worldwide.

– Harry (Edinburgh College of Art)