

Xiaofei Rao

University English for Academic Purposes in China

A Phenomenological Interview Study



上海交通大学出版社
SHANGHAI JIAO TONG UNIVERSITY PRESS



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*To my Chinese university students and
teaching colleagues from China and the U.S.,
since 2004*

Foreword I

Dr. Xiaofei Rao was raised in a family of educators. In school, she was immersed in a master narrative of learning for success within the Confucian-rooted collectivist culture. The public schools Xiaofei attended were locations that stressed for the most part fact-based knowledge. She learned the importance of hard work and competition to secure future employment and a comfortable future. Xiaofei was always an exceptional learner, eager to learn and improve with a driven work ethic. Finishing her master's degree in 2004, Fei quickly landed in a position teaching English within a higher education teacher program. As an English university teacher in Shanghai, she witnessed and experienced how so many institutions and with no exaggeration institutions across the globe have imposed unreasonable standards for English proficiency. During her doctoral career, I was her teacher, advisor, and mentor. I was honored to witness a burning desire that I have seen in only a handful of doctoral students always to strive and read, think, and reimagine what would be in her mind's eye. As her mentor, it was no small feat keeping up with Xiaofei. Xiaofei was demanding of my academic talents mastered over many years. Xiaofei, it seems, always thought of me as her teacher. Nothing was further from the truth. Xiaofei was my teacher. Xiaofei was and continues to be—my teacher.

When she applied for our doctoral program, Xiaofei came with an impressive resume; all A's with letters that spoke of her academic acumen and drive for excellence. Xiaofei brought these dispositions to her doctoral program, which in the end, served as her academic torch to rethink and, more importantly, reimagine academic English for Academic Purposes (EAP) for Chinese students. This book is a result of her empirical research aptly titled *University English for Academic Purposes in China: A Phenomenological Interview Study* she addresses a philosophical imperative coupled with a pedagogical and curricular imaginary of what EAP should be whence fundamentally rethinking EAP practices. She methodically reconsiders and reimagines teaching and learning with and for EAP learners.

Initially, Xiaofei began with a pilot study. She recruited 16 sophomore volunteers, 4 from her university to hone her research approach. From there, she started the arduous task of finding at least sixteen volunteers from the many universities in the Shanghai community using purposeful sampling followed by a saturation of

snowball sampling, where the final twelve participants accepted the opportunity to be interviewed by Xiaofei. To obtain trustworthiness of the textual data that would inform her findings in her qualitative study, she carefully reviewed recruitment considered crucial to securing uncompromising interview data for analyses and interpretation. Central to her qualitative research, she thoughtfully combed the translated texts with research-informed criteria of whether the selected participants would be interesting, representative, and thought-provoking. This would assist Xiaofei in responding to the purpose and research questions of her study. More importantly, her participants were free to express their perspectives. In turn, data generated thick descriptive meaning-making that informed her purpose and research questions. In the end, only eight participants met this threshold; from the final eight, four participants surfaced that best represented the student population at-large of today's Chinese university youth engaged in University EAP programs.

Each participant generated approximately seventy-five pages of interview data in the participant's first language, Mandarin. These interviews were then transliterated into English. Xiaofei then checked and double checked the transliterations, which took time and patience. After several rounds of data analyses over several months, the data saturation surfaced. This book is the fruitful result of her 2 years plus research endeavor.

University English for Academic Purposes in China: A Phenomenological Interview Study speaks to the trustworthiness of Dr. Rao's investigation. All students in this study are millennials. They bring a notion, many times not articulated of what they believe necessary in their language study. There is a "want", an organic desire for the faithful reconstruction to the spirit of democracy and social justice within University English programs. Hence, this study explores generational dispositions of today's Chinese university youth. The participants' unique transformative ways challenge the banking philosophy of teaching that prevails not only in her home country but across many nations which regards knowledge as a top-down gift bestowed by teachers who are used to considering themselves as the keepers of knowledge whom many times have limited understandings about students' unique lived experience.

Dr. Rao's consolidation of her lived experience and the incremental and transformative philosophical, ideological, and theoretical knowledge bases on TESOL education, Xiaofei's academic grounding is informed by cognitive and sociocultural constructivist theories of learning, critical theory, and critical language pedagogy studies. University English for Academic Purposes in China: A Phenomenological Interview Study is the result of Dr. Xiaofei Rao's intellectual transformation. This book sheds empirical light by coming to terms with the lived understandings of today's Chinese youth and what they believe indispensable to their university EAP learning experience. It is the author's hope these findings will inform the university EAP pedagogies to the range of possibilities foreign language education can be by making it socioculturally relevant to its beneficiaries today and into the future.

Dr. Rao's vision is inclusive. She envisions that China's English Language Teaching in the 21st century will include a role of creating safe and democratic teaching and learning environments embracing an anti-banking, holistic, and

humanistic philosophy. With the writing of this book, her ultimate purpose and goal are to educate people to live responsibly in a sustainable culture with a global conscience, a vision of peace, love, and intelligence, a sense of empowerment and consciousness, a pride of their diverse identities and readiness to dialogue, communicate, critique, and engage in this globalized world.

Las Cruces, USA

Dr. Rudolfo Chávez Chávez
Emeritus Regents & Distinguished Professor
New Mexico State University

Foreword II

I am pleased to recommend Dr. Rao's study of English for academic purposes (EAP) situated in China. It was based on the phenomenological study she conducted during her doctoral program with us in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, New Mexico State University, U.S.A. The area of EAP is central to the research endeavors of an increasing number of Chinese and international researchers and scholars since the turn of the 21st century. Her study offers a critical and well-grounded lens on EAP learning in China's higher education institutions. This study makes a valuable contribution to current EAP research by focusing on Chinese undergraduate students and their language learning trajectories starting from their elementary and middle school years up to their university experiences. The student voices in this study introduce a perspective about EAP that is rarely discussed and provides the basis for rethinking EAP pedagogy.

Dr. Rao's investigations surpass the themes of earlier studies on EAP study at the university level. Much of the existing literature has discussed the conventional teaching of academic vocabulary, reading and writing, and the growing dissatisfaction among Chinese university students about their general university English program, which again follows the teaching and learning of vocabulary and grammar that they have lived through in their middle school and high school English programs. In her study, Dr. Rao reveals the generational dispositions of today's millennial youths, which dominate China's university classrooms. Her study has implications for today's university instructors teaching English in China. This generation of EAP learners, unlike the older generations of language learners, are marvelous storytellers and aspire to use academic English to meet their life goals. They each have a unique but representative lived experience and language learning experience to share within a broader sociopolitical and cultural situation. Together the millennial youth call for more meaning-making transformations, holistic teaching, localized critical university EAP pedagogy that would serve the present and future EAP learners in a 21st-century world.

As Dr. Rao's dissertation committee member, I witnessed how with perseverance, courage, and great patience she meticulously conducted this phenomenological study in which nine themes emerged, through the thick description of millennial youth's perspectives and lived experiences. From the university students' perspectives, Dr. Rao imagines new directions for the science of EAP. The novelty of Dr. Rao's work is that she insightfully includes what today's Chinese millennial EAP learners think and say and navigates and connects their views to a broader international TESOL community. This academic contribution, while small, is invaluable.

Las Cruces, USA

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Preface

Internationally, the progress of globalization and the rise of academic English as a medium of instruction and a research-informed practice in the 21st century higher education contexts have made it urgent and invaluable to explore how millennial youth learn partially or wholly in English, or prepare for their academic study and career paths in English. This book arises out of a dissertation study on understanding the generational characteristics of today's Chinese university youth and the critical dispositions that they believe indispensable in their past and present academic English learning experience in and outside the school settings. The methods used were Seidman's phenomenological in-depth interviewing and participant observation with a selected group of Chinese sophomores who were studying University EAP at a university in Shanghai that offered University EAP program in the 1st and 2nd school years.

Part I of the book is theoretical. It analyzes the generational characteristics of today's Chinese university youth, the language learning contexts for the need of academic English in the world universities, important learning theories, and findings in the field of Second-Language Acquisition (SLA) that affect university English teaching and learning in China, and EAP as a critical language pedagogy. Part II presents the interview data in the form of learner vignettes and nine emergent themes from these vignettes. It explores the participants, their schools, and family settings where English was learned as an academic language. It serves as a practical contribution to the existing literature on how English was acquired/learned by Chinese English Language Learners (ELLs) in and outside the school education. Part III is more explorative. It crystalizes the above-mentioned themes and synthesizes the meanings that participants made of their past, present, and transformative English experience. It also provides recommendations grounded on the findings from the thick analysis of the interview data and envisions the future of University EAP domestically and internationally.

The purpose of this study is to understand Chinese university students' perspectives on their distinctive generational characteristics, and the critical dispositions that they believe indispensable in acquiring English as an academic language in and outside the school settings. It also aims to reveal the contributing aspects that

affect their academic English proficiency, critical awareness development and other possible lived experience, and the pedagogical implications conducive to inform the future University EAP pedagogies in this globalized century. A general objective of this book is to make its arguments and findings accessible to the audience of a broader population of English language educators, researchers, teachers, practitioners, TESOL researchers and instructors, graduate students, who have an academic interest in the University EAP research, teaching, and learning, and general readers that have an interest in academic English teaching and learning in China.

Shanghai, China
March 2018

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More generally, I should like to thank my American colleagues and friends from the College of Education of New Mexico State University, New Mexico, U.S.A., my brave and far-sighted Chinese colleagues who have been teaching University EAP in higher education institutions in Shanghai since 2013, and particularly the Chinese university undergraduate students who participated in this study. They all made this study possible.

Contents

Part I Theory and Concepts

1 Introduction	3
1.1 Today's Chinese University Youth: Grace and Dispositions	3
1.2 In-Depth, Phenomenological Interviewing: A Way to Looking in	5
1.3 Revealing Lived Lives: The Three-Interview Series	6
1.3.1 Interview One: Focused Lived Experience	6
1.3.2 Interview Two: Detail of University EAP Learning Experience	7
1.3.3 Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning	7
References	7
2 University Academic English: A Rising Global Phenomenon	11
2.1 Globalization and the Rise of English as a Global Language	12
2.2 Increasing Demand for Academic English in the World Universities	13
2.3 Foreign Language Policy Shifts in China: From 1949 to Now	14
2.4 University English Teaching and Learning in China	16
References	18
3 Learning Theories that Impact English Teaching and Learning	21
3.1 Behaviorism	21
3.1.1 Behaviorism in Education	21
3.1.2 Behaviorism and Structuralism in English Language Teaching	23
3.1.3 English Language Teaching Against Behaviorism and Structuralism	24
3.2 Constructivism	25
3.2.1 Cognitive Constructivist Theory of Learning	26
3.2.2 Sociocultural Constructivist Theory of Learning	26

3.3	Second Language Acquisition	27
3.4	Learning Motivation	28
3.5	Comprehension Hypothesis	29
3.6	Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency	30
3.7	English Textbooks in Use for Language Learners	31
3.8	Caring, Supportive Teachers that Matter	32
3.9	Testing and Assessment that Play a Role in Students’ Academic Success	34
	References	35
4	English for Academic Purposes as a Critical Pedagogy	41
4.1	Definition of English for Academic Purposes	41
4.2	Theoretical Underpinnings of EAP	42
4.2.1	Needs Analysis	42
4.2.2	Sociocultural Constructivist Theory of Learning	43
4.2.3	Interrogation of EAP Assumptions	44
4.3	Critical Pedagogy and Its Influence on University EAP	45
4.4	Freire’s Influence: Anti-banking Education	46
	References	47
 Part II Practice		
5	Vignettes of Chinese University EAP Learners	51
5.1	Vignette of Dandan	51
5.1.1	English Learning at Public Primary School	51
5.1.2	English Learning at Private Bilingual Middle School	53
5.1.3	English Learning at Key Public High School	55
5.1.4	EAP Learning at University	56
5.1.5	Family Support and Parental Influence on English Learning	57
5.2	Vignette of Meimei	59
5.2.1	English Learning at Public Primary School	59
5.2.2	English Learning at Public Middle School	61
5.2.3	English Learning at Key Public High School	64
5.2.4	EAP Learning at University	66
5.2.5	Family Support and Parental Influence on English Learning	70
5.3	Vignette of Xiaobo	71
5.3.1	English Learning at Public Primary School	71
5.3.2	English Learning at Public Middle School	72
5.3.3	English Learning at Key Private High School	75
5.3.4	EAP Learning at University	76
5.3.5	Family Support and Parental Influence on English Learning	81

- 5.4 Vignette of Xiaogang 81
 - 5.4.1 English Learning at Public Primary School 81
 - 5.4.2 English Learning at Public Middle School 84
 - 5.4.3 English Learning at Public High School 85
 - 5.4.4 EAP Learning at University 88
 - 5.4.5 Family Support and Parental Influence on English Learning 91
- 6 Emergent Themes Surrounding Learner Vignettes 95**
 - 6.1 English Learning at Primary Level 95
 - 6.1.1 English Textbooks Are “Dull” 96
 - 6.1.2 English Learning in Classroom: Good Behavior Is Key 97
 - 6.1.3 Summary 102
 - 6.2 English Learning at Secondary Level 103
 - 6.2.1 In Public Middle School: Life as a Pre-Scripted Routine 104
 - 6.2.2 In Private Bilingual Middle School: Life Could Be so Diverse 109
 - 6.2.3 In High School: Schooldays as Flattened and Stressed 113
 - 6.3 Emergent Awareness of Self-Disciplined Autonomous Learning 122
 - 6.4 Shadow Education: An Alternative Way to School Success 125
 - 6.4.1 Attending Private English Institute 126
 - 6.4.2 Having English Home Tutoring 128
 - 6.4.3 Cramming English by One’s Self 131
 - 6.5 Optimum Education, Peer Pressure, and Finding an Outlet 132
 - 6.6 Chinese English Teachers of Different Qualities 135
 - 6.6.1 School Teachers that Taught not for Examination Purposes 136
 - 6.6.2 University EAP Teachers as Navigating Beacon and Inspiration 138
 - 6.6.3 Uncaring Teachers that Discouraged Learning 140
 - 6.7 Different Motivations in English Learning 141
 - 6.7.1 Learners and Integrative Motivation in English Learning 142
 - 6.7.2 Learners and Instrumental Motivation in English Learning 152
 - 6.8 Scientific Research as an Empowering Drive 156
 - 6.8.1 Developing Serious Scientific Attitudes 157
 - 6.8.2 Nurturing Teamwork Spirit and Leadership Awareness 159
 - 6.8.3 Striving for Articulation in Presenting in Public 160

6.9 Visualizing a Possible Self and Promising Future 163
 6.9.1 Generational Characteristics of the Learner Cohort 163
 6.9.2 Options of Career Planning for a Promising Future 166
 References 170

Part III Revelations, Desire, and Legacy in the Science of EAP

7 Crystalization of Themes 179
 7.1 EAP Learners and Their Exposure to a World with Multiple
 Opportunities and Possibilities Through English: Revealing
 Dispositions 179
 7.2 EAP Learners’ Critical Awareness Development Through
 English: Critiquing the Power of Institution 181
 7.3 EAP Learners and Their Self-Transformation Through English:
 Using University EAP Practice as a Self-Empowering Tool 183
 7.4 Learning Difficulties Confronted by Chinese University Youth
 Using Foreign EAP Textbooks 186
 7.5 Worries of Gaining a Low GPA in University EAP
 Assessment 188
 7.6 Respecting and Responding to University Youth’s
 Learning Needs 189
 7.7 Teacher Influence on Students’ Academic Success in University
 EAP 190
 References 191

8 What is and What may be in the Field of University EAP 193
 8.1 Challenges for Future Studies 193
 8.2 Implications for University EAP Teachers 194
 8.3 Toward a Localized Critical University EAP Pedagogy. 197
 References 199

Afterword as Concluding Remarks 201
References 205

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AWL	Academic Word List
BICS	Basic interpersonal communicative skills
CALP	Cognitive academic language proficiency
CEAP	Critical English for academic purposes
CET	College English Test
EAP	English for academic purposes
EFL	English as a foreign language
EGAP	English for general academic purposes
ELL	English language learner
ELT	English language teaching
EMI	English as a medium of instruction
ESL	English as a second language
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
ESP	English for specific purposes
EST	English for science and technology
GELT	General English language teaching
HSEE	The High School Entrance Examination
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MSEE	The Middle School Entrance Examination
NHEEE	The National Higher Education Entrance Examination
TEFL	Teaching English as a foreign language
TESL	Teaching English as a second language
TESOL	Teaching English/teachers of English to speakers of other languages
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language

Definition of the Terms

Academic English proficiency: This term refers to the ELLs' abilities to “understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school” (Cummins, 2008, p. 71). Such proficiency covers listening, speaking, reading, and writing about the subject area content materials throughout the process of formal academic learning. It is interchangeable with the term Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), introduced by Cummins (1979, 1981, 2008) in differentiating and theorizing between the social and academic language acquisition.

College English Test (CET): This term refers to the university-level English proficiency test implemented biannually in Mainland China. This test is comprised of two levels, CET Band-4 and CET Band-6 for Chinese university non-English-major students. As a high-stakes large-scale standardized criterion-referenced test administered by the National College English Testing Committee on behalf of the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education, it aims at measuring the English proficiency of university ELLs in accordance with the College English Curriculum Requirements (Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, 2004/2007).

English for academic purposes (EAP): This term refers to the teaching of English with the “specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach in that language” (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 8), or the study of English for the purpose of “participating in higher education” (Bruce, 2011, p. 6). EAP grounds English language teaching (ELT) in the cognitive and linguistic demands of the academic target situations, tailoring the instruction to specific rather than general purposes (Benesch, 2001).

University youth: This term is interchangeable with *university students*. It refers to the student cohort born as the Millennials, also known as the Generation Y, or Gen Y. They are most commonly described as the cohort between 1980 and 2000 (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Morrissey, Coolican, & Wolfgang, 2011, Stasio Jr., 2013), who grew up with the emergence of the World Wide Web and the assortment of

related digital technologies, such as cell phones, text messaging, video games, and instant messaging (Howe & Strauss, 2000). In this study, the term of *university youth* refers specifically to the only-child generation of Chinese citizens born between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 1999 within the larger socioeconomic climate of the country's Reform and Open-up since 1978.

The National Higher Education Entrance Examination (NHEEE): This term is commonly addressed as the *Gaokao* (the Chinese *Pinyin*). It is also translated as the National Matriculation Examination or the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE). It is the most influential and significant high-stakes academic examination held annually in early June in Mainland China. As a prerequisite for entering higher education institutions at the undergraduate level with no age restriction since 2001, the *Gaokao* is usually taken by students at the end of the 2nd semester of Grade Twelve when they finish high school. The examinations last about nine hours over a period of 2 days, depending on the province respectively. In most provinces, the compulsory subjects of Chinese Language Arts, Math, and English are required for all test takers. Meanwhile, the social-science students take an additional examination on the elective subjects of history, political sciences, and geography, while the natural-science students take an additional examination on the elective subjects of physics, chemistry, and biology.

The High School Entrance Examination (HSEE): This term is commonly known as the *Zhongkao* (the Chinese *Pinyin*). It is a high-stakes academic examination held annually in the middle of or late June in different provinces or cities in Mainland China. As a prerequisite for entering high school or other equivalent secondary schools, the *Zhongkao* is usually taken by students at the end of the 2nd semester of Grade Nine when they finish the 9-year compulsory education in middle school.

The Middle School Entrance Examination (MSEE): According to China's 9-year compulsory education policies and the pertinent education laws and regulations, primary school graduates have legal rights to receive free public middle school education in the neighborhood without taking any entrance examinations. However, private middle schools and some key public middle schools hold a high-stakes selective examination in the middle of or late June annually for the selection of top primary school graduates.

Part I
Theory and Concepts

Chapter 1

Introduction



1.1 Today's Chinese University Youth: Grace and Dispositions

The continual growth of English language teaching (ELT) and the newer generation of ELLs in China are inevitable in this new and diverse era. The growth complies with the country's developmental strategy, meets the need of the internationalization of higher education, and arises from the role of English for academic or specific purposes. Internationally, four generations of learners are identified since the 1950s (Reilly, 2012): the Baby Boomer Generation (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Y (1981–1999), and Generation Z (2000–present). Born in the 1980s and 90s, Generation Y, for short, Gen Y, is known as the Millennials, or the Internet generation. Growing up with technology and changing socioeconomic factors, this generation is confident and technologically advanced (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), enjoying personal, financial, academic, and social qualities differing from other generations. A literature review of the undergraduate youth in world universities reveals the value in understanding the generational dispositions of this students group as well as their language learning experience in and outside the school settings (Broido, 2004; Center for Language Teaching Advancement (CeLTA), 2014; Davis-Wiley, 2013; Deng, 2013; Haley & Alswael, 2012; Kavaliauskienė, 2012; Morrissey et al., 2011; Pew Research, 2010; Stasio Jr., 2013; Tong et al., 2011; Wang, 2009; Yuan, 2012).

For today's university youth in China, the learning of English for academic purposes (EAP) represents a considerable academic challenge as academic communicative competence, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, are essential for academic success in the EAP syllabi, pedagogy, and assessment. In the world universities, research on the distinctive dispositions of today's Gen Y is increasing, with international educators, such as Berman and Cheng (2001), Evans and Morrison (2011), Kavaliauskienė (2012), Reilly (2012) and Sandars and Morrison (2007), exploring and discussing not only the generational characteristics

of this student population, but also the challenges they bring to the classroom, especially the University English classroom. Berman and Cheng (2001) discussed the difficulties that 53 Canadian undergraduates encountered in English learning. Evans and Morrison (2011) analyzed the language-related difficulties faced by 28 freshmen during the first term of their university experience in Hong Kong. Kavaliauskienė (2012) revealed the major sources of difficulties in English for specific purposes (ESP) learning among university learners in Eastern Europe. Reilly (2012) found that in Mexico, 71% of students described their English classes as “very boring”. CeLTA (2014) analyzed the demographic transformation in the student population and the pertinent changes in language teaching methods by quoting Pew research on the qualities of today’s university youth (Pew Research, 2010). Despite the distinctive characteristics of today’s university youth, the similarities in their English learning difficulties, along with their language learning attitudes, demonstrate the value in examining Chinese university youth and their particular academic English learning experience.

China boasts the world’s largest higher education system, having more university youth of all types and levels than any other country, with more than 20 million studying and living on campus (Zhou, 2006). Many of these youth are earnest, diligent, and hard working. They value the time and opportunity for learning, cherish lofty ideals, and study hard in their discipline areas. However, within the fast-changing societal environment, they often find themselves trapped in an ambivalent mindset of their status quo and the future. It is also acknowledged that they feel proud as God’s favorites in people’s eyes, the pillars of the country, and the future hope of the family and the Chinese nation. Notwithstanding, they are frustrated about the rising pressure on academic success, peer competition, and job employment upon graduation. Lastly, it is acknowledged that they aspire to contribute to their family and the society but are concerned in the meantime of their personal and academic gains in and outside higher education (Li, 2005; Zhou, 2006).

Zhao et al. (2009) surveyed 2,283 freshmen and sophomores from 12 Chinese universities, noticing that nearly 35% of them had low learner morale in English learning, and felt dissatisfied with the university’s ELT. Qiao et al. (2010) investigated 20 universities and colleges in Heilongjiang Province, reporting that in over half of these institutions, teachers sacrificed class time for the CET 4 and 6 mock tests. Cai (2010) explored the prevalent discontent of over 2,400 university youth nationwide regarding their learning attitudes of university ELT through two big-data surveys conducted in 2009 and the following year 2010. Daunting and alarming, these findings reveal the urgency in understanding the generational characteristics of today’s university youth and their University English learning experience as they compose the majority of today’s University English classroom.

More recently, English teachers from home universities raised issues of today’s Chinese university youth and the suggested ELT methods (Guo, 2010; Zheng, 2011; Tong et al., 2011; Lu, 2011; Zhang & Zou, 2012; Li, 2012; Yuan, 2012; Deng, 2013; Lin, 2013; Ma, 2014). This reveals a gap in the domestic ELT literature on understanding their particular English learning experience within the

macro Chinese English learning context. In spite of their generational characteristics, the commonalities in these youth's University English learning difficulties and learner attitudes recommend continued research value to examine qualitatively, quantitatively, or with a mixed approach, how they learn University EAP in and outside the school settings.

1.2 In-Depth, Phenomenological Interviewing: A Way to Looking in

The study of phenomenology originates from Husserl, the “fountainhead of phenomenology in the twentieth century” (Vandenberg, 1997, p. 11), who claimed that people can be certain of how things appear in and present themselves to their consciousness. Husserl named his philosophical method phenomenology, the science of pure “phenomena” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 55). Phenomenology begins in human being's lived experience and eventually turns back to it (van Manen, 1990, p. 35), searching for “essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experience contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). It informs individuals by providing the perception of phenomena—how it appears and feels. Researchers with a phenomenological perspective qualitatively examine the meaning of human's lived experience, understand the phenomena in their term by providing a description of such experience as it is experienced by the person (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998), and allow the essence to emerge (Cameron, Schaffer & Hyeon-Ae, 2001). They explore the lived experience to understand by giving it meaning and transform it into a textual expression of its essence, through which the text reveals a “reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (van Manen, 1990, p. 36).

Interviewing, as a basic mode of inquiry, allows the researcher and her participants to construct a dialogue that brings a deeper understanding of the truth beneath the surface phenomena with the aim of understanding their lived experience and the meaning they make out of them (Seidman, 2006). Since the purpose of this study is to understand the generational characteristics of today's Chinese university youth and the critical dispositions that they believe indispensable in learning academic English in and outside the school settings, a qualitative lens permits the researcher to use of Seidman's (2006) in-depth phenomenological interviewing and to collect data for such intention, as it is

a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues. As a method of inquiry interviewing is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration. Finally, it is deeply satisfying to researchers who are interested in others' stories. (p. 14)

Seidman's in-depth phenomenological interviewing tool provides access to the various contexts of the participants' behaviors in academic English learning and the way to understand the meaning of these behaviors. According to Seidman (2006), the in-depth phenomenological interviewing, through a three-interview series, guides the participants organically to reconstruct their lived experience within the topic under study; meanwhile, the researcher has an agenda which allows her and her participants to "plumb the experience and to place it in context" (p. 17).

1.3 Revealing Lived Lives: The Three-Interview Series

Within Seidman's (2006) interview paradigm, the complete sequence of three separate but interconnected interviews includes: Interview One the focused life history, Interview Two the details of the experience, and Interview Three the reflection on the meaning. Each interview investigates a particular theme. Since in this study the research target is the Chinese university youth who were learning University EAP, these themes are embodied in the focused academic English learning experience of the past, the detail of the present University EAP learning experience, and the reflection on the meaning of the past and present academic English learning experience.

1.3.1 Interview One: Focused Lived Experience

The purpose of the first interview is to "put the participant's experience in context by asking them to tell as much as possible about themselves in light of the topic up to the present time" (Seidman, 2006, p. 17). Participants were encouraged to deconstruct the biographical and historical events regarding the family and primary and secondary schooling that made them university students in the selected university in Shanghai, which was decided through convenient sampling among universities in Shanghai that offer University EAP program. In asking the participants to put their University EAP learning in the context of their prior lived experience, questions such as how they decided to be a university student was raised. By asking "how" questions, the meaning-making events that situated them presently in University EAP program out of the context of their life world were subsequently reconstructed and narrated.

1.3.2 Interview Two: Detail of University EAP Learning Experience

According to Seidman (2006), the purpose of Interview Two is to “concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience in the topic area of the study” (p. 18). This interview was more directed as participants would be asked to reconstruct the details about their present University EAP learning experience on the basis of their daily activities as university ELLs.

1.3.3 Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning

The purpose of the third interview is to ask participants to construct the meaning-making narratives of their lived experience. The question of meaning, claimed Seidman (2006), is to address the “intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life” (p. 18). In this interview, participants would be asked about their understanding of University EAP learning experience and the meaning of being an ELL learning University EAP at this target university. For instance, they would be required to reconsider what they had covered in the first two interviews, and to describe what they believed important in learning University EAP, and the influences of such learning experience on their academic English proficiency, critical thinking development, and other pertinent experience. By doing so, they would be given opportunities to reflect on how the contributing factors interacted to bring them to the present situation, to look at their present lived experience and the sociopolitical and educational contexts in which such experience occurred in detail.

Scaffolding each other, these interconnected interviews aim to let the meaning of the target university youth’ behaviors surface tangibly and meaningfully within the context of their lives and lives of people and the world around them.

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Chapter 2

University Academic English: A Rising Global Phenomenon



The role of English as the most commonly used language for the global political, economic, and cultural exchanges has made its research and education within the macro context of globalization to be approached through a variety of means. Internationally, Short et al. (2001) researched the rise of English and its role as a leading form of global communication. Bamgbose (2001) investigated globalization and its implication as regards ethical issues and related study, raising the inquiries of English dissemination globally and opportunism in English language teaching. Gupta (2001) studied English language education policies, learner exposure to English, and the interrelations. Vogel (2001) explored foreign language training in higher education and the structure of foreign language programs in the European context. Block and Cameron (2002) studied the influence of globalization on language policies and practices. Rhedding-Jones (2002) studied the standardized English curriculum in globalization. Lysandrou and Lysandrou (2003) discussed the supremacy of English as a global lingua franca for communication and its impact on communities that use it. Bamgbose (2003) examined the problems of English in language policy and language planning. Within China, Du (2001) and Hu (2001) investigated the country's foreign language policy shifts, envisioning the future changes in the field of ELT. Zhu (2003) analyzed the globalization-oriented ELT challenges that China confronted. Chang (2006) studied China's English major education within the changed global and local contexts. These international and domestic studies reveal the continuing academic value in exploring the influence of globalization on English and its education in China's higher education in this new century.

2.1 Globalization and the Rise of English as a Global Language

The 1995 report of the British Council verified the dominance of English over the world's other languages with the recognition of globalization in the "political and academic discourse" (Bamgbose, 2001, p. 514). English as a global language emerged and grew with the British and U.S. colonialism, the expansion of a single global market, and the promotion of English globally by the U.K. and the U.S. government and private companies for political and commercial purposes (Benesch, 2001; Hyland, 2006; Phillipson, 1992). Benesch (2001) summarized the economic roots and ideological underpinnings of English for academic purposes (EAP) as follows:

... EAP's discourse of neutrality has presented the history of this field as a consensual and inevitable chronology of pedagogical events rather than a well-crafted and organized efforts on the part of governments, businesses, and foundations working together to promote English language teaching, conferences, publications, and faculty exchanges, ensuring that markets and labor would be available to promote their economic interests. (pp. 34-35)

Though the hegemony exists on the choice of English in a country's foreign language education, the "accelerated rate" of language shift toward English never decelerates (Reagan, 2001, p. 63). Aided by the political and economic hegemony of the U.S. after the two World Wars in the 20th century, English continues to spread and penetrate in the 21st century:

... More than 75 territories have officially recognized English as a primary or secondary language, and the number of speakers of English as a first or second language or foreign language, or those routinely exposed to English, has reached 2, 213, 507, 500, making up over a third of the world's population. (Crystal, 2003, p. 107)

Crystal listed various social phenomena to manifest the dominance of English in the modern world: English has permeated the field of popular culture, becoming the main language of popular music, advertising, satellite broadcasting, home computers, and video games. It is the language of international air traffic communication, and is used extensively in international maritime, policing, and emergency services, and serves in the academic, scientific, and technological sectors that over 80% of all information is stored in English in the electronic retrieval systems.

Other researchers described and discussed similar influences of English on the societal life in the time of globalization. Fishman (1996) surveyed the use of English in 20 countries, concluding that the world of large-scale commerce, industry, technology, and banking was an "international world... linguistically dominated by English almost everywhere, regardless of how well established and well-protected local cultures, languages, and identities may otherwise be" (p. 357). Bottery (2000) noticed the association of the progress of globalization with the dominance of English. Block and Cameron (2002) observed new impetus to the growth of English as a global lingua franca through new changes in the economy and new means of communication. Chang (2006) discussed the interplay between

globalization and English, arguing that the growth of people's English competence has expedited globalization by "facilitating political understanding, economic activities and cultural exchange," while globalization serves as the "driving force to strengthen the position of English as a global language" (p. 515). These discussions reflect the indispensable connection between English and the most prominent characteristic of our time, globalization, highlighting the ongoing value of understanding the varied learning experience of today's ELLs.

2.2 Increasing Demand for Academic English in the World Universities

At the turn of the century, one in five of the world's population was able to speak English with reasonable competence (Crystal, 2003). The new century witnessed English as the world's predominant language of research and scholarship with more than 90% of the journal literature in some scientific domains printed in English and the most prestigious and cited journals in English (Hyland, 2006), though such growth was at the expense of other languages, making them "unnecessary" (Crystal, 2003, p. 15). In the world's academia, more students and academics are gaining fluency in the convention of English academic discourses to understand disciplines, establish careers, and navigate learning successfully (Hyland, 2006). English, in particular academic English, serves not only as a lingua franca that facilitates sharing and exchange of ideas and dissemination of information and knowledge, but also sweeps around like a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, in Swales' (1997) words, a "powerful carnivore gobbling up the other denizens of the academic linguistic grazing grounds" (p. 374).

Gray (2002) investigated the expansion of English from the mid-1960s to the present, arguing that the increase in the number of the world's organizations, transnational corporations, and Internet use has accelerated this process. With the university education becoming globalized and the enormous expansion of the second and foreign language (S/FL) speakers and ELLs that are studying academic disciplines through English-medium instructions, the growth of English in higher education has been "dramatic, changing the conditions under which language learning takes place" (Hyland, 2006, p. 24).

According to UNESCO's statistics in May 2014, at least four million students went abroad to study in 2012, up from 2 million in 2000, representing 1.8% of all university enrolments of 2 in 100 students globally. Traditional destination countries, such as the U.S. (hosting 18%), the U.K. (11%), and Australia (6%), remain strong magnets for international students seeking high-quality education. More new destination countries and regional hubs, such as Singapore, New Zealand, and Malaysia, are rising. The expansion of higher education in postcolonial territories of the U.K., such as Hong Kong, South Africa, India, and Singapore, is also noticeable (Hyland, 2006). European countries, such as Germany (hosting 5% in 2012) and

France (hosting 7% in 2012) according to UNESCO's 2014 statistics, have accelerated the process in competing for more international enrollment by offering courses and instructions in English in a wider range of disciplines. Other than the popularity of English medium of instruction (EMI) courses and programs offered across Europe (Maiworm & Wachter, 2002; Wachter & Maiworm, 2008), in the Asia Pacific region, found Kirkpatrick (2017), that more universities were moving to provide their students with courses and programs through EMI. These conspicuous trends in the world's higher education institutions manifest an increased demand for University EAP program, not only in destination countries, but also in home countries, to assist students in developing better linguistic and communicative skills to serve their higher education overseas.

More recently, inside China, some leading higher education institutions in major cosmopolises, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, started to introduce University EAP program to replace the traditional general ELT since 2013. This solidified positioning university youth as the resource of knowledge and experience in student-centered English classroom, promoting learner needs, autonomy, originality, critical thinking, and academic integrity through changed, research-informed University EAP practices not only for academic and work purposes, but also for global inclusivity (de Chazal, 2014).

2.3 Foreign Language Policy Shifts in China: From 1949 to Now

The official English education in China started in 1862, though there was no consistent national foreign language policy, nor well-designed foreign language planning at that time (Chang, 2006; Guo, 2001). It is in the broader context of the changed international environment and international relations that China came to envisage the rise of English and accordingly shifted its national foreign language policy to embrace this world trend.

The latter half of the 20th century not only witnessed the founding of the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) in 1949, but also underwent tremendous changes in its national language policy and language planning. This included standardization of the official language and indigenous languages, and the enhancement of foreign language education. The former was reflected in the propagation of Mandarin Chinese (commonly known as *Putonghua*) as the nation's only official language, the standardization and use of a simplified form of the Chinese script nationwide except for Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao, and the linguistic description of various languages of minority nationalities. The most remarkable, however, was the implementation of a series of up-down movement to promote the FL education (Lam, 2002).

Even after 1949, China's national foreign language policy, in particular on English, was largely motivated by the "prevailing political agenda of the time for

about three decades” (Chang, 2006, p. 515). The political and economic considerations in the 1950s reflected on the foreign language preference were to adopt and promote Russian as the preferred foreign language with a push of English to the verge of extinction. However, the political and economic break with the Soviet Union in the early 1960s, along with the official establishment of the more diplomatic and economic relations with the Third World countries, made it urgent for the shift of China’s national foreign language policy towards English. During this period and in onward years, English was prescribed as the leading foreign language in the secondary education. For the first time, China officially raised the concept of a first foreign language, indicating a great change in the English language policy. Although it took into consideration the long-term political and economic needs and proved significant, it failed to be implemented consistently during the next 10 years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).

With the end of the Cultural Revolution and the accelerating progress of the economic integration in the last quarter of the 20th century, China has recognized the role of English in globalization, regaining the national policy of favoring English in its education cause. The field of ELT ushered in a new era of rapid development since 1978 with the national policy of Reform and Open-up issued later that year. The Ministry of Education (MoE) encouraged the long-term language planning and a balanced program of training foreign language speakers in 1979 (MoE, 1999). Three years later, in 1982, it demanded that English be taught as the major foreign language in middle school (Liu & Gong, 2001, quoted in Hu, 2001, p. 250). Since then, English has become the preferred and dominant foreign language taught in the secondary and higher education.

Lam (2002) quoted Scovel (1995) who traced the preceding events of the course of ELT in China and classified them into three historical periods: Period I from 1949 to 1965, Period II from 1966 to 1976, and Period III from 1977 and onwards. This division recognizes historically the upheaval caused by the Cultural Revolution and the period before and after it. Lam furthered Scovel’s demarcation of China’s foreign language education into six historical subdivisions as follows (Table 2.1).

These historical phases start with the time when Russian became China’s preferred foreign language in the 1950s. Then, English gained its growing

Table 2.1 Six subdivisions in China’s foreign language education

Historical periods	Subdivisions of foreign language education	Time
Before Cultural Revolution	1. Interlude with Russian	Early 1950s
	2. Back-to-English movement	1957–1965
During Cultural Revolution	3. Repudiation of foreign language learning	1966–1970
	4. English for renewing ties with the West	1971–1976
After Cultural Revolution	5. English for modernization	1977–1990
	6. English for international stature	From 1991

Cited from Lam (2002, p. 246)

importance as a major foreign language from around 1957 to the middle of the 1960s, till its rising status suffered a severe setback during the Cultural Revolution, which dramatically changed China's overall foreign language education policy. It was not until the end of such 10-year national calamity in 1976, with its sociopolitical and ideological backwash gradually being annihilated has China painfully realized the strategic urgency in opening its door to the outside world. This meant China was determined to keep up the pace with other countries and to become part of the international community. Hence, it regained the foreign language policy emphasis on ELT and promoted it unabated with the advancement of the Reform and Open-up and the rumbling wheels of the history into the new century.

Even today, the preference for and advocacy of English is connected to its pragmatic prestige in international business relations and communication. The past decades have proved English as a preferred foreign language with its instrumentalism as a communicative lingua franca in accelerating foreign trade, governmental and nongovernmental exchanges and the rise of the comprehensive national strength and social and economic growth. Even more noteworthy is that in China the field of ELT suffers when the political agenda prevails over the economic and educational agendas despite the economic integration, while it promotes the economic progress when the political agenda converges with the latter within a broader climate of globalization (Hu, 2001). This history-verified revelation raises the continuing value in exploring the distinctive generational characteristics of today's Chinese university youth and the critical dispositions they believe important in learning academic English within the broader social context of the globalized 21st century.

2.4 University English Teaching and Learning in China

China is the country that traditionally values education and runs the largest education system for the largest population in the world (Zhou, 2006). The fact that so many only children born under the "One Family, One Child" policy are coming of age has heightened their parents' aspiration of giving their children the best education possible. Despite that English is a foreign language to most Chinese and that the official English education barely started in the late 19th century, English learning has never ceased and continues to draw rising attention among millions of its people. Assuming that there were probably three hundred million Chinese that actively engaged in the job of learning English, Boyle (2000) quoted Cowan et al. (1979) to summarize the national enthusiasm for this cause:

... The Chinese view English primarily as a necessary tool which can facilitate access to modern scientific and technological advances and secondarily as a vehicle to promote commerce and understanding between the PRC and countries where English is a major language. (p. 466)

Such essential motivation for English learning has not weakened or changed at the turn of the new century, as was verified in Bowers (1996):

... [T]hey learn English because it is the language of science, specifically perhaps of the majority of research journals. They learn it because it is the neutral language of commerce, the standard currency of international travel and communication. They learn it because you find more software in English than in all other languages put together. (p. 3)

So far, English has become the leading foreign language in the curricula of China's education of all levels for nearly four decades. Despite the zigzagged path for its hard-earned dominance, the rise of English to the present prestige in the national curricula was inseparably tied to the broader climate of economic globalization and the shift of the national foreign language policy after 1949.

The critical role of English as the world's lingua franca in our era of globalization has been acknowledged in the internationalization of higher education. The strategic importance of English in China's higher education reform and the promotion of quality education has been perceived by the central government in its push for the socioeconomic development, national modernization and competitiveness, and international communication in the global economy (Cai, 2003, 2010a; Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development 2010–2020, 2010; Zhou, 2006). The Ministry of Education (MoE) has stipulated that University English program should enable students to communicate effectively and develop in them a global vision through language education (Zhou, 2006). University ELT, as the higher end of the English curriculum, has been given remarkable policy attention (Cai, 2010a; Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Hu, 2004; Jiang, 2003; Shu & Hua, 2009) due to its significance in facilitating resource sharing, information exchange, and dissemination of information and knowledge across disciplines.

Despite the policy orientation to the University ELT quality betterment, restrained by the limited class hours, the biannual high-stakes standardized college English tests (CETs) and other investments, the English curriculum requirements and the test-oriented teaching were interpreted as the "coaching materials" (Chen & Klenowski, 2009, p. 7) with a banking ideology (Freire, 1970/2001). In the University English classroom, textbook-based instructions remain as a priority, with teaching arranged primarily in conformity with fixed guidelines set by the school or the department, and with teacher instructions as the major form of classroom learning. Although University ELT should not retreat to the behaviorist matter of teaching how to record, repeat, do sentence drills, or listen and rote memorize like a deposit or parrot, what happened in the classroom reveals a banking model of pedagogical practices.

One of the most evident consequences is that inefficiency and test orientedness have become a frequent label to University ELT (Zhu, 2003), constituting a thorny issue it is confronted, identified for long, but still existent, not yet properly addressed or solved (Hu, 2005; Li, 2002; Lin & Ma, 2004; Pan & Cai, 2011). Cai (2010b) conducted a longitudinal mixed-approach research on Chinese university ELLs' satisfaction with ELT from 1996 to 2010, concluding that College English

Integrated Course remained as a mega-size core undergraduate course, and a “most widely concerned, labor-consuming, and time-costing course. ... one of the most frustrating courses among university students” (p. 57). This reveals what Freire (1970/2001) critiqued the “scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits” (p. 72); over time, it would transform them to be “repositories for information dumped there by teachers” (Fecho, 2004, p. 18).

An overview of China’s recent 10-year ELT literature reveals the efforts in looking into the contributing factors to the discouraging educational result and the pressing dilemma that University ELT has faced in the new century (Liu, 2010; Zhang, 2003; Qin, 2003; Lu, 2010; Yang, 2010; Hu, 2011; Cai & Liao, 2010 and Cai, 2012). Though in these studies, qualitative or mixed-approach methods were applied to explore the complexity of ELLs’ English learning experience, they have not yet provided a meticulous portrait of today’s university youth, nor the attributional manifestations among, between and within their academic English learning experience in the broader social environment of the globalization and internationalization of higher education. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), things in their naturalistic settings need to be investigated, which refers to understanding the contexts where today’s university youth learn University English. Since this study aims at the “rich description of the social world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 16) with the multiple realities, the meaning that each participant addresses or raises within a variety of social settings matters where English has played a role on their lives. Meanwhile, the uniqueness of their lived experience in their respective sociopolitical and historical context constitutes an essential part of a dialectical inquiry into their social discourses of academic English learning worthy of interpretation, analysis and sharing in our globalized era (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

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Chapter 3

Learning Theories that Impact English Teaching and Learning



3.1 Behaviorism

3.1.1 Behaviorism in Education

The popular understanding of learning in the first half of the 20th century characterizes a system of behavioral responses to physical stimuli by behaviorist linguists such as Thorndike (1921), Watson (1925), and Skinner (1957). They believed the essence of learning was developed in terms of stimulus-response association through habit formation, operant conditioning, and reinforcement with an emphasis on successful error-free learning in small and prepared steps and stages. Then, habits would be formed, reinforced, and strengthened by drill practice and imitation. Behaviorist learning theory derived from Skinner's (1968) work in the 1960s claims that learning was evaluated as change in a learner's behavior with emphasis on modification of the learner behavior. Its pedagogical implication includes presentation of information, question, and feedback to arouse learner response and positive reinforcement for correct answers and repetition of the cycle for correct learning. Behaviorist learning theory, contended Greeno, Collins, & Resnick (1996), forms the basis of the traditional learning environment geared for the efficient transmission of the information and basic skills to learners in a neatly organized manner. To those who advocate behaviorism in learning, behaviors are learned habits, accounting for how such habits are formed to influence the learning process.

Teachers with a behaviorist mindset take classroom as a teacher-centered environment, with teachers, textbooks, and other enrichment materials as the major source of knowledge. They regard curricula as the intensified teaching guideline, in which text-based exercises are designed and developed with intentional guidance, regular repetition and review, and increasing difficulty levels. According to Bloom (1956) and Gagné (1965), constant repetition and consideration are necessary for the effective reinforcement of responses and able to reproduce the whole.

Behaviorist theory of learning, summarized Dai and Chen (2007), addresses more the process than the condition of learning, featuring the principles as follows:

- i. Language learning is habit formation;
- ii. Mistakes are bad and should be avoided, as they make bad habits;
- iii. Language skills are learned more effectively if they are presented orally first, then in written form;
- iv. Analogy is a better foundation for language learning than analysis; and
- v. The meaning of words can be learned only in a linguistic and cultural context.

Additionally, behaviorists resort to observable and testable behaviors, such as quizzes and examinations, to measure the degree of learning and to evaluate the efficiency of positive reinforcement in verbal praise, good grade, and prize to students. Fosnot and Perry (2005) claimed that behaviorist teachers intend for a “sequenced, well-structured curriculum” (p. 9) to guide them pedagogically on how to assess, motivate, reinforce, and evaluate learners. In China, such teaching philosophy and pedagogical practices remain popular in schools of different educational levels.

Despite the popularity of the behaviorist mindset on learning theories in education, Kohn (1993) argued against extrinsic reinforcements at school, such as tangible rewards, because they could only create temporary compliance, not a fundamental shift in performance. Kohn’s “Do this and you’ll get that” (p. 3) summarized the then-and-now prevailing behaviorist strategy for teaching students to behave in school. He contended that the more artificial inducements are used to motivate students, the more they lose interest in what they are being bribed to do. This is because

... when it comes to producing lasting change in attitudes and behavior, however, rewards, like punishment, are strikingly ineffective. Once the rewards run out, people revert to their old behaviors. Studies show that offering incentives ...is not only less effective than other strategies but often proves worse than doing nothing at all. Incentives, a version of what psychologists call extrinsic motivators, do not alter the attitudes that underlie our behaviors. They do not create an enduring commitment to any value or action. Rather, incentives—merely – and temporarily – change what we do.” (p. 110)

Apparently, Kohn’s (1993) argument contradicts the conventional behaviorist wisdom of offering positive reinforcements for improved performance. Rewards, Kohn claimed, typically “undermine the very process they are intended to reinforce” (p. 109). What Kohn (1993) advocated is using the intrinsic desirability, namely integrative motivation, to reward and motivate students. Integrative, or intrinsic motivation, other than extrinsic reinforcements, reflects a learner’s inner interest in a given task. This implies that in educational settings, learning activities need to be designed curiosity-arousing and challenging to learners (Malone, 1981; Piaget, 1970).

Despite the counterarguments (Reitman, 1998) against Kohn’s inquiry of the traditional thinking of the behaviorist model of teaching and learning, the Skinnerian dogma that pervades today’s Chinese educational institutions needs

critical reexamination. Since this study intends to understand today's Chinese university youth and the critical dispositions that they believe important in learning English as an academic language in and outside the school settings, their individual learner behaviors reflected in their past and present learning experience matter as they may contribute to their school success.

3.1.2 Behaviorism and Structuralism in English Language Teaching

The research on language teaching and learning in the 20th century was a history of succession of trials, errors, correction, and advancement (Cheng, 2006; Ni, 2009), in which behaviorist learning theories prevailed in the field of ELT. Skinner (1957) discussed in *Verbal Behavior* the applicability of the behaviorist theory of learning to language study, arguing “no reason to assume... that verbal behavior differs in any fundamental respect from non-verbal behavior, or that any new principles must be invoked to account for it” (p. 10).

Behaviorist theories of learning claim that children learn their first language by simple imitation, listening to, and repeating what adults say. Children imitate sounds and patterns they hear and receive positive reinforcement with awards and approvals for doing so. They continue to imitate and drill practice linguistic sounds and grammar patterns till the habit of correct usage of the language is formed and further strengthened. From the behaviorist perspective, the quantity of language that children hear and the consistency of reinforcement that they receive are determinant to the success of language acquisition, simplified to imitation, repetition, and habit formation. Within the framework of behaviorist learning, the errors that children make in acquiring their first language are evidence of the result of imperfect acquisition; and this acquisition process works for learning a second or foreign language.

The British situational language teaching and American audio-lingual methods were introduced as they share similar structuralist views of the nature of language and behaviorist views of language study. British linguists Firth and Halliday studied the relationship between the language structure and the context and situation in which language is used. Their argument echoes in Pittman (1963) that the principal classroom activity in teaching English structure would be the oral practice of the structures of the language, and the oral practice of the controlled sentence patterns should be given in the situations designed to give the greatest amount of practice in English speech to students.

Along with the Army Method, the American audio-lingual methods arose as a result of Bloomfield's behaviorist theory, identifying the language structure with its basic sentence patterns and grammatical structures (Dai & Chen, 2007). Language, from the structuralist perspective, is a system of structurally related elements like phonemes, morphemes, words, structures, and sentence types, produced linearly in

a rule-governed way to transmit meaning. Language study entails the task of “mastering the elements or building blocks of the language and learning the rules by which these elements are combined, from phoneme to morpheme to word to phrase to sentence” (Dai & Chen, 2007, p. 19). An important tenet of structural linguistics is that the primary medium of language is oral, and students ought to engage in listening and repetition practices, transformation drills, and dialogues (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

English language teaching (ELT), accordingly, displays pedagogical features in-class activities such as oral instructions in the target language as the medium with dialogues and drills forming the basis. A structuralist ELT teacher gains an “insight into the linguistic problems involved that cannot easily be achieved otherwise” (Lado, 1961, p. 2); he knows real problems that his students might have regarding their first and target languages, and entails the role of minimizing possibilities for mistakes to provide better teaching.

3.1.3 English Language Teaching Against Behaviorism and Structuralism

Behaviorism in the field of ELT reached its peak in the 1960s with its application not only to the teaching of foreign languages in America but also to that of English as an S/FL in the U.K. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Though the behaviorist and structuralist learning theories were widespread, challenges started to emerge in the 1950s among American and British language researchers, such as Chomsky, Firth, Halliday, Hymes, Labov, and Krashen, who questioned the soundness of the theoretical foundation and the practicality of prior assumptions about the language structure and learning. Attacked as unsound, behaviorist learning theories could not serve as a solid foundation for how humans learn a language, since much use of a language was not imitated behavior but created anew from the underlying knowledge of the abstract rules. As for the practicality of the behaviorist approach, researchers noticed that the practical results fell short of the expectations of students unable to transfer skills required through method to real communication outside the classroom, and the experience of studying through procedures boring and unsatisfying (Dai & Chen, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Chomsky (1957, 1965) challenged the assumption about language structure and learning, arguing that language acquisition should not be reduced to developing an inventory of responses to stimuli, since each sentence that one produces represents a new combination of the words governed by rules and principles. Despite that each language has a finite number of phonemes and morphemes, the universal phenomena of the human mind underlay all languages as speakers can create an infinite number of sentences. The Chomskian revolution undermines the behaviorism and

structuralism based linguistic theory of Situational Approach and Audio-lingual Method, making embryo of the innovation and experimentation on the ELT derived from contemporary theories of language and second language acquisition (SLA) that integrate humanistic and scientific views in the holistic learning and growth of language learners.

Apart from Chomsky's views on language competence and performance, Hymes (1972) argued that grammatical competence is abstract language knowledge of the monolingual adult native speaker; it would not make sense if he fails in using it properly through activities. This implies that Chomsky's linguistic views serve for developing a theory of linguistic system, but not necessarily for pedagogical practices. When a learner acquires communicative competence, he acquires both the knowledge and the ability of language use on "when to speak, and when not to; what to talk about, and with whom; when, where, and in what manner to interact" (p. 277). Hymes' theory incorporates communication, culture, and communicative competence, featuring what a language learner should be informed to be "communicatively competent" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.159) in a speech community.

Halliday (1970) argued that linguistics is concerned with the description of speech acts or texts; language study is the study of the "functions of language, and therefore all components of meaning, brought into focus" (p. 145). He developed Hymes' view of communicative competence with seven essential functions of language, namely, the instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative, and representational functions. These functions, when acquired and properly used, could motivate and empower learners in language learning (Halliday, 1975).

3.2 Constructivism

Constructivism views learning as an interpretive, recursive, and nonlinear process by active learners interacting with the surroundings of the physical and social world (Fosnot, 2005). Two schools of constructivism prevail, namely cognitive constructivism and sociocultural constructivism. Cognitive constructivism stems from the work of J. Piaget, featuring the individual learning process and how a person constructs and develops his knowledge through experience. Sociocultural constructivism, developed by L. S. Vygotsky, emphasizes the social context of learning. Though Piaget did not include the influence of social inputs, while Vygotsky did not stress the action and reflection of individual learners, they each told half of a good story of learning that complements the other (Cobb, 2005; Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006).

3.2.1 Cognitive Constructivist Theory of Learning

In Piaget's stance, cognitive constructivism conceives learning as a "holistic, 'bottom-up' process" (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 169) enacted by an active learner as the constructor of his knowledge structure. Learning comprises successive and spiral stages in which a learner's intellectual growth is mostly influenced by personal intellectual activities while he explores, manipulates, and understands his experience (Goodman, 1990). Learning occurs through self-regulation, which involves retroactive and participatory construction and adjustment on the part of the learner in response to the external perturbances. The mechanism that promotes change in cognitive structure is equilibrium, which accounts for a learner's continual adaptation to the world around him in a nonlinear, flexible, and open way. The complexity of equilibrium makes clear how learning is continuing, how thought is marked by "acceptance or rejection of something as reasonably probable or improbable" (Dewey, 1910/1997, p. 4), and how living itself could be defined as knowing (Deutsch, 1997).

What cognitive constructivist theory of learning informs University ELT is that learning is an active process in which students construct new ideas and concepts based on their past and present language knowledge. They develop abilities to select information, originate assumptions, and make decisions in the process of integrating learning experience into their existing cognitive structure. This process allows them to proceed beyond the surface of information given and to interact with the environment by exploring and manipulating objects (Bruner, 1973).

3.2.2 Sociocultural Constructivist Theory of Learning

The sociocultural perspective of S/FL acquisition originates in the work of Vygotsky (1981), who studied the role of social experience in the development of individual knowledge. Vygotsky placed emphasis on the social context of learning, namely, how social and cultural contexts affect a learner's cognition, or how the social environment accounts for the development of the higher cognitive process.

Vygotsky stressed the connectedness between learning and a learner's social and cultural world. Since people start to learn long before they attend school, any learning one encounters in school, argued Vygotsky (1978), has a "previous history" (p. 84). The pedagogical implication is that all fundamental cognitive activities have social foundations, and cognitive skills and patterns of thinking are products of the activities practiced in the social institutions of the culture in which individuals grow up and mature through the process of "internalization," which is

the process whereby the individual, through participation in interpersonal interaction in which cultural ways of thinking are demonstrated in action, is able to appropriate them so they become transformed from being social phenomena to being part of his or her own intrapersonal mental functioning. (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 193)

The two types of interaction, interpersonal and intrapersonal, possess different meanings: the former means “communicative events and situations which occur between two people,” while the latter is communication that occurs “within an individual’s mind” (Saville-Troike, 2006, pp. 112–113). As the sociocultural phenomena, these interactions connect language and thought, indicating the connection between learning contexts and individuals with opportunities for language development.

Unlike the cognitive constructivist view that biology and development lead learning, Vygotsky emphasized socially and semiotically mediated learning which propels development (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). This lies an important educational tenet that the capacity to teach and to benefit from instructions is the fundamental attribute of human beings.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) proposed by Vygotsky (1978) is defined as the distance between the “actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving” and the “level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.” It functions as a connecting concept and model for the higher cognitive growth and explains how a learner’s learning experience could be organized as the most effective form of learning that occurs within it. Since learning involves moving beyond the current level of competence, scaffolding in teaching serves to move learners into the nearest reaches of their incompetence and assists them to become competent there through socializing and engaging in activities with a more able adult or a peer who has already mastered that particular function.

The sociocultural constructivist theory of learning is influential in the field of SLA as it verifies that knowledge is constructed and developed through learning, which occurs through the interaction with others. As a causative force in acquisition, interaction facilitates language learning, which is essentially a social process based on the sociocultural settings (Saville-Troike, 2006). To understand how a second or foreign language is learned, it is indispensable to study the social and educational factors that shape the increasing competence of language learners (John-Steiner, 1985). This implies that University English program and its pedagogies must consider scaffolding learners’ social activities and cultural practices as the source of thinking. The teacher–student and peer interaction must also serve the purpose of language development (Huerta-Macías, 2005).

3.3 Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition (SLA) refers to the “learning or acquisition of a language other than a native language, which is referred to as a second language or by the shorthand term L2” (Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2011, p. 16). According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the study of SLA explores how non-native speakers grow proficient linguistically and pragmatically in English with most theories, hypotheses or models coming from the study of first language acquisition,

linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics (Brown, 2007; Richard-Amato, 2003; Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2011).

Although the study area of SLA remains limited and controversial (Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2011) with the literature focusing on “behaviorist, nativist, and interactionist” theories (Huerta-Macías, 2005, p. 2) and SLA hypotheses and models (Brown, 2007), SLA provides teachers with the findings of language learning process, effective principles of pedagogies (Balderrama & Diaz-Rico, 2006; Huerta-Macías, 2005), and the critical role of SLA in the field of ELT worldwide. More distantly, Austin (1962) found that studying words or sentences outside a social context tells little about communication or its effect on an audience. Searle (1969) argued that one cannot account for meaning in the absence of the context of a speech act. Ausubel (1968) proposed that effective learning occurs when learners relate new materials to existing cognitive structure and reorganize their understanding of the concepts. Bonk and Cummings (1998) espoused that learning occurs when knowledge is the result of a situated construction of knowledge.

Discussed above is language learning from the socio-constructivist perspective. In this process, learning occurs when knowledge is built on the prior experience and enhanced by the interaction between individuals, peers, and the group. Active transfer leads to new situations through engagement between knowledge, social experience, and interaction, whereas rote memorization in the banking model of education cannot. This indicates that University ELT aiming at facilitating students’ academic English proficiency must be wary of the banking practices and support constructivist teaching and learning approaches.

3.4 Learning Motivation

The SLA theories ensure the importance of motivation as a cluster of factors that “energize behavior and give it direction” (Rifai, 2010, p. 5216). Literature over the last 20 years on motivation in the field of SLA reveals that motivation not only involves the reasons from language learners for the acquisition of a second/foreign language but also proves to be the most powerful determinant influencing the rate and success of the L2 learning (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 2001, 2005; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, 2011; Gardner, 1985; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Zhang & Kim, 2013). Gardner and Lambert (1972) divided motivation into two orientations, namely integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation, or intrinsic motivation, means a desire to learn a language so as to communicate with people from the culture who speak it, or identify closely with the target language group, while instrumental motivation, or extrinsic motivation, refers to a desire to learn a language since it could fulfill some utilitarian goals, such as finding employment or passing an examination.

The source of motivation is a crux in learning theory, with the behaviorist view emphasizing instrumental, or extrinsic motivation; while the cognitive view giving prominence to integrative, or intrinsic motivation. According to Rifai (2010), integrative motivation in early empirical studies proved key to successful learning of a second language and the sustained learning of that language, while instrumental orientation seemed to have limited correlation to successful language learning (Gardner, 1979). Research in the 1980s found integrative motivation may not be the strongest predictor of language learning (Gardner, 1988; Gardner & McIntyre, 1991). Later in the 1990s and most recently, studies reveal that motivation for L2 learning may not be as simple as the integrative–instrumental dichotomy (Rifai, 2010; Zhang & Kim, 2013). This is because other motivational components, such as desire for knowledge and identity, new challenges and needs for self-development and for achievement (Dörnyei, 1990), intellectual and academic stimulation, personal challenge (Oxford & Shearin, 1994), and patriotic, pragmatic and other-regulated considerations (Zhang & Kim, 2013), could also play a role on the success of L2 learning.

Since this study intends to understand today’s Chinese university youth and the critical dispositions that they believe indispensable in acquiring English as an academic language in and outside the school settings, the types of learning motivation that are reflected in the participants’ learning experience matter as they may contribute to their school success.

3.5 Comprehension Hypothesis

Comprehension hypothesis, first named as input hypothesis, indicates that the L2 learners need to be placed in the meaningful language environment where a higher level of linguistic proficiency is provided (Krashen, 1982). Though most language textbooks focus on the “explicit learning of language plus practice” (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 67), Krashen (1982) advocated the implicit acquisition of language from comprehensible input realized in the meaning-making context. Learners understand the language structure “a bit beyond” the current stage of their linguistic proficiency of *i* within the process of language acquisition, reaching the level of *i + 1* (Krashen, 1982, 1985, 2003, 2004). Since people acquire a language when they understand what others say and what they read, acquisition works when learners comprehend “what is said or written, rather than how it is expressed” (Krashen, 1984, p. 21).

Comprehension hypothesis has significant pedagogical applications on the learning of University English. It applies not only to reading, literacy, spelling, vocabulary, and syntax (Krashen, 2004), but also to realistic classroom practices (Huerta-Macias, 2005).

3.6 Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

The development of academic language across content areas is vital for school success (Bowers, Fitts, Quirk, & Jung, 2010; Fillmore, 2004; Gee, 2008; Krashen & Brown, 2007; Maxwell-Jolly, Gándara, & Benavidez, 2005; Scarcella, 2003; Valdés, 2004). The literature review on “academics” for ELLs shows rich but disputable discussions as to how “academics” is positioned and interpreted, as Valdés (2004) claimed there is “no agreed-upon definition of either academic English or academic language in general” (p. 103). This situation creates problems and causes confusion when teachers attempt to promote EAP or other similar English programs. In China, such issue of defining academic English also exists, making it necessary to explore how it has been approached in the international TESOL academia.

SL learners, argued Cummins (1996), need to learn both interpersonal skills and cognitive academic language skills. Along with researchers such as Martin-Jones and Romaine (1984) and MacSwan (2000), Cummins (2000) regarded academic literacy as a social construct embedded in language use, shaped by the “language and context in which they are acquired and used” (Martin-Jones & Romaine, 1984, p. 30). Cummins (1979) first defined the terms *basic interpersonal communicative skills* (BICS) and *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP). ELLs acquire basic interpersonal communicative skills, or *social language*, within the first 2 years of exposure to English; but they may spend years to develop cognitive academic language proficiency, or *academic language*, the language of textbooks, class lectures, essays, and educational videos, which students need for academic success in the English-medium institutions. According to Collier and Thomas (1989), under the best of circumstances, students entering school and simultaneously acquiring language and content skills may take 7–10 years to develop CALP, depending on their level of academic preparation upon entering school as a second- or additional-language learner.

Much has been explored regarding the cognitive, academic, and linguistic needs of ELLs (Cummins, 2001; Nieto, 2002). The ELT course designers and teachers realize that teaching those who use English for their studies differs from teaching those who learn English for other purposes. This makes the programs designed for preparing non-native users of English for English-medium academic settings have grown into a multi-million-dollar enterprise worldwide (Hyland, 2006). For many Chinese high school and university youth, the first taste of *academics* in English is through TOEFL *ibt* tutorials or a preparatory language program for the foundation degree. Such tailored courses and programs are more welcomed because they aim to raise learners to the level required for entering an English-medium college or university.

Despite the popularity of CALP, Edelsky et al. (1983) critiqued Cummins’ *academics* in language based on the skills and knowledge measured by schools, or test-wisness. Wiley (2000) discussed the cultural, historical, and sociopolitical

contexts embedded in the notion of academics, claiming that academic learning/ language proficiency encompasses both the individual and societal levels. Language skills, argued Martin-Jones and Romaine (1984), could not be “neatly compartmentalized in the way that Cummins suggests” (p. 29). This implies that Cummins’ theoretical concept of academic language fails to address the language used in its sociopolitical context and the connection to power relations. Martin-Jones and Romaine were insightful in the deficit thinking of ELLs’ language proficiency and the testing standard set by the *Institution*, as

... in this setting, only a narrow range of prescribed uses and functions of literacy is seen as legitimate. School standards of literacy are seen as contributing in a very direct way to the cognitive development of the child ... Cognitive/academic development language proficiency can only be understood as appropriate display of schooled language. (p.30)

Cummins (2000) agreed with such argument, reiterating the sociopolitical factors and coercive power relations in the broader society that contribute to the failure among underachievers. Critical understanding of the influence of these issues on today’s ELLs’ academic English learning experience, along with the research on the acquisition/learning of academic English, has significant pedagogical implications, as the challenges to learn English and succeed academically are confronted simultaneously.

3.7 English Textbooks in Use for Language Learners

Textbooks are the *basis* of 70–95% of all classroom instruction; with the advancement of educational levels from kindergarten through high school, such dominance increases (Gay, 2000). Worldwide, ELLs use textbooks and additional authorized materials when they learn English as a school subject. Due to the national foreign language policy, different English materials for ELLs are developed for classroom use. These materials are used to “facilitate” the learning of English with a variety of forms and functions to serve language learning (Tomlinson, 1998, p. 66),

... They [Materials] can be instructional in that they inform learners about the language, they can be experiential in that they provide exposure to the language in use, they can be elicitive in that they stimulate language use, or they can be exploratory in that they seek discoveries about language use. (*ibid.*)

Despite the instructional, experiential, elicitive, and exploratory functions of English textbook materials, there are controversies regarding the textbook used for language learning. Tomlinson (2001) identified the textbook proponents who regard the textbook as the “most convenient form” of materials presentation, achieving the “consistency and continuation,” providing learners a sense of “system, cohesion, and progress,” and helping teachers “prepare” and learners “review” (p. 67). Tomlinson also acknowledged the textbook opponents such as Allwright (1981), O’Neil (1982), Littlejohn (1992), and Hutchinson and Torres (1994),

who uncovered the demerits of textbooks, such as being “inevitably superficial and reductionist” in the coverage of language points and in the provision of language experience, failing in meeting the “diverse needs of all its users,” imposing the “uniformity” of syllabus and approach, and eliminating the “initiative and power” from teachers (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 67).

Other than the controversies over the textbook use, more disputes continue on should the textbook and pertinent materials be learning or acquisition focused, texts be contrived or authentic, and materials be censored (Tomlinson, 2001). Soars and Soars (1996) and Hutchinson (1997) noticed that, despite the debate on the conscious learning and subconscious acquisition proceeds (Ellis, 1999), most textbooks are based on the form-focused instruction with an enrichment of communication activities. In the 1990s, researchers such as Bacon and Finnemann (1990), Kuo (1993), and Little, Devitt, & Singleton (1994) advocated the authenticity of textbook materials and their motivating effect on learners, while others, such as Day and Bamford (1998), warned the “cult of authenticity” (p. 54). Ellis (1999) argued for the “enriched input” which offers the input with the “exemplars of the target structure in the context of meaning-focused activities” (p. 68).

Apart from the authenticity of global textbooks, the censorship issue is also controversial. Though some form of the censorship of English textbooks might be “pedagogically desirable” and “economically necessary” (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 68), teachers such as Wajnryb (1996) attacked the blandness of EFL textbooks. Jacobs and Schumann (1992) and Arnold (1999) argued for the effect in the provocative texts that stimulate the engagement needed for better learning.

Internationally and domestically, an increasing number of English textbooks and materials are in print and use. A number of trends with the publication of these teaching and learning materials are detected, such as a similarity in the presentation, practice, and production (PPP) approach (Tomlinson, 1999), a greater emphasis on the language form, and the centrality of grammar in lower and intermediate level textbooks (Hutchinson, 1997; Soars & Soars, 1996). These materials use corpus data to reflect actual language use (Fox, 1998), requiring learner investment with more interactive learning packages (Parish, 1995) for discoveries (Bolitho & Tomlinson, 1995; Carter & McCarthy, 1997; Joseph & Travers, 1996).

These important trends in English textbooks for language learners globally are manifested in this study. In the interviews with the participants on their past and present academic English learning experience, they expressed thoughts on English textbooks used in and outside the schools and their influences on the critical dispositions that they believe indispensable when acquiring University EAP.

3.8 Caring, Supportive Teachers that Matter

Caring is a receptivity to the needs of others that fosters the emotional and intellectual growth of students of different age levels (Noddings, 1992). It is defined as a value and moral imperative that moves “self-determination into social responsibility

and uses knowledge and strategic thinking to decide how to act in the best interests of others” (Webb, Wilson, Corbett, & Mordecai, 1993, p. 33). In the educational context, caring is manifested as a “philosophical stance” for developing a “more ethical and caring society” (Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001, p. 24). The literature over the past 50 years has accumulated the value of caring, or supportive, teacher–student relationship for better school learning, learner motivation, and higher level student achievement (Davis, 2003, 2011; Gay, 2000).

Since schools are viewed traditionally as the places to “develop and nurture an ethic of caring” (Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001, p. 24), caring, supportive teachers matter as they create “qualitatively different classroom environments” that feel safe, warm, and comfortable for learning (Davis, 2011). They empower and motivate students to behave and explore in the socially responsible ways. Other than the caring interpersonal relationship between teacher and students in and outside the school that is characterized by “patience, persistence, facilitation, validation and empowerment” for the participants, there are also uncaring ones that are characteristic by “impatience, intolerance, dictations, and control” (Gay, 2000, p. 47).

Both positive and negative teacher attitudes and expectations have profound effects on student achievement (Good & Brophy, 1978, 1994). According to Davis (2011), students that perceive their teachers as caring and supportive tend to engage more in the subject content, take intellectual challenges, and persevere when confronted with hardship and failure. Those who have caring, supportive teachers early in their schooling tend to evidence more adaptive academic and behavioral outcomes up through middle school, and middle and high school students who perceive their teachers as caring and supportive are more likely to connect with the classroom content and less likely to drop out of school. However, not all teachers possess positive attitudes toward, expectations of, and interactions with students. Teachers that do not care devalue and demean their students and express uncaring attitudes and behaviors. These devaluations, accompanied by low or negative expectations of their intellectual abilities and potentials, have “deleterious effects” on students’ emotional and intellectual growth (Gay, 2000, p. 46), and hence obstruct their academic achievement (Good & Brophy, 1994; Harry, 1992; Oakes, 1985).

In this study, all participants had voices on their English teachers in and outside the school. They provided thought-provoking insights into which aspects of teacher caring were most influential in nurturing their academic confidence and expediting their school achievement.

3.9 Testing and Assessment that Play a Role in Students' Academic Success

For ELLs, navigating testing and assessment is an important means to their academic success. Though the terms *testing* and *assessment* are often used interchangeably, the latter is an umbrella term that covers various ways of “collecting information on a learner’s language ability or achievement,” and contains measurement instruments conducted on a “one-off” basis such as tests, as well as qualitative methods of monitoring and recording student learning such as observation, simulations or project work” (Brindley, 2001, p. 137). School achievement assessments, Hughes (1989) argued, are based either on the specific content of the course or the course objectives. This is frequently implemented by teachers to determine what a student has fulfilled in a specific course or curriculum.

Since language assessment aims at the information collection on learners’ language proficiency and/or achievement, it is hence used by stakeholders, decision-makers, and school authorities in national, regional, and local language (or foreign language) policy and language learning programs for the purpose of “selection, certification, accountability, diagnosis, instructional decision-making, and motivation” (Brindley, 2001, p. 138). These purposes are subject to the “social and political context” (*ibid.*) where the assessment takes place.

The research on language testing and assessment since the latter half of the 20th century reflects the predominant beliefs and practices internationally on the nature of language, language learning, and performance (Clapham & Corson, 1997). In the 1960s and 1970s, language tests, influenced by behaviorists and structural linguists, were designed to assess whether learners had learned different aspects of the linguistic system of a language (or a foreign language), such as phoneme discrimination, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge. According to Brindley (2001), objective testing formats, such as multiple choices and a magnitude of test items, were applied to “maximize reliability” (p. 139) in such discrete item tests. In the 1970s and early 1980s, due to no information available regarding the learners’ ability in using the language for communicative purposes in such tests, integrative tests, such as cloze and dictation, were introduced to require learners to use their linguistic and contextual knowledge to reconstitute the meaning of spoken or written texts (Oller, 1976, 1983; Oller & Hinofotis, 1980).

Although these traditional English testing formats are still widely in use and prove imperative in English classes of China’s primary and secondary schools for both formative and summative assessment purposes, it is crucial to realize that a single test for a learner’s overall ability is insufficient for an accurate picture of his/her English proficiency. A reasonable integration of the different assessment procedures, advocated Cohen (1994), is “necessary” (p. 196). Such integration includes direct tests that reflect real-life demands for communicative purposes (Weir, 1990, 1993), the assessment of the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing,

respectively, and the study of the washback effect of testing and assessment in terms of the ethics and fairness in English teaching in school and in ELLs' respective learning experience (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Huang, 2005; Liu & Gu, 2013; Zheng & Chen, 2013).

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Chapter 4

English for Academic Purposes as a Critical Pedagogy



4.1 Definition of English for Academic Purposes

More than a teaching approach, EAP refers to a branch of applied linguistics that consists of a significant body of research into the “effective teaching and assessment approaches, methods of analysis of the academic language needs of students, analysis of the linguistic and discursal structures of academic texts, and analysis of the textual practices of academics” (Hamp-Lyons, 2001, p. 126). It is briefly defined as teaching with the aim of assisting ELLs’ study or research in English (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland, 2006; Jordan, 1997), or a means that students meet their academic needs in learning content-based subjects in English (Sinha & Sadorra, 1991, cited in Cai, 2012a). As an umbrella term, it covers academic communicative practices and needs to be understood regarding the “local contexts and the needs of particular students” (Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. ix).

Though University EAP involves practical matters such as curriculum and syllabus design, learner needs analysis, course and text materials development and assessment, it proves to be a much more “theoretically grounded and research informed enterprise” (Hyland, 2006, p. 1) that embraces linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, communicative language teaching, writing across the curriculum, learning theory, and genre studies. The following discussions of the theoretical underpinnings of EAP focus on its critical foundations of needs analysis, the sociocultural constructivist theory of learning, and the interrogation of EAP assumptions, into which the influence of critical theory and critical language pedagogy permeates.

4.2 Theoretical Underpinnings of EAP

4.2.1 Needs Analysis

Defined as the technique for “collecting and assessing information relevant to course design” (Hyland, 2006, p. 73), needs analysis regulates course design and teaching (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Hyland, 2006). There exists a consensus in the literature about its centrality in teaching and evaluating EAP (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hyland, 2006; Jordan, 1997; Robinson, 1991). This is because needs analysis integrates the goal of individuals with the rules and requirements of the institution, with the pedagogical implication that if students need what the institution offers, like a degree, there would be no conflict, resistance, or struggle; and whereby their needs would be met if they follow what the institution requires. Hence, needs analysis “naturalizes what is socially constructed, making externally imposed rules seem not just normal but also immutable” by merging tactically learner needs with the institutional requirements (Benesch, 2001, p. 61). This implies that it could be viewed as “learning goals bringing to bear the teacher’s values, beliefs and philosophies of teaching and learning” co-constructed by the teacher and his/her ELLs (Hyland, 2006, p. 74).

Two types of needs analysis, namely target situation analysis and present situation analysis, are influential throughout the past 30 years’ EAP literature. Target situation analysis concerns learners’ “future roles” and their “linguistic skills and knowledge” needed for disciplinary studies (Hyland, 2006, p. 74), while present situation analysis concerns their present learning and the information about their current proficiencies and ambitions, revealing not only the “types of text assigned”, but also the “reactions of students to assignments and the processes they go through in fulfilling them as well as faculty reactions to student participation and writing” (Benesch, 2001, p. 11). Hutchison and Waters (1987) created a needs analysis framework in the form of general questions as follows (Table 4.1).

In the Chinese University EAP literature, the value of needs analysis is gaining ground, constituting a “crucial part of the ESP/EAP institutional theory” by guiding students’ activities and helping them to perform in academic studies (Cai & Chen, 2013, p. 3). Discussions on incorporating needs analysis into University EAP teaching (Cai, 2012b; Rao & Ji, 2015) have inspired a “method for collecting data about target requirements” (Benesch, 2001, p. xviii). Though the call for University EAP is a welcome opportunity in the inertia of University English program development, more research on needs analysis should be done to ensure that both learner needs and institutional requirements could be democratically negotiated and made beneficial to learners.

Needs analysis is an important theoretical construct of traditional EAP, as it is a pragmatic and indispensable method for collecting data about the target requirements (Benesch, 2001). These characteristics make the politics of University EAP transparent and draw public attention to the power issues that have been otherwise ignored in the name of pragmatism in university settings. It also opens up the

Table 4.1 A framework for needs analysis

Present situation analysis	Target situation analysis
Why are learners taking the courses? Compulsory or optional Whether obvious needs exist Personal/academic goals Motivation and attitude What they want to learn from the courses	<i>Why do learners need the language?</i> Examination, postgraduate or undergraduate course, etc.
<i>How do learners learn?</i> Learning background and experience Concept of teaching and learning Methodological and materials preferences Preferred learning styles and strategies	<i>What genres will be used?</i> Lab reports, essays, seminars, lectures, etc.
<i>Who are the learners?</i> Age/sex/nationality/L1 Subject knowledge Interests Sociocultural background Attitudes to subject or discipline	<i>What is the typical structure of these genres?</i> Move analyses, salient characteristics, genre sets, etc.
<i>What do learners know?</i> L1 and L2 literacy abilities Proficiency in English Writing experience and genre familiarity	<i>What will the content areas be?</i> Academic subject, specialism within discipline, secondary school subjects
	<i>Who will the learner use the language with?</i> Native or nonnative speakers Reader’s knowledge—expert, beginner, etc. Relationship: peer, teacher, examiner, supervisor
	<i>Where will the learner use the language?</i> Physical setting: school, university, conference Linguistic context: overseas, home country Human context: known/unknown readers

(Hutchison & Waters, 1987, pp. 62–63; cited in Hyland, 2006, p. 75)

possibility of exploiting critical theory and critical language pedagogy to question the social injustice and inequities that may be intended solely to fulfill target expectations.

4.2.2 Sociocultural Constructivist Theory of Learning

The sociocultural constructivist theory of learning originates in the work of Vygotsky. It understands the role of social experience in the development of one’s knowledge by emphasizing the social context of learning: how social and cultural contexts affect a learner’s cognition and how the social environment accounts for

the development of higher cognitive processes. This learning theory highlights the relationship between learning and learners' social and cultural worlds, as people start to learn long before schooling. Pedagogically, it informs that all fundamental cognitive activities have social foundations; and cognitive skills and patterns of thinking are the product of activities practiced in social institutions of the culture in which individuals grow and mature through internalization. The other contribution by Vygotsky is his interpretation of the ZPD, a connecting concept and model for higher cognitive growth, which explains how learning experience could be organized as the most effective form of teaching–learning process that occurs within it.

The sociocultural constructivist theory of learning is significant to the theoretical construct of University EAP due to its recognition of the socially constructed knowledge and responsiveness to the “complexities of institutions, teaching, and learning in local contexts” (Benesch, 2001, p. 4). Although the early years of EAP centered on lexical items and text types that students might encounter in courses or academic work, it is the social context that becomes central with its “unpredictability and multiple meanings” and the insights that the linguistic analyses of text, the basis of early EAP instruction, are an “insufficient foundation of instruction” (*ibid.*).

EAP has evolved from its modest roots in the 1960s to become an “emerging global phenomenon” by capitalizing on global challenges (de Chazal, 2014, p. 3). Grounded on the sociocultural constructivist theory of learning, University EAP opens more opportunities for integrating social activities and cultural practices as the source of critical thinking, the centrality of critical language pedagogy and praxis in students' holistic development, and the “inseparability of the individual from the social” (Moll, 1990, p. 15).

4.2.3 Interrogation of EAP Assumptions

When critical approaches are adopted in language education, it is the practice to interrogate the assumptions on which the theory and practice are grounded. This means to question, interrogate, and investigate what was previously taken for granted, and whether it is solid or naïve (Benesch, 2001). In University EAP, it is important to raise such interrogations as they raise a “skeptical eye towards assumptions, ideas that have become naturalized” (Pennycook, 1999, p. 343), indicating “critical theory as problematizing practice” (p. 341).

The discussion on the increasing demand for academic English in the world universities has made it evident that the growth of academic English as a functional lingua franca today is inexorable with the increased needs of students who use it for the access to universities in the leading English-speaking countries. However, the all-consuming power of English reveals that L2 writers may be underrepresented in or even excluded from the web of global scholarship (Gibbs, 1995), and non-standard varieties rejected by native editors, referees, and other gatekeepers who

insist on the strict rhetorical standards in international publications (Flowerdew, 2001; Gosden, 1992).

The situation of the present dominance of academic English in higher education and scientific research could be dated back to the historical circumstances and political and economic issues that are not traditionally investigated in the literature. Phillipson (1992) analyzed the political and economic roots and the interest in the conscious promotion of English for strategic and economic reasons. His incisive analysis reveals ELT as a global and multimillion-dollar industry to be an “important corrective” (Benesch, 2001, p. 31), and the ESP literature’s portrayal of the rise of academic English worldwide as a natural and politically neutral phenomenon. Benesch (2001) summarized the economic roots and ideological underpinnings of EAP as follows:

... EAP’s discourse of neutrality has presented the history of this field as a consensual and inevitable chronology of pedagogical events rather than a well-crafted and organized effort on the part of governments, businesses, and foundations working together to promote English language teaching, conferences, publications, and faculty exchanges, ensuring that markets and labor would be available to promote their economic interests (pp. 34–35).

Benesch’s summary of EAP’s role informs the complexity of the institutional forces that push EAP teaching and research worldwide. Since a wide range of academic texts and discourses are “socially, politically, racially and economically loaded” (Rogers, 2004, p. 6, cited in de Chazal, 2014, p. 25), it is important to arm EAP learners and faculties with critical theory and critical language pedagogy to avoid such uncomplicated and historical assumptions. This practice, argues Rogers, allows for a “more nuanced and dynamic relationship” between the target situation and learner intention for language study (cited in de Chazal, 2014, p. 25).

4.3 Critical Pedagogy and Its Influence on University EAP

Starting with the basic assumption that human vocation is to “take action which changes the world for the improvement of life conditions” (Crawford, 1978, p. 2), critical pedagogy serves as an approach to teaching and curriculum informed by critical social theory that seeks to understand and critique the “historical and sociopolitical context of schooling” and to develop “pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society” (Pennycook, 1990, p. 24). Given the sociopolitical and cultural features of University EAP and the power relations in China’s higher education institutions, University EAP teaching is no longer a matter of advanced linguistic input or output, devoid of human factors involved in attempting to learn a foreign language. Instead, it is embedded in the personal and “social and political milieu” of the linguistic proficiency and the social awareness, responsibility, and transformation (Wachob, 2009, p. 1).

Critical pedagogy in the field of ES/FL takes as joint goals to develop simultaneously ELLs' communicative ability and the ability to apply it to the cultivation of critical awareness of the world and the ability to act on it to make changes and improvements. This results from the personal and social choices that reflect a desire to "understand both the word (i.e., language) and the world and to act upon these choices" (Crooks & Lehner, 1998, p. 327). Taken as a social and educational process rather than a pedagogical method, critical pedagogy indicates a "way of 'doing' learning and teaching" (Canagarajah, 2005, p. 932), concerned more on how University EAP could affect "personal and social change than it is with 'how to teach language' more effectively or in ways that simply encourage critical thinking on the part of teacher and students" (Crookes & Lehner, 1998, p. 327).

Grounded on the above-mentioned theoretical basis, critical pedagogy in University EAP foregrounds the interplay between the teacher and ELLs, discarding the deficit tradition of deferring to the former as the sole authority in and outside the school with "mediated actions" (Wertsch, 1998). This requires him to reflect on how he interacts with the latter and how they treat one another, while negotiating individual, institutional, and societal expectations. As a strong tool in University EAP, critical pedagogy focuses not only on the text materials and pedagogical contexts, but also on sharing the authority and responsibility between the teacher and ELLs to empower both to be positive and active in teaching and learning.

4.4 Freire's Influence: Anti-banking Education

As the world-renowned Brazilian educator, Freire is regarded as the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy with overarching influences on international scholars who share a stance that favors learner autonomy and advocate other critical pedagogies, such as emancipatory, democratic, feminist, and liberatory pedagogies. In his work of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970/2001) theorized a Marxist-based pedagogy that opposes the dehumanizing banking model of education, providing educators a critical pedagogy of love and hope that acknowledges humans as cultural agents, capable of recognizing their places in ideological apparatuses, and acting as change agents. The banking concept is based on the assumption that knowledge learning could be simplified as memorizing and regurgitating information; it could be deposited, stored, and used at a later time. Conversely, students are empty vessels into which teachers pour in knowledge like money into a bank, and out of which students are required to make withdrawals or pour out what they have learned.

Freire (1970/2001) proposed otherwise a problem-posing model based on the anti-banking philosophy, aiming to empower students through humanization and to transform them to be active participants in meaning-making dialogues of critical consciousness. This model enables the oppressed to analyze their position within the privileged hierarchy of the oppressive society which dislocates them from the

existing cycles of social reproduction, and revitalizes the relationship between the theory and practice as an act of politics and struggle for social justice (Torres, 1998).

While criticizing the banking model of education which transforms students into “receiving objects” and teachers into “depositor, prescriber, domesticator” out of a “mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness” (Freire, 1970/2001, p. 77), Freire viewed education as the practice of freedom by rejecting the banking concept in its entirety and instead, adopting a concept of women and men as “conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world” (p. 79). The banking method would not work in University ELT within the realm of the liberal education, for it would only negate such pursuit. These earnest concerns trigger this study on exploring the past and present academic English learning experience of today's university youth for critical and dynamic University EAP pedagogical solutions. Meanwhile, it intends to address the educational issues which are not only pertinent to classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objectives, and evaluation measures, but also rich in the sociopolitical, historical, and cultural experience that may have direct or indirect influences on the cause of English language education at university level (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

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Part II

Practice

Chapter 5

Vignettes of Chinese University EAP Learners



Four selected University EAP learners that were interviewed for the study are introduced here, Dandan, Meimei, Xiaobo, and Xiaogang, from a chosen university in Shanghai that offers University EAP program in the first 2 academic years. This chapter presents tangible life stories of their academic English learning experience that they have lived at home, in schools, with private tutors, and at private English institutes. The following parallel sections of each participant provide a rich amalgam of their distinctive but typical lived experience in and outside the school settings up to this point.

5.1 Vignette of Dandan

Dandan was born in 1995 in Luoyang, the capital city of Henan Province in Central China. She is the only child of her family of the Han nationality and grew up as a city girl. She has no siblings but two cousins on both parents' sides. Dandan is the 2nd-generation university student from her family, on her father's side. She has been learning English for 13 years, majoring in tourism management at her university in Shanghai.

5.1.1 *English Learning at Public Primary School*

Before primary school, English was foreign to Dandan. She started formal English learning in Grade One at a local public primary school. There were six parallel grades with four parallel classes in each grade, and approximately forty students in each class. Dandan had three female Chinese English teachers: One taught in Grades One and Two; one in Grades Three, Four, and Five; and the third in Grade

Six, the graduating grade. The English textbooks by the People's Education Press (PEP) in Beijing were used for the entire school.

The English program in lower grades was easy with the purpose of developing an interest among pupils. Though Dandan and most of her school-age peers did not know English until Grade One, she felt that English learning in lower grades was like playing. The systematic focus on pronunciation started in Grade Three. Vocabulary retention was demanded; words in each unit were written on a card for rote learning. In Grade Six, text organization and writing structure were lectured. After class, text translation and listening to tapes were assigned as routine homework. Besides classroom learning, Dandan did not attend any private English institute for after-school English enrichment at this stage.

Required as a school subject other than the classroom language, English was limited in class hours and was far from being part of students' life in and outside the school. According to Dandan, there were,

... 3 days within a week that we had English classes. ... There was one day that we had two periods of English; in the rest two days there was one period per day. Each period lasted around 40 min. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Despite the insufficiency of English class hours in school, Dandan, instead, developed an early love for English learning as a little pupil,

... I like English. I never bored about it. English learning was not a burden to me. I had interest and confidence. My school records basically looked good. I didn't have any particular learning strategies or methods, I just cared about it. Once when I was in the street and noticed unfamiliar [English] words, I would consult my dictionary. I had good memory. I was attentive in reading, eh ... I liked reading in English. In school, the study load was not heavy. I would seek more extracurricular materials to feed myself once I was informed by my classmates, my parents or people around. (*ibid.*)

Dandan liked this foreign language, English; her good test results in quizzes and examinations in school boosted in her a stronger internal motivation for English learning. When she was proceeding to higher grades, Dandan started to seek actively extracurricular materials such as *Cambridge Young Learners' English* (CYLE) and *New Concept English* (NCE) to enhance her English learning in school. In Grade Six, she started reading by herself the CYLE and NCE series, burying herself in reading NCE and listening practices. At this period, she inquired about private English tutorials for academic enrichment:

... I had classmates that attended English tutorial classes after school. There were a variety of such private English institutes with good propaganda in the neighborhood [of my home]. Altogether I attended two English tutorial programs. The [first] one I attended when I was a 5th grader was *Dashan* English tutorial center. I went there every weekend. The class size was small, around 10 even-aged peers. Each period lasted two hours. I spent around one year there. I liked the teacher there because she did not teach for test purposes. Instead, she taught foreign cultures and how to pronounce in English. She drew our attention to oral ability and grammar. She used in class the NCE and other supplementary materials. There were English public speech festivals at *Dashan*. I attended two, and was awarded first prize. We did not have such activities in school.

... Then in Grade 6, my parents suggested another English tutorial center because some of my classmates attended there. I attended during the weekdays after school, twice a week, and each period lasted two hours. I spent around two to three months in this new center. It gained a good reputation through its test-oriented tutorial. The class size was big, around 30 to 40 peers in one class. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

These private English institutes were academically helpful. The *Dashan* English Institute enhanced Dandan's knowledge of foreign cultures, oral ability, grammar, and English public speech skills, while other intensified tutorials helped her with test-taking skills for better test results in the Middle School Entrance Examination (MSEE). Dandan started to feel academic pressure in Grade Six upon graduating from primary school. She knew the MSEE was no easy work and it was the only means that could send her to the ideal middle school which was highly competitive and desirable for many. Since the English Entrance Examination in the MSEE was difficult, and she aspired to enter a private bilingual middle school in the city, Dandan was working hard with the tutoring assistance at the second local private English institute for academic improvement during the final examination months.

5.1.2 English Learning at Private Bilingual Middle School

Through her persistent endeavor and competitive test results in the MSEE, Dandan entered the bilingual middle school that ranked top in her home city. This private foreign language middle school featured its English programs. The class size remained big with a much larger student population of thirteen parallel classes in each grade and over fifty students in one class, altogether around eight hundred students in one grade.

In school, Dandan had altogether seven or eight foreign teachers, the majority of whom were from America. She started to have English-medium instructions by them once a week since Grade Seven that embraced the culture-integrated curriculum design and American culture enrichment. Her classmates preferred easy-going American teachers and their alternative teaching styles because their classes were light and fun, and students were allowed to eat snacks, move, and interrupt teachers. These teachers also hosted foreign festivals in school to introduce cultural celebrations and engage students to partake in these feasts,

...when there were foreign holidays, such as Halloween, Christmas and Easter, foreign teachers would introduce stories and pertinent vocabulary and movies. On Trade Festival, teachers and students sold their self-made stuff to collect money for disaster areas. Our foreign teachers would wear costumes and sell hot dogs. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Other than foreign teachers, Dandan had Chinese English teachers that taught routinely on weekdays. She had two Chinese English teachers: One taught in Grade Seven, and the other in Grade Eight. Oral English was available in both programs. Dandan was most impressed by her homeroom teacher in Grade Seven by saying,

...she was a new graduate from a southern university [in the country] who demonstrated more passion and confidence in teaching than many veteran teachers did. As a homeroom teacher with around 20 students, she always kept a thick notebook to record our daily performances. She was popular among us because she would never give us a pouty, straight face like most Chinese teachers would do, and treated us fair and nice like friends or a big sister. When we approached her with personal problems or learning difficulties, she always had private conversations with us after class with advice and possible solutions. We were open to her and shared personal problems. She did not stay long though and soon left for marriage. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Dandan had a school visit experience as a 9th grader at the sister school of hers in Wisconsin, U.S.A. After the selection test and two rounds of school interviews, she and five other peers were selected and traveled afar to this American school in the state of Wisconsin. She recalled her short study tour abroad, saying this overseas experience not only broadened her academic horizon but also reshaped her thinking of her future academic path and career planning,

...I was a 9th grader then, and we traveled there for half a month. We all stayed at homestay. Most of my Chinese peers' homestays were from the junior high, while mine was from the senior high. I spent half of my time attending classes with my American peers at the junior high, while the rest half at the senior high. We were also taken to Minnesota and Chicago for sightseeing for about three days. Though it was the coldest season then...it was snowing to knees...I really liked the living and learning environment. People were kind and nice. This exchange experience impressed me most; thereby I have developed an ambition of studying in America. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Other than interacting with her American peers and developing real-life experience overseas, Dandan explored the unseen gains through this lived experience, thinking more of her future academic path for advanced English learning and overseas study upon university graduation,

... In my growing up, my parents have never taken me abroad other than this short exchange program. I have relatives that have settled down abroad and friends that are studying overseas, I believe I can make it, too. I feel if I hope to use English for communication purposes, good oral ability would be enough; but if I wish for more, I would read more English novels and literature. I am planning to take TOEFL *ibt* test next year because it is valid for two years. I aspire to apply for an American graduate school upon graduation. I have purchased practice tests for TOEFL *ibt* and plan to work on them myself. My expectation for TOEFL *ibt* is over 100; if I would do IELTS, it would be 7.5 out of 9.0. I feel the preparation for TOEFL *ibt* or IELTS tests would be different from that for the *Gaokao*. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

In middle school, Dandan developed good study habits and skills in English learning despite the rising academic workload. She previewed and reviewed each class and stayed attentive in class, taking notes on vocabulary and grammar as required, and following strictly her subject teachers' instructions. She not only finished homework on time but also practiced extra autonomous reading on English newspaper articles subscribed by the class. She remembered that upon entering middle school, the whole class was immediately assigned to study groups, with four to five students in each, and started to have more testing ever since,

... there were quizzes each week on major subjects, such as math, Chinese language arts and English, and major testing, such as monthly examinations, middle-term and final-term examinations, on these subjects. All the test results were recorded and marked within the study groups for ranking in class and in grade. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Though she was boarding in school and had little spare time out of the tightness of the school schedule, Dandan managed to indulge herself in reading and reciting her father's NCE books over the weekend when she returned home.

5.1.3 English Learning at Key Public High School

Dandan entered a local key public high school based on her good test results in the High School English Examination (HSEE). She continued to board in school and returned home on weekends. In high school, the class size exploded to twenty-four classes in each grade that would take the high-stakes National University Entrance Examinations (NUEE), for short, the *Gaokao*. There were two class types: One was the parallel class, and the other was the experimental class. Among these classes in her grade, two were the parallel Experimental Classes with thirty-six selected top students in each, while the rest twenty-two classes were parallel classes with around sixty students in each. Additionally, there was an international department with more classes and students.

Dandan was assigned to the Experimental Class in the first year of high school, and received optimum education in this class as her HSEE test results were excellent. She investigated the differences between the Experimental Class and the parallel class by saying,

... first, the former had fewest students in number with the finest quality faculties; second, it enjoyed priority in all teaching facilities that the school could provide, and was always firstly informed with the contest information citywide, province-wide and nationwide. I felt more academic pressure in the Experimental Class because all my peers were top students from middle schools, and teachers accordingly raised the difficulty level in the academic study. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

One year later when she proceeded to Grade Eleven, there was a division of liberal arts class and science class. Dandan chose liberal arts and entered a new class because the two Experimental Classes were science. She recalled,

... we had 5 big liberal arts classes with around 70 students in each, but compared with the rest 19 parallel science classes, the number of students in liberal arts classes was small as the majority chose science. (*ibid.*)

Among all core subjects, Dandan preferred English, Chinese language arts, history, and geography. She had a headache on politics and math. There were two Chinese English teachers: One taught in Grade Ten in the Experimental Class, and the other in Grades Eleven and Twelve when she entered the liberal arts class. Dandan was impressed by the second English teacher. It was not because he taught them for the rest five semesters in high school, but because this male teacher taught

not for the examination purposes. Furthermore, he unfolded before his students a wonderful world of English and American cultures and authentic English expressions in English classes, even though there was no oral test in the *Gaokao*. In Grades Ten and Eleven, the academic pressure was tangible and heavy as there were class quizzes and minor tests every 2 weeks, and monthly tests, mid-term, and final examinations.

The school continued to use the PEP textbooks. Other than that, the 21st-century English newspaper was used in class as supplementary reading materials. Dandan's middle school teacher suggested the NCE Books One and Two. In high school, she started the NCE Book Three by herself. Dandan has been reading the NCE series till today and loved to "invest time on reading and digesting them," as there was "no better English materials than this series" (Interview One, October 9th, 2015).

Dandan remained top in class despite the mounting academic pressure, saying the pressure from English and other core subjects was affordable. She recalled that when she entered the liberal arts class in Grade Eleven, endless workbooks and model test papers poured down for lecturing in and after class. The entire class was required to learn by rote the model essays in the past years' *Gaokao* English test papers, which were constructed in a fixed writing format. Despite the tightness of the school schedule, Dandan squeezed time in recess, lunch and dinner break, and bedtime for free reading. The school authority did not stop students like her from extensive reading other than textbooks.

5.1.4 EAP Learning at University

At university, Dandan was assigned to the school-based University EAP program, in which there were two EAP course types, namely, comprehensive EAP and academic writing. The former took up four credits, and the latter, two. Two EAP textbooks by Pearson on listening and speaking and reading and writing were purchased for classroom use. It was the first time that Dandan used foreign textbooks for English program. Handouts were distributed for classroom use based on the topic in each unit of the textbook, which covered a wide range of content-based topics with enlarged vocabulary level and more difficult grammar. Dandan recalled how she was working on comprehensive EAP, academic listening, and academic writing by saying,

... University EAP program taught how to write academically, with a focus on logic thinking, critical thinking and coherence. ... In comprehensive EAP, I learned how to use formal language to write with a focus on key vocabulary, texts and authentic expressions in the unit. ... In academic listening, I listened to text audios, watched TED and practiced listening without note-taking for synthesizing and focused listening with note-taking. I learned to use discourse markers to facilitate listening.

... academic writing was given every two weeks by a Chinese English teacher, specializing in how to write with a specific goal for each class. ... These requirements were no easy work because they were all new to me. I read such writing before; but when I started to

write in a scientific way myself, there was a huge gap. In high school what was taught to write was simplistic and highly test-oriented for the *Gaokao*, which had a fixed pattern and format. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

To Dandan, it was important for young females like her to stay self-disciplined and studious for university life in a new place. In Dandan's eyes, a well-planned life and smart time management was important and rewarding. She described a full day's schedule and study activities as follows,

... I usually get up at 7 in the morning, brush teeth, wash face, make the bed, have breakfast, then walk to school for morning classes. I have lunch around 11:30 am. In the afternoon, classes proceed till late evening. When all classes are over, I walk back to the dorm for homework and other chores. Generally, we have 7-8 classes a day; the work load is heavier compared with other Shanghai universities, so I usually do my homework late in the afternoon to evening before I have dinner at student canteen. At bedtime, I watch some American drama. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

Besides a healthy lifestyle, Dandan continued her high school study habits in University EAP learning. She said proudly that,

... I never cut classes now in university. ... I keep pace with teachers and stay attentive [in class]. I preview and review my classes and finish homework on time. This is like what I did in high school. I feel good in doing so. (*ibid.*)

In the meantime, Dandan learned the rules of *musts* and *must-nots* in scientific writing and practiced one IELTS test writing every week. She applied language knowledge and skills acquired in her University EAP program to other content-based disciplines, making definite learning goals for a solid academic growth at a U.S. graduate school and a desirable career trajectory as a professional interpreter.

Through two pieces of navigated project research work in the past school year, a lot was learned through the painful research and writing process. This, according to her, has cultivated serious scientific attitude, cooperation spirit within the team, and other indispensable research abilities. Dandan was excited about the fruitful harvest because all her efforts were well paid off. Other than her major study in tourism management and her minor study in finance, she was planning for French language study in the following semester as she felt learning one more foreign language would surely help.

5.1.5 Family Support and Parental Influence on English Learning

Both Dandan's parents are intellectuals, supportive of their only daughter's academic study. Though they do not speak or use English at work or in home, they keep reminding Dandan of the importance of English learning, as they feel English is important for a better life. Besides, they understand the importance of home

literacy and create a friendly home environment for Dandan's language sense development and early-start home literacy.

Dandan's mother taught Chinese language arts at a local primary school when Dandan was little. As a language teacher, she stressed the importance of language acquisition in one's early life and guided Dandan to recite the *Tang* and *Song* poems and other Chinese classics at home. When Dandan was recalling her parents' influences on her subject study in primary school, she was saying,

... In primary school, the subjects I liked best were English and Chinese language arts. I liked Chinese language arts. It was partly because my mom was a Chinese language arts teacher then. She always felt language acquisition was important in one's life, and taught me to recite *Tang and Song* poems and other classics at home when I was little. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Dandan's father is an engineer at a local locomotive works. He had some working experience in Germany on a government sponsorship a couple of months before Dandan was born. Before he was leaving for Germany, he brushed up his English at home by listening to the tapes every morning. Dandan's mother played tapes at home, too. That was Dandan's early "fetal education" on English learning,

... My dad was an engineer at a local locomotive works in Luoyang. A couple of months before I was born he was officially assigned to a German enterprise for two to three months. It was some program sponsored by the two governments, my mom told me years later. Therefore, he had to brush up his English by listening to tapes every morning. My mom also played tapes at home ... that was the early fetal education to me. I assumed I had an inborn talent for languages, in particular English. It might be just because of that. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

At the time when Dandan was in primary school, many parents chose English or math tutorials outside the school for their children, as these were key subjects in school. Both Dandan's parents, in particular her mother, did not feel that way; instead, they helped her at home as much as they could. Dandan's mother emphasized language proficiency and the role of recitation of the classics in developing language sense and cultivating an elegant disposition. Dandan was saying that,

... Since I am the only child in my family, my parents cared about my academic achievements. In primary school, many Chinese parents would choose English or mathematics tutorial programs for their children, because these subjects were key for higher school grades. My mom did not feel that way. She felt language proficiency would help more. That's why she kept reminding me of the importance of English learning. Though as a primary school Chinese language arts teacher, she knew little English and could not guide me much [in English learning], my mom emphasized recitation of the classics as she felt it would help develop a stronger language sense and cultivate in me an elegant disposition. That was exactly what she did on me when [I was] little.

My dad helped me with phonetics and pronunciation when I was learning English sounds. He was patient with me. I have two female cousins: One is four years older than me, while the other is five years younger than me. I was always the best in study among us three, but my parents and other families never compared us. They just encouraged us to do our best (Interview One, October 9th, 2015).

5.2 Vignette of Meimei

Meimei was born in 1996 in a tier-3 city in Hunan Province in mid-South China. She is the only child of her family of the Han nationality and grew up as a city girl. She has no siblings but five cousins on both parents' sides. Meimei is the 3rd-generation university student from her family, on her father's side. She has been learning English for 10 years, majoring in finance at her university in Shanghai.

5.2.1 English Learning at Public Primary School

Meimei started formal English learning in Grade Three at a local public primary school. In this school, there were six parallel grades with three parallel classes in each with the big class size of sixty-three pupils, and altogether around one hundred and ninety peers in each grade. In her little inland hometown, all public schools used the prescribed PEP English textbooks. Meimei and many of her playmates had never heard of English, nor attended any English related tutorials till Grade Three. In Grade Four, Meimei and several of her classmates played an English drama, *the Race between Hare and Tortoise*, at the school English drama festival. This experience ignited her passion for English, though she had only a few lines in the play.

Meimei attended a private English institute called *Pinyin English* for the extracurricular enrichment, where she spent 3 years, from Grades Five–Seven, there. This was the first private English institute she chose for herself. She retained a living memory of this private institute in her early years of English learning, and recalled her English learning experience there by saying,

... the reason why I chose it was its eye-catching propaganda. It boasted itself on learning English through Chinese *pinyin* romanization. It said that one could learn English well through our Chinese *pinyin* romanization, no need for learning English phonetic sounds. This sounded appealing. I read their flyer, attended a demo class, and decided to start off [with it]. I spent three years there, from Grades 5 to 7. They had their own teaching materials which were called *Pinyin English*. I overheard that the school head was from Beijing, who once worked in an overseas education agency. ... The teaching was helpful. It consolidated my English learning at school. They used Chinese *pinyin* romanization to help us learn English phonetic sounds, making English spelling and words recitation easier. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015).

For most Chinese pupils, English phonetics and spelling constitute a big headache as Chinese and English differ in the aspects of pronunciation, spelling, and grammar. Since neither the primary school nor the middle school that Meimei attended taught English phonetics, in her memory, it was this private English institute that helped her with beautiful pronunciation in English.

In primary school, Meimei had two female Chinese English teachers: One taught from Grades Three to Five, and the other taught in Grade Six, the graduating grade

of primary school. Meimei recalled, saying that the English program in Grades Three and Four was easy, leaving with her little exact retention, despite that the class hours were limited to one to two per week. Her impression on the school English program in Grades Five and Six was blurry, too. In Meimei's view, at the higher grades, teachers' expectations included recognizing English words in a double-sided sheet and simple sentence patterns such as greetings and asking for names or places. She complained that it took 2 years in school on such "simple things," while at *Pinyin* English, they finished all required language points in textbooks "within two weeks" (Interview One, October 11th, 2015), and learned more. Meimei did not spend much time on English in school; her focus on English learning was at the private English institutes that she attended outside the school. She had an extra of 3-h English tutorials at *Pinyin* English every Saturday morning with a small class of no more than twenty students. She was fairly content with her after-school English enrichment experience at *Pinyin* English by saying,

... I felt teachers at *Pinyin* English guided me onto a right path in English learning autonomously. (*ibid.*)

In primary school, teachers played a role in Meimei's English learning because what she cared most was teacher. Meimei's focus on English learning remained outside the school; she had limited impression on her Chinese English teachers in school because they cared little of the class. She preferred teachers at *Pinyin* English because they often interacted and conversed with students before, during, and after class. Meimei referred to her thoughts of teachers' roles on her English learning by saying,

... I found the first time when I was at *pinyin* English that I had special preference and reliance on teachers in my subject studies. The factor of teachers contributed most to my English learning. I had several teachers at *pinyin* English who possessed differing teaching strategies. I would not use "good" or "not good" to label them, other than commenting on whether their teaching fitted my way of learning. The first teacher [at *pinyin* English] was easy-going after class but strict in class. I remember there was a naughty boy in my class who was scared to death to this teacher. The biggest difference between English teachers at *pinyin* English and those at my primary school was that the former would interact and converse with us after class. It was in Grade 5 that I started using QQ [a domestic online socializing Media], to interact with my teachers at *pinyin* English. ... In school due to the class size, my English teacher could hardly take care of us. In fact, she seldom interacted with us after class.

... My first teacher at *pinyin* English left due to some personal reasons when I was in Grade 7. Another teacher arrived to take her place. She was a new graduate, very young. At the very beginning I disliked her and could not accept this newcomer in any way. I retreated to the back of the classroom and had little interaction with her in and outside the class. I assumed they two had some talks about all students in class and this newcomer knew I was a good student. She noticed my abnormal behavior and approached me for a private talk one day after class. ... I cried because we chatted over the previous teacher. Gradually, I was touched by her sincerity and opened my heart to her and accepted her [and her teaching]. I keep in touch with her till now, though she only taught us one semester. It was when I was an 8th grader. Then we had a third teacher. I could not accept her, either. This time, I dropped out. This was not because of her teaching style or personality. It was simply

because a teacher's personality meant more to me than the knowledge she taught in class. On the other hand, there were other private English institutes available in town and some of my classmates transferred there. It was a test-oriented institute, to be exact, a cramming school for the High school Entrance Examinations. I followed [my classmates], and found the teacher I liked. So, I transferred to this new place for extracurricular language enhancement and better test results. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

5.2.2 *English Learning at Public Middle School*

The public middle school that Meimei attended did not require the report of the MSEE test results. It was far away from her home, and took her around half an hour to school by public transportation. There were eight parallel classes in each grade with around fifty-five students in each class, which was the average student number in local public schools. Meanwhile, Meimei attended a new private English institute called *Sunshine* English, which she defined as a cramming school for the HSEE.

Meimei liked core subjects, such as English, biology, and math, in middle school. She had three female Chinese English teachers: One taught in Grades Seven and Eight, the second in Semester One of Grade Nine, and the third in Semester Two of Grade Nine, the graduating grade of middle school. Meimei recounted this unusual teacher deployment by saying,

...we had an unhappy experience with the first English teacher, ... the whole class once signed a letter to the school head, asking for a new one to replace her because the majority of the class was dissatisfied with her class. ... Firstly, we felt she was not a real professional; secondly, some of us did not behave in class. The teacher was not happy as we did not cooperate, so she had irrational behaviors, such as throwing away the mouse, or the blackboard brush before us. To us many, this was unbearable. ... Some male students did not show respect. They ate and chatted casually in class. ... In Grade 8, the teacher-student connection was broken and eventually irreconcilable. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Meimei was upset of her classroom learning during this time because the broken relationship between the class and the teacher caused chaotic class management, more underachievers, and deteriorated school achievements. The depressing classroom climate at times made her plan not to attend English classes to avoid noisiness and distraction, as she was complaining,

...I had little expectation of the teacher or the English program that the school offered. She let us self-study and left the classroom right away when the school bell rang. There was no private tutorial or conversation between us, no direct and frank talk with each other. Probably both parties were reluctant to face up to it [the situation] ...The whole class was out of control. Nobody could settle down to work. People chatted loudly at their own will. ... It was not a killing headache to me, though sometimes I developed the idea of not attending English classes. It was too noisy [in class]. I could not concentrate myself. ... This situation lasted around two weeks.

As I have mentioned, in Grades 7 and 8, we had three English classes per week, with each class lasting 40 minutes. Our time was wasted.... I only kept my own pace. ... My focus [on English learning] was not on classroom time, but on the English tutorials outside the

school. It was at a much higher difficulty level. I tried not to allow such poor classroom management to affect my learner morale. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Though affected by the discouraging classroom environment for half a month, Meimei endeavored to study by herself with a focus on the vocabulary in the textbook, workbooks, and homework from *Sunshine English*. The learning schedule and knowledge framework designed by her teachers from *Sunshine English* unfolded a complete picture of the overall grammar knowledge that was further consolidated with the enhancement workbooks. After each class, she reviewed her class notes and finished homework on time. All, according to Meimei, was for the HSEE.

The situation began to change when the second English teacher arrived at the 1st semester of Grade Nine who knew better about the classroom management and more experienced and strict with the rebellious adolescents. Student attitude in classroom learning improved. However, about 80% of the class, mostly male students, hopelessly and dramatically dropped because since Grade Eight, everything in English became tougher with more advanced vocabularies. Grammar became more tangled and difficult. On reflection, Meimei claimed that if one attempted to harvest from the teacher in class, he would not learn anything within the predicament of the broken teacher–student relationship. She felt sorry and unfair for those who were affected in this unexpected incident by saying,

...those male trouble-makers would not care, but their bad behaviors had affected the rest, even though the latter wanted to learn but failed. The teacher was so frequently distracted and made irritated and could not teach in class. The second teacher came and regulated the class discipline. Things changed a little bit, but our school records remained disappointing, though there was improvement in our attitude in classroom learning. That was the 1st semester of Grade 9. At the beginning of the 2nd semester, this teacher was transferred to another public middle school due to the teacher exchange program between middle schools in the city. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Hence, Meimei asserted that such learning situation had become irreversible unless one took private English tutorials outside the school like her.

The 3rd teacher arrived in the 2nd semester of Grade Nine and adopted the *carrot-and-stick approach* to motivate the entire class for English learning. This teacher “enjoyed a good reputation because of this *welcomed* teaching approach,” and meanwhile, since her husband was the schoolmaster, she could easily “report us to the authority” (Interview One, October 11th, 2015). Meimei elaborated on how this approach worked in her class,

... I said the way she treated us was *welcomed* because it was the carrot-and-stick approach. There was a gap between the time she offered us *a carrot* or *a stick*. When we behaved in class, she gave us an award, but when we did not [behave], she reported us to the school head. This approach worked, but very limited. ... Some male students in my class had lagged way behind. They couldn’t keep pace no matter how hard they tried. They were so poor in English and totally lost in grammar and language points, and had no idea how to make up. The teacher could help little, too. (*ibid.*)

Regardless of the academic and administrative adversities, the class was again given with neat lesson plans, in-class interactions, quiz and examination, homework, and teacher feedback, though there were no other class activities, such as group tasks, English songs, movies, or festivals. The class was making slow but solid progress in Grade Nine with the help of these two teachers, and once ranked the 3rd in a simulation examination before the HSEE. Meimei referred to the role of the latter two Chinese English teachers in her middle school English learning by saying,

... these teachers that taught us in Grade 9 played a vital role on the hard-earned progress of my class, as they pushed our intermediate and low achievements forward. ... Meanwhile, I felt they were more professional and responsible than the 1st one since they had well-organized lesson plans, serious in our preview, review, homework, in-class interactions, quiz [and examination] and teacher feedback. ... These were basic but important learning activities in middle school English learning. To me, middle school English program was like a routine with class lecturing, unit dictation and whole-class morning reading. If one failed in passing dictations, by the way, such dictations would go with around 20 words, he had to do a make-up by the English class representative at the teachers' office. My teachers cared about our achievements in this aspect, too. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Other than teachers' roles, Meimei reflected on the student self-discipline in English learning. When teachers wrote on the blackboard in class, some students, in particular female students, and a couple of male students, took notes carefully. Oftentimes, the majority of her class had to do the make-up after the class dictation and some students cheated. "That was the last thing I would do," Meimei insisted. She liked morning reading, though many of her peers did not care. This is true that when people read together, nobody knows who contributes more while who else contributes less or none. According to Meimei, it all depended on one's learning attitude and self-discipline.

At the winter break in Grade Nine, Meimei decided to apply for a renowned high school at the capital city of the province which held the autonomous recruitment tests province-wide in late March or early April every year. She was informed that among all required subjects that were tested, the difficulty level of English examination was "far beyond the middle school English level" (Interview One, October 11th, 2015). Meimei signed up for a 15-day English tutorial tailored for the high school autonomous recruitment English examination at *Sunshine* English. It was a small sprint class with twenty students centered on systematic, intensive tutorials of listening, reading, and writing. In school, she created a learning community with four like-minded peers with the common goal and ambition. They sat together as a study group based on the permission of the homeroom teacher, encouraging and supporting each other in preparing for the recruitment examination. Meimei recalled this learning experience by saying that,

... everyday we reviewed the vocabulary and buried ourselves in model test papers. Life was rich and full then. It was the peak time of my English learning. (*ibid.*)

Though unsuccessful herself, Meimei felt it was a big worth because one of her peers made it. She recalled how this unforgettable and rewarding intensified English learning experience meant to her as a motivated 9th grader,

...in the autonomous recruitment examination, only mathematics and English were tested; the difficulty level was far, far beyond what I have learned in a public middle school. Meanwhile, I had to prepare meanwhile for the High School Entrance Examinations on all [required] six subjects in the upcoming June. This meant I had to weigh the potential gains and losses in the last few months of Grade 9 because only the comprehensive finals would decide which high school I would be qualified for. ... I would say English in all high-stakes testing was not easy though its textbooks were rather easy; if one hoped to attain a higher grade in testing, he had to work on all kinds of model test papers distributed by the teacher or purchased by himself or his parents. ... In my middle school, there were no class activities, foreign festivals, movies or songs, or other projects available at all. We were not able to afford these things. Everybody cared about the HSEE and it was the priority in life. That's everything for middle school students like us. ... As students, our task was to work on textbooks, workbooks, exercise books and model test papers. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

5.2.3 English Learning at Key Public High School

Meimei attended high school in town, which was a key public high school province-wide with sixteen parallel classes in one grade and fifty students in each class. There were over eight hundred students in her grade who were from the cities within the province. There was also one class that had students from the suburban counties and rural countryside.

In the first year of high school, Meimei, as a 10th grader, noticed that there were major changes in English learning. She made two big decisions in life: One was to stay in the class where the homeroom teacher taught English, and the other was her self-nomination to serve as the class representative of the English subject. As a tall girl from childhood, Meimei was always assigned by the homeroom teacher as the class representative of the P.E. class, though she had little interest in this post. In high school, she developed a strong will to serve as the class representative of English regardless of the trifle tasks such as collecting and distributing homework, reporting quiz feedbacks, and the like. She boasted herself as a highly responsible and demanding assistant to her teacher because she would not allow any of her peers to cheat when they had to do the make-up with her. She remained in this post for 3 years in high school.

Meimei had two Chinese English teachers in high school: One was a male who taught in Grade Ten, and the other was a female in Grades Eleven and Twelve. The male teacher was once a visiting scholar at some British grammar school with overseas study and life experience. His classes were engaging because he included different cultures and other pertinent topics in class time and used modern educational technologies, such as powerpoints, to engage students. The female teacher was an Obama fan and included many of his public talks and speeches in her

otherwise traditional and rigid classroom teaching. Meimei recalled this class episode by saying,

... Those Obama talks were tough for most of us, despite the bilingual subtitles in English and Chinese. We practiced listening in class, but that was indeed dry and boring. We had a listening workbook, in which the exercise items were identical with the test items in the University Entrance English Examination. We started such test-oriented routine training ever since Grade 10. In class time, we worked on the listening exercise items first, then the teacher would announce the answers. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Intensified, examination-oriented routine training started early since Grade Ten. It remains a routine for most high schools throughout the country, when students are again required to work on piles of workbooks and model test papers for the *Gaokao*. Meimei continued regular extracurricular tutorials and finished three thick notebooks full of her grammar notes. She cherished these notebooks, saying,

... I still keep these notebooks with me at university. They are my treasure. My EAP teachers do not lecture on grammar, so sometimes I would refer to these grammar notes for self-review. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Other than that, Meimei ordered a private one-to-one tutorial of ten customized classes on grammar and reading comprehension at home with the teacher from *Sunshine* English in the summer of Grade Nine when the HSEE was over. The reason why she ordered these tailored English tutorials was to fulfill her passion for English and to close the gap in advanced English learning.

As an 11th grader, Meimei had only four English classes per week in school, and her English teacher was poor in curriculum design and lesson planning. Again, she felt the urgent learning needs when the harvest in classroom learning was limited. She resorted to her *Sunshine* teacher again and ordered two more successive private tutorials with her every Friday afternoon at the teacher's home for academic enrichment. Meimei recalled this after-school English learning experience, her tutor teacher's influence, and her future academic planning with the insights into the "centrality [of grammar]" in English learning and testing. She was saying,

... In the first year of high school, most of my peers were poorly aware of the importance of grammar, I realized its centrality through English tutorials outside the school. In Grade 11, I felt English [in school] was cushy and I harvested little; I needed further enrichment. So I ordered one-to-one tutorials again at *Sunshine* English. My teacher from *Sunshine* English had clear logic and helped construct the framework of grammar as a whole. Grammar is of utmost importance; it is a guide. Twelve time and tense is important. Subordinate clauses, such as noun and adverbial clauses, are important, too. It is vital to know them and know how to use them. ... Frankly, my focus on English learning was not from my official schooling, but from my tutorials outside the school. It was also on grammar and reading comprehension.

Though the 2nd and 3rd tutorials were repetitive, I became more enlightened on clauses and other language points. I felt gratified with my slow but solid progress. ... In the 2nd semester of Grade 11, I had again one-to-one tutorials with this teacher. Altogether I had five focused tutorials on reading comprehension. She taught me reading comprehension strategies and enhanced my reading skills through longer passage reading. In Grade 12, I was even planning to apply for Hong Kong University.

... Simply put, my private English tutorials helped me to live through tough examinations with ease in school. I remember once when everybody complained about the difficulty level of a mid-term examination, I myself felt good. It turned out that I ranked No. 1 in my grade. I was always among the top 5 in my grade in high school. The only thing that I did not do well in high school English was my handwriting. Because of it, I could not attain full marks in English examinations due to my poor handwriting. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Meimei was complacent about her early awareness of the centrality of grammar knowledge in English learning when most of her high school peers were struggling with it. This augmented her confidence in language study and motivated her to apply for a foreign university because of her good English proficiency.

In spite of being a top student in Grade Twelve, like most peers, Meimei had to expose herself to workbooks and model test papers to prepare herself for the *Gaokao*. She recalled this critical period by saying,

... English textbooks were easy then, as long as one was able to handle the prescribed vocabulary, grammar, basic listening skills and common writing topics. In Grade 12, we were fully exposed to model test papers.... At that time the everyday homework would include one or two model test papers. Though there was heavy pressure on most of us, I was O.K. English was not a burden to me. I seldom reviewed English before monthly tests, or middle or final examinations. I would, half an hour prior to examinations, take out my textbooks and take a quick look at the content in each unit. This was because some test items, such as blank-filling, were directly from these texts, so I had to recite them well. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Meimei's test results in the *Gaokao* were far beyond the admission cut-off line of her choice university. Her test result in English subject was 146 out of 150. It was good enough to land her directly on Class A of University EAP program.

5.2.4 EAP Learning at University

Meimei is a finance major at university. Upon entering university, she and other newcomers took a placement test which landed her on University EAP program because of her competitive test result. In her department, all core courses pertinent to the disciplinary studies were given in English by Chinese and foreign professors.

Meimei's EAP program included reading and writing, listening and speaking, and an academic writing course which was offered every other week with the focus on the structure and framework of academic writing. In University EAP program, reading, writing, and listening were integrated into four credits, and one credit for academic writing. EAP had the lion's share regarding its credits among all required courses. The class size was comparatively small with twenty students in Semester One and thirty in Semester Two when some were transferred to other class modules while more flowed in. These A-level students came from different disciplines based on their leading test results in the placement test upon entering university. EAP textbooks by Pearson were used in guided teaching with affordable workload. Book

One focused on thinking mode, how an academic text was comprehended, and how a scientific paper was constructed independently.

Within the first few months after she was assigned in University EAP program, Meimei quickly noticed the gap between high school English and this new English program. She struggled to adjust herself to the changed learning scenario. She recalled the new academic English learning experience by saying,

... It was in Semester 1 of the first school year. I assume the majority of us realized the gap. First, it was brand-new, interesting and relaxing, seemingly, I mean, as the teacher guided us, step by step, in exploring and learning. It was fun in class. We did not have much homework, compared with what we had before. At university, we do not have to bury ourselves in test-oriented learning. What we did was to review, for example, how a technical term was defined. The teacher required that we write a short passage of definition based on given terms. This was different from what we did in high school, to work on piles of test papers, easy and repetitive test items. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

In the meantime, Meimei compared her academic writing course with the IELTS test writing by saying,

... the [EAP] writing course in the first school year was like IELTS writing. In class, the teacher included various writing skills in IELTS, such as writing based on a graph, and the like. I felt it was like the IELTS writing. (*ibid.*)

Meimei developed serious scientific attitude and team cooperation spirit by working on study tasks and course projects, such as independent writing, research project, and group presentation, which required both independent work and peer cooperation. She referred to the study task of paragraph writing, saying she would rather invest more time on the content, the depth, and breadth of the writing, other than the newness in the structure. “I am used to scientific reports and journal papers, longer ones. ... Now I could tell a scientific style from a more subjective one, like a film review” (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015), she was saying so. Meimei has passed College English Test (CET) 4 and was preparing for CET 6 and the IELTS test. She found critical thinking a real difficulty and challenge, and worried about her low GPA due to the higher difficulty level of the EAP program and the insufficient study skills to guarantee her learning efficiency. Many of her peers shared similar worries and attributed it to the situation that no more test-oriented workbooks or training was available at university.

Meimei continued to resort to private tutorials at *English First (EF)* to deal with the learning difficulties she encountered during this period. She was endeavoring to her full school schedule and oftentimes only took 10–15 min on lunch, while spent the rest of the 1-h lunchtime at the school library, reading, listening, or honing her oral ability for at least half an hour. She described her full day’s activities by saying,

... I usually get up at 7:15 in the morning. I arrive at school at 8:15 for the first class. There are two or four classes in the morning. Then, I alone hurry to the student’s canteen for lunch. Then I head to the library to read English for 20 to 30 min. Then I return to the classroom for the afternoon classes. Generally, we have two or four classes in the afternoon. In the evening, I go for volleyball training with my teammates. This will last to 8:30 or 9:00. Then I go back to my dorm, take a shower, wash clothes, wind up the work from school associations, then go to bed at around midnight. ...When there are 8 classes a day,

we spend the whole day at school without any break. When there are fewer classes, I would go to the library for self-study or work on the chores from the school associations that I partake. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Meimei lived on campus with three female dorm-mates who were from University General English program. She seldom confined herself to the dorm life when there was no class. Instead, she had her hands full during weekdays. She was active and versatile at school associations. She served as the team leader of her study group. She worked as the secretary of the student presidium of her grade. She also played volleyball at the varsity team and participated in training in evenings when there were no optional courses. Out of the richness in life, Meimei remained sober of her academic limits, making balance between her academic study, hobbies, and socializing.

Meimei had three University EAP teachers with different personalities and teaching styles. The 1st teacher was an amiable and responsible textbook follower, who explored meticulously the intention of textbook developers and stayed focused on the key concepts and language points in the field of EAP in class. The second EAP teacher was a resourceful and talkative male who had good relations with students due to his impressive personal charisma. The third EAP teacher was a female think tank who was interesting and often fed the class with various study resources. In Meimei's view, this female teacher loved to share, spoke fast, and moved nonstop within a 45-min class. After class, she would upload learning materials in the class email account for students' autonomous learning. Meimei liked these EAP teachers and their classes; she was proud to have more interactions with them than most of her classmates. She compared her EAP classes with her high school equivalents' by saying,

... my EAP classes are engaging and eye-opening; they make me engaged and excited. My teachers would encourage you to partake in class activities, peer work, discussions and debates. They are completely different from high school English classes. Well, in high school, I knew exactly what teachers would say in next minutes. They followed the routine like this: first, they lectured on the text, then on words, further, on grammar. The 1st 10 min on a passage, the 2nd 10 min on its exercise items, and the 3rd 10 min on answers checking; everybody knew this dry and boring routine, I would do my own things in the rest 20 min.

... EAP [classes] are different; they are among the very few [university courses] that truly attract students. This is the only course at university that can hold me throughout 45 min without thinking of or touching my smart phone. In EAP classes, few people sleep or play with their mobiles, while in other courses, that is a frequency. I don't know whether it was attributed to teachers' lesson planning or it was developed by textbook developers. I feel EAP, its curriculum design, is motivating and inspiring. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

However, Meimei had concerns about the excessive input to digest in and after class. She was trying to review learning materials from her 3rd EAP teacher on weekends but always failed. The knowledge information and learning resources her teacher shared were "exciting but unaffordable," Meimei shrugged her shoulders, saying,

...The third teacher feeds us with an avalanche of learning resources. She may have a lot to share. Her speaking speed is rather fast. She goes nonstop in a 45-minute class, though occasionally she may ask us to engage in a short discussion, very short. I am trying to adjust myself to this teaching style. There is no sufficient time for us to think or digest what we are spoon-fed. I feel there is too much information within one class. I often get lost, I feel I am buried with what she feeds us. I am trying to grow used to her class. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

Meimei perceived the unexpected gap between high school and University English programs based on what she observed and experienced in and outside the class. She realized her academic limits through the past year's learning experience and independent campus life. She referred to the learning difficulties shared by most of her peers due to English-medium instructions, though she was O.K. with the normal speed of foreign professors and had confidence in opening her mouth to speak before public. She reflected on the different academic stages of English learning by saying,

...first, the difference lies in the curriculum itself. What I learned in high school was English as a foreign language subject. We were taught how to recite words, how to read for meaning, and how to do reading comprehension. ... In university, the EAP program teaches English for its own sake, the cultural knowledge integrated, and the thinking mode that goes fundamentally different from our Chinese. ... For instance, based on my past English learning experience on reading, I would not say reading is a challenge until I learned academic reading in the EAP program. It was so hard to figure out within minutes the intention of the writer; it was so hard to detect the topic sentence; as for the overall structure, well, I am still learning how an academic paper is constructed.

All right, second is the instructional means. In high school, textbooks were the only focus; we learned what textbooks say. In university, EAP teachers enrich our classroom learning with audios and videos, research projects and journal papers. These scaffolding materials broaden our academic horizon and guide us to see how English should be applied in real academic scenarios, such as TED.

To me, the real challenge occurred last year when I was a freshman. I was glad Semester 1 was over, but, the test results of the finals were not desirable. I realized my vocabulary remained limited. ... University EAP program focused on critical thinking, ... the problem was, you felt fun in class, and there were few notes for you to review after class. When the semester was over, you found you have learned little. ... Yes, each class was filled with chi-chi learning resources and information, but they were mainly lectured by the teacher. You were taught a concept. We worked on pertinent study tasks based on what was learned in class, ... the problem was, they were far from ingraining in us a definite study skill or learning philosophy. ... More is needed to guarantee our learning efficiency.

When I recall, I realize my harvest was limited. In high school English, I had accomplished a thick exercise book and three otherwise fat notebooks on grammar study; I often review them and feel a sense of achievement. During the winter break of Semester 1, I seriously reflected my EAP learning and started to doubt my academic achievement throughout the semester's study. I felt I was trapped in English learning at the university level. Then I enrolled in *EF* for my oral ability. I just felt anxious on what I have done, and perceived more urgent learning needs. I, as usual, needed external assistance outside the school. ... It has been half a year since I signed up for oral ability enrichment. It was helpful indeed. ... there at *EF*, online instructions are integrated with face-to-face teaching. There is a topic embedded in each unit with the videos. I make use of lunch break to practice reading and

listening at the school library. I managed to ensure that I had at least half an hour daily on reading and listening practices. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

As a conscious and active learner who has learned University EAP for an entire school year, Meimei was maturing with this new academic English program. Based on her learning experience, Meimei was summarizing,

... if one hopes to feel the penetrating influence of EAP, he has to cool down to reflect and think over his learning experience, the overall learning history, and the philosophical and ideological changes that help re-shape his own learner identity. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

5.2.5 *Family Support and Parental Influence on English Learning*

According to Meimei, English learning at private English tutorials was the only thing that she has persevered for years with full financial support from her parents, though neither of them nor other family relatives speak English or work in a field that requires it as a working language.

Meimei's mother is a stockbroker. She feels that the career trajectory and job opportunities in the field of finance and economics are promising; therefore, she insists that Meimei, her only daughter, study this academic direction at university. Meimei is O.K. with this decision, though she has limited passion for it. She is thinking of studying modern drama in London. She once traveled alone to Shanghai for an 8-hour modern drama *A Dreamlike Dream* by the producer LAI Shengchuan when she finished the high school proficiency test in the summer of Grade Eleven. It was under her mother's full support of this ambition. During the trip, she encountered a female friend who shared a similar interest in modern drama and encouraged her to pursue her dream by trying different things to find out her heart's desire. Meimei was grateful for this traveling experience and discussed her future academic planning by saying,

... When I was in Grade 11, there was a required high school proficiency testing. Unless one passed it, he would not be qualified for the *Gaokao* in Grade 12 upon high school graduation. It was in the summer of Grade 11 when I finished the proficiency test, I traveled to Shanghai alone for a modern drama *A Dreamlike Dream* by the producer LAI Shengchuan. It lasted for eight hours.

During the drama time I met a female friend who liked drama too, though she had no pertinent lived experience in drama, me either. She told me she was not from Shanghai; instead, she was from Harbin, a northern city. She was working in the field of charity at its Shanghai branch with its headquarters in Hangzhou, Jiangsu Province. She depicted to me an imaginary Shanghai in her heart. ... You know, I am biologically from Nantong, Jiangsu Province. All my relatives on my grandpa's side are from Nantong. When I was little, I was taken back to Nantong every one or two years. Now we mainly travel back to Nantong to visit my great-grandma. Since I grew up in Changde, Hunan province, every time when we were traveling to Nantong, we would always take Shanghai as the transfer city. ...

Shanghai was not unfamiliar to me, but this was only restrained to some well-known scenic spots. ... To me, Shanghai is a guest city; I have little feel of it. We all know this city is more or less intolerant and mean to outsiders. There was little nostalgia until I came for the drama and met her in Shanghai at that time. After this short encounter, I realized I hoped to come [to Shanghai]. I applied for five out of six higher education institutions in Shanghai in the *Gaokao*. I aspired strongly to come. My mom supported me, too.

... Now I am thinking of studying modern drama in London upon university graduation. Don't you think the idea is bold and crazy? Er, probably, I might consider London School of Economics. I could ground myself in my current major and study in this university. I would still be close to drama.

I have passed CET4. I plan to take IELTS in the spring of 2016, because I hope to continue my graduate study in London. I like modern drama, while London is the cradle of drama. I long for an overseas experience there. As a stock broker herself, my mom felt that job opportunities in the field of finance and economics are good. She insisted that I entered my current university. I was O.K. with this decision then. I would not say I dislike this discipline, I just have little passion [for it].

As for my goal and the road ahead, it is indeed a hard topic. I feel I try to avoid such topic these days... hard to face and say. I have been thinking about it. I told myself I had to figure it out before I become a university junior. Presently, I am inclined to try things out. I couldn't guarantee that I find it throughout this year... I hope to experience more and have more choices. Now people say you get to do what you feel like in life. I feel at least I have to give it a shot before I get to know what I really like to do. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

5.3 Vignette of Xiaobo

Xiaobo was born in 1996 in Shanghai, one of the four municipalities under the central government of the country. He is the only child of his family of the Han nationality and grew up as a suburban boy. He has no siblings but two cousins on both parents' sides. Xiaobo is the 2nd-generation university student from his family, on his mother's side. He has been learning English for twelve and a half years, majoring in international economy and trade at his university in Shanghai.

5.3.1 *English Learning at Public Primary School*

Xiaobo started English learning in a public kindergarten in his home city. His Chinese homeroom teacher taught the entire class English by reciting fairy tales and playing drama. No English textbook was used at this time. Though Xiaobo had little interest, he followed other children when they engaged in class activities. The kindergarten English program was short-lived for 4 months. Upon kindergarten graduation, the class performed an English drama before their parents.

Xiaobo started formal English learning in a neighboring public primary school, where the Shanghai Oxford English textbooks and workbooks were used. Xiaobo had little interest in English since young; in his eyes, it was a required subject only for examination purposes. In his class, there were forty students with more girls than boys. Xiaobo did not attend any private institute for after-school English enrichment because the school provided an English tutorial program in the beginning school years. However, in Grade Six with the arrival of a new school-master, all tutorial programs were canceled and changed to self-study periods.

In school, Xiaobo had three female Chinese English teachers, on whom he had little impression. This was because they muddled the class and cared little about those who slept in class. They often required little pupils to learn words and texts by rote. Xiaobo recalled his English learning experience in school by saying,

... rote memorization was a must. We had to recite all texts. I was good at it with a super memory. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

In the primary school English program, no class activities, such as singing English songs, playing drama or watching foreign movies, were available. In the limited memory of Xiaobo regarding English learning at this stage, textbooks were flattened and easy with simplistic and boring text characters. Though Xiaobo claimed no particular learning methods, with a super memory he behaved, followed whatever teachers demanded, and did well in the written and oral English homework and tests. In Grade Five, he attended a spelling bee contest and was awarded the 3rd prize within the school district. Xiaobo recalled this learning experience with a sense of pride by saying,

... There was a spelling bee contest when I was a 5th grader. I signed up for it by myself. I just wanna have a try. I spent around one full month on reciting a reference book. Sometimes I asked for help from my parents. I plunged myself into it, though I forgot almost everything after the contest. But anyway, confidence in English learning grew thereby. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

5.3.2 English Learning at Public Middle School

The compulsory education that Xiaobo received is 9-year compulsory schooling that combines 5 years of public primary school and 4 years of public middle school. There is no entrance examination for entering a neighborhood public middle school when primary school education is finished. Nevertheless, there is a placement test for all newcomers and only the top 40 are assigned to Class One, the best class within the school district, according to the official school ranking. The rest students go to seven parallel classes with forty students in each. Xiaobo was proud of being in Class One.

Xiaobo had two female Chinese English teachers: One taught Grades Six to Eight, and the other in Grade Nine, the graduating grade. In his view, English in

middle school had a fixed routine with textbook knowledge, blackboard notes, tape listening, class quiz, and homework. He recalled his English classes at this stage by saying,

... We were recommended to work on reference books on listening comprehension, cloze and unit-based exercises. There was no short-cut, you just worked on more workbooks.

... grammar was systematically taught in Grade 6, though it was interwoven in teaching in lower grades in primary school. Technical terms were new and taught through specific examples for illustration. Note taking from blackboard was required, but few of us followed, we were sleepy in class. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaobo described himself as a top student with limited English proficiency but super test-taking skills, though sometimes he was ranked 1st in class. For many middle school students, academic and peer pressure started to ascend at this age, and Xiaobo was in no exception. He had his interpretation regarding this aspect,

... there was pressure from people around, and the school, but I was O.K. with that. I followed my own pace and worked on huge amounts of exercises. I was willing to do so. ... My school achievements were stable; though [the school records of] my Chinese language arts were not so desirable, my excellence in math could make up the gap. I have done much more than my peers. I realized the importance of examination for my future. It had much to do with my potential high school. It was all about my future. I told you, I had excellent test-taking skills. We were convinced of the importance of the excellence selection examination and worked all out for it. I simply worked harder and more. This is universally true, work harder and more, particularly, in my disciplinary studies now. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

More important was his high learning efficiency in subject studies in middle school. He referred to it by saying,

... I finished a thick math workbook in Grade 8. This enlightened and empowered me in math study. I finished all homework with ease. When my classmates were working on homework assigned by teachers, I was working on more challenging extracurricular tasks. I was a genius in math; but in English class, I was busy in taking notes from blackboard. ... I had strategic skills. I would not do all math or English exercise items, instead, I focused on those with higher difficulty levels. Since the difficulty level of the assigned homework remained low, I challenged myself with more difficult ones and thus ranked top in examination. You wouldn't harvest good examination results if you did not enhance yourself with more extracurricular tasks. (*ibid.*)

In Grade Nine, testing became intensified with three quizzes during weekdays and extra classes or examinations over the weekend. Students were required to work more on unit-based workbooks, listening comprehension exercises, and model test papers distributed or recommended by their teachers or parents. Academic pressure haunted Xiaobo since Grade Eight when he was preparing for the excellent selection examination by the school district and the high school independent recruitment examination organized by key high schools in the city. The influence of peer pressure, according to Xiaobo, was internalized and pushed him forward,

... it was the pressure from the outside world, my peers, I mean, that motivated me, when I saw them study so hard. Then it gradually changed to inner motivation. I aspired to be accepted by the key high school in the city. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Unlike Dandan and Meimei who attended private English tutorials in middle school, Xiaobo never resorted to private tutorials for English learning. Instead, he developed his study plan and worked on piles of workbooks and model test papers to hone his test-taking skills, faster handwriting, and better accuracy on test items. Despite the heavy study load and academic pressure, he kept a healthy lifestyle with bedtime no later than 11 o'clock at night.

With the expectation of entering a key high school in the city, Xiaobo strived to study strenuously. He managed his time for core subject studies. He grew to be a math genius through intensified practices on math problems with higher difficulty levels. He gave himself challenging study tasks in math every day, collecting and reviewing question items in which he made mistakes and took detailed note in the margins. He recalled his English learning during this time by saying,

... I stayed attentive in class. I followed teachers and took careful notes from the blackboard. We were required to prepare a thick notebook for mistakes, in which grammar rules were recorded and shortened into formulas for quick reviews prior to quizzes and examinations. It was hard in the beginning. We never did this in primary school. This was new [in middle school] but proved systematic and helpful for better test results.

Other than that, I worked on more workbooks and model test papers. I worked all by myself. I don't like private tutorials. I didn't think they would help much, so I never attended any. I had friends who attended some. I didn't feel they worked better than I did in school. I think it was a waste of parents' money. I would judge through the practical results. I chose to study at home. My reference materials were mainly from my teacher's and my parents' recommendation; they are much more difficult and challenging than exercises from textbooks, the latter were easy, helpless for HSEE, frankly.

... My teachers helped much too, but they mainly followed the routine, such as textbooks, tapes, blackboard notes, homework, examination papers, and the like. Most Chinese teachers were alike. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

In Grade Eight, Xiaobo attended a citywide English writing contest integrated with listening, reading comprehension, and a creative IQ test. He was awarded the 2nd prize. He signed up for some math contests, but failed at the municipal level. In Xiaobo's eyes, signing up for the subject-based contests was important because

... an impressive resume with prize records for the key high school application is crucial. ... I was careful in planning my future high school. I wouldn't miss any possible chances to make myself stand out. I needed more prizes to shine among other high school applicants. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

One year later, Xiaobo succeeded in the excellent selection examination and the high school independent recruitment examination. He was eventually accepted by his dream high school, a well-renowned key private high school in the city.

5.3.3 English Learning at Key Private High School

Xiaobo entered a key private high school and started to board. There were four Experimental Classes and eight parallel classes in each grade with fifty students in each. Only top students with the higher HSEE test results entered the Experimental Class. Xiaobo was under huge pressure because he was declined and entered a parallel class; only students from the Experimental Class were the apple of the school's eyes.

Xiaobo was struggling to catch up throughout the entire Grade Ten, the first school year of high school, due to the huge knowledge gap between his past middle school and this key private high school. He used the rhetoric of the “darkest time” to visualize his academic struggles as he lagged behind at the start. Xiaobo blamed his middle school teachers for not preparing him for high school studies. In his memory, the study schedule in high school was unbearable. He was saying,

... I was boarding; I had to get up at 5:30 for morning exercises at 6:00 sharp. ... The homework was unbearable, too. All dorms were blacked out at 10:30 at night. That was the time when my dorm-mates and I were still working on damned homework. I had to use an emergency lamp with dim light to move on. This was risky; if I were caught red-handed in using it, I would be reported. ... I slept less than 5 h a day. I was always drowsy. I forced myself to open my eyes wide and stay awake in the core courses. ... There was lunch break, but I did not want to move around; I would rather rest my head on the desk for a short while. ... When I felt sleepy in the daytime, I slept over the IT class and geography class. I had no choice. The only thing I longed for was good sleep. I could hardly afford such killing schedule. ... This [situation] lasted for 3 years in high school. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Soon after entering high school, Xiaobo noticed that teachers would not lecture on textbooks because of the content easy. Instead, extensive homework and model test papers were assigned for preparing students for the university independent recruitment examination and the *Gaokao*. Teachers “cared little about students as individuals” but more the “average score of the class and major testing results in the school, the district and the city” (Interview One, October 1st, 2015). There was an oral class in Grade Ten, but it lasted for only one semester. The inter-school exchange programs were only for top students in the Experimental Class, not the rest in the parallel classes. In Grade Twelve, the graduating grade, Xiaobo invested more time on minor subjects like geography and biology other than English. He recounted this learning period by saying,

... I busied myself for a biology contest, endless homework and model test papers and university independent recruitment examination. ... We were buried with an avalanche of model test papers. Oftentimes, they were our homework. For instance, geography was a minor course, but we often had piles of test papers over the weekends. Few of us could accomplish them.

... I had geography in middle school, but teachers only lectured on textbooks. I encountered the huge gap in high school geography. I had disadvantages compared with my peers from private middle schools in the city. I had to spend more time on my weakness; so, my time was wasted on these minor subjects; I had little time on English. (*ibid.*)

According to Xiaobo, his life in high school became a linear duality: dorm and classroom. In his eyes, he did not have a life of his own; it was flattened for the *Gaokao*.

In Grade Ten of high school, Xiaobo squeezed time for longer sentence translation, reading comprehension, and focused grammar study. He spent class hours on vocabulary and grammar study by working on his workbooks, and learned to summarize the key and difficult language points from the exercise items in his words. He picked up university CET 4 and 6 vocabulary books for recitation and finished a thick workbook on the CET 4 and CET 6 reading comprehension passages at the university level and one-third of the IELTS vocabulary book.

It was during this time that Xiaobo learned to use his iPhone app to assist vocabulary learning. Soon he found himself got half the results with twice the effort, as vocabulary was a tiny part of English learning compared with other aspects of listening, reading comprehension, and writing. He signed up for a tutorial class in school but quickly quit. It was because classes were only available on weekends, while he was always exhausted on weekdays and needed more sleeping hours during the weekend.

In general, what was left in Xiaobo's impression on high school English learning experience was text-orientedness, on which he was straightforward by saying,

... I didn't remember anything in my high school English textbooks; they were useless. Textbooks were easy; we only worked on model test papers. Teachers did not lecture on textbooks. There was some time I felt reluctant in following the teacher in class. I focused on my own pace. I spent the class time on vocabulary and grammar. When I finished those exercises, I would summarize the key and difficult language points in my own words. ... My life in Grades 10, 11 and 12 was only for the *Gaokao*. There was some time I felt empty and panic. ... I felt rather bad about my otherwise good English. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

5.3.4 EAP Learning at University

In the first year at university, Xiaobo was assigned to University EAP program in which EAP textbooks by Pearson were adopted for classroom use. Handouts and supplementary text materials were available for each unit. There were two class types available: experimental classes and parallel classes, both of which were based on the placement test results upon entering university. The former engaged in University EAP program with a faster teaching pace than the latter, which taught General University English. The class size of the former was smaller with twenty-five students. For both class types, each class lasted 90 min.

Xiaobo referred to his Chinese University EAP teachers, a male and a female, who wrapped up academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking in their instructions. Students were informed on the first day of class that University EAP program was fundamentally different from high school English program or general English language teaching (GELT) at university. It was the first time that Xiaobo

realized that in English learning, grammar and sentence drills would give way to integrated language proficiency, in particular, oral competence, for content-based knowledge and academic communication.

Unlike other participants such as Meimei and Xiaogang who were prone to human interactions, Xiaobo seldom conversed with his University EAP teachers. He was not among the minority, as it was not uncommon among today's university youth that avoided interacting with their university professors unless they had to so, since they did not feel the need. Xiaobo explained this mindset by saying,

... I don't like to surround teachers for a good impression; I feel reluctant to resort to them. ... I seldom volunteer to answer questions. I knew some would, not me. I am an adult. I don't feel right relying on them on how to work out test items because there are other channels available, such as discussing with classmates or searching on Internet. ... I can manage my study. I don't want to bother my teachers with silly test items. I am fed up with them in high school.

Anyway, if you feel like doing so, it is O.K. I mean your questions have to be academic when you approach teachers for answers. It is weird to bother them with model test items or textbook contents. That's what we did in middle and high school. I prefer to listen to others and solve learning difficulties by myself or with my buddies. If I feel the need so, I'd approach them for helpful websites for learning or learning methods for recommendation. It is the last thing for me to ask for answers for test items. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

Other than his Chinese EAP teachers, Xiaobo had foreign teachers from *English First (EF)* who taught academic writing every other week. This was tailored for the Experimental Class that Xiaobo attended. Courseware was used in class; academic writing theories such as the HOOK concept, the hamburger theory, and plagiarism in writing were introduced. According to Xiaobo, this writing course helped in academic writing formality. There were visiting foreign professors who lectured on core courses, such as Principles of Economics. English-medium instructions were applied with textbooks and courseware. Though they were a big challenge, Xiaobo stayed focused in class and took notes as much as he could, using these courses to facilitate his academic listening abilities.

Unlike many of his male peers, Xiaobo did not play video games or waste hours on *wechat* in his Iphone; he seldom visited nearby Internet bars. In the past semester when some courses were dull with one-way lecturing, many of his peers cut classes. He did not. Instead, he spent time on new vocabulary and the content of newly distributed text materials. He realized the importance of school credits and had a strong sense of self-discipline and study habit at university by saying,

... I never cut classes. I follow teachers' requirements and finish study tasks, though sometimes I do my own things in class. Though I seldom preview or review classes, I go all out in examination and never cheat; success means hard work, I knew this. I knew musts and must-nots as a university student. University teachers would not push you hard for learning; it all depends on yourself. Self-discipline and autonomous learning are key for success in university.

Anyway, sometimes I cannot help worrying about failing in the finals or a low GPA. I can hardly afford lagging way behind. ... I care; we all care about that, you know. ... to me, one

has to be fully responsible for his study at university. ... It is the last thing I cut classes, though my learning efficiency is just so-so. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

Meanwhile, Xiaobo followed a neat schedule which reflected his routine life and study on campus. He was describing the routine of his weekdays as follows:

... I usually get up at 7:50 in the morning. I finish washing up within 10 min and buy breakfast on the road to school. I ride a bike to campus at 8:05 to 8:10 from my dorm for morning classes that begin at 8:15. I am always on time. University EAP and other discipline-based core courses are always in the morning. Class activities include reading and discussing technical terms and case studies. ... Sometimes classes go from early morning to late afternoon; this makes me exhausted. If I am not drowsy, I engage in class activities, and work harder and longer. When there is homework for that day, I would find an empty classroom to accomplish it after dinner. Then I stay longer or find a campus café to self-study till 11:00 p.m. before I ride back to dorm, where I stay up late preparing for some certificate tests.

Other than that, I spend a couple of hours per day on English. I would spend some more time on listening to English news reports on East Day or Voice of America. There is alternative, English on special speed and on normal speed. I listen several times till the news is fully comprehended. I also practice retelling without notes. (*ibid.*)

Vocabulary acquisition was easy in the first year of university, according to Xiaobo. Things changed in the second school year before Xiaobo realized that more time must be invested on University EAP learning. He continued to use his iPhone app to create vocabulary notebooks to facilitate this time-consuming study task. Academic listening was Xiaobo's Achille's heel. He recognized this academic limits by saying,

... in high school, much less attention was paid on listening. Now, I have realized the importance of listening proficiency. You get to listen and digest before you respond in class. ... I spend time on listening to English news reports on East Day or VOA. I did special speed in Semester 1, and now I am turning to normal speed and get more used to it. I also practice retelling without notes. I feel I am doing well so far. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

In spite of the class disciplines of University EAP program informed in the orientation week, Xiaobo detected the differences between the academic English programs based on his class observation and learning experience. He analyzed this point by saying,

... University EAP is not difficult, you won't fail in the final, but there is no easy work to get a good examination result without hard work. I never feel I would fail it. ... In high school, I squeezed time for English learning. I sacrificed my sleeping hours on it, though the learning result was not desirable. ... Now, time remains a big problem to me. On one hand, my class schedule is tight; on the other hand, I am preparing for some certificate examinations. This is time-consuming, but is a worthy investment because I need to plan for my future career, so I have little time available for autonomous learning on University EAP. ...

High school English tests focused on grammar with a fixed difficulty level, but that of the EAP quizzes and finals varies in different test items. The layout of the past final examination paper was like that of the IELTS test; more challenging items interwove with less challenging ones. For instance, in reading comprehension, the test item of paraphrasing was

thorny. I knew literal or free interpretation; but sometimes, I simply could not understand the original, I had no idea what the sentences say about. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

Though he had a limited passion for University EAP, Xiaobo displayed thought-provoking insights into the teachers' role in the secondary and higher education. He realized that his high school English teachers possessed a disposition of spoon-feeding and nursing, which he did not expect from his University EAP teachers. He explored teacher's and students' roles at university by saying,

... In middle and high school, we were spoon-fed by teachers; the whole class was teacher-centered. They would show you what to do and what not to do. They recommend you enrichment materials for the *Gaokao*, or other high-stakes tests. I was led and pushed by my teachers. At university, teachers would not do these pushes. They want you to manage your life and study. One has to study by himself and for himself. EAP teachers would not spoon-feed or hold your hands all the way. You get to grow self-disciplined to learn autonomously. I see this point myself. ... Compare with high school teachers, they would not keep asking you for homework or class attendance, they would not report you to school authorities or parents, but they might fail you in the final.

... we are adults, aren't we? We deserve more rights and room for independent thinking and actions. We don't need nannies at university. ... By nature, this is the core of the problem of those who are irresponsible for their own studies. If you read, write and speak little, you could figure out the possible consequences. If you do not try without external motivations, or blame others for academic failure, this is very wrong. To blame the academic failure of EAP learning on a lack of teachers' professionalism is precisely the logic of cause and effect reversed. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

Other than the thoughts on teacher's and students' responsibilities, Xiaobo discussed his learning methods in learning University EAP. He claimed no such thing in English learning, but stressed how his past English learning in high school played a role on his present study habit and learning experience,

... to a large extent, frankly, I live off my past achievements and meanwhile follow my teacher's pace. I feel living off my past achievements doesn't contradict following the teacher's pace. They go concurrently. ... What is needed for current English learning remains in what I learned in high school, such as reading skills, listening skills and test-taking skills. ... I can read fast. The skills and strategies I've acquired for fast reading are mainly from my own endeavor in high school. I am still counting on my past achievements in English learning. My English proficiency was at its peak when I was preparing for the university independent recruitment examination. My reading ability remains at my high school level, so does my writing ability.

At university, I was tied up with oral presentation from foreign professors, independent project research which required case studies, and other study loads. ... Study tasks took too much time. I needed time to digest the discipline-based knowledge and how to use it in the assignment of case study. We were not allowed time for doing so; professors assumed we knew everything. We did not. ... It is a sheer fallacy for improving English through assignments. The last thing for me is to improve my English competency through these assignments. I struggled to finish them, submit on time, and done; that's it, [I had] no time for quality.

... I never have a passion for English [learning], I now prefer using the methods which worked on me in high school rather than exploring something new or radical. Why bother? I never cut classes, I show up on time, I always do homework, I seldom review after class or before the final, I never cheat in examination, and I hence never worry about failing this course. I am happy with where I am. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

Xiaobo noticed that at university, the difficulty level of test items varied and the layout of the past year's final examination was like that of the IELTS test. Even so, he remained reluctant in exploring the newer learning methods for language study. Instead, he fairly enjoyed living off his past achievements.

Since Xiaobo was from the Experimental Class in University EAP program, all his class members were required to take the IELTS test with a minimum test result of 6.5 by the end of the 4th semester when the University English program is over. According to Xiaobo, a good IELTS test report is a must for his university graduation and degree application, which he took as an external learning motivation for current endeavor. He was saying,

... IELTS is a language proficiency test. I feel it necessary to have a certificate like this to demonstrate my English proficiency. I need it for a better job; this is not a bad decision. I would like to give it a try. ... It is haunting on me and keeps reminding me of doing more academic reading, writing, listening and speaking practices. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

In the Experimental Class, students were required to accomplish more and heavier study load before university graduation. Xiaobo was thinking of completing all academic targets in his disciplinary studies for due credits and degree before he could graduate smoothly on time. He was in no hurry of applying for graduate school like many of his peers. Instead, he was brewing other possible plans for himself. He was planning for finding employment at a renowned foreign company to accumulate practical working experience before applying for graduate school in some years' time. Xiaobo seemed confident in his future career path by saying,

... I have been thinking of a job in a renowned company first and work for a couple of years, then I would apply for graduate school. This may make my resume look good. I would prefer a foreign company. This is because, first, the salary is good. The corporate culture is more dynamic, open, tolerant and fair. I don't like state-owned enterprises. I don't like the culture there. It is more conventional and bureaucratic. Though we all know that you would have to work harder and longer and get more grey hair early in a foreign company. Well, I just expect an equal and fair working environment.

I hope to accumulate some working experience before I would think about graduate study. Now my goal is to finish all the required course studies, pass the IELTS test and get the degree [to graduate] on time. I am not planning to study abroad upon university graduation. I am a pragmatist, so feel what I need most is more practical working experience. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

5.3.5 *Family Support and Parental Influence on English Learning*

Both Xiaobo's parents are English teachers at a suburban public middle school in Shanghai. Like many of their colleagues, they are dedicated to work and responsible for students. In the meantime, they understand the value of home literacy and positive parental influence on a child's healthy growth, hence no matter how early they leave for work and how late they come back home, they always care about their only son's physical and mental health as well as his cognitive development.

Unlike many of the even-aged Chinese families, the conventional practice of *spare the rod, spoil the child* does not work in Xiaobo's home. Instead, his parents have created an easy and fair home environment in his growth. This is revealed in Xiaobo's reflection on his parents' support and assistance in his English learning,

... They [Xiaobo's parents] never beat me, or scold me with bad words for the mistakes I made when young. They tried not to let me feel discouraged and pessimistic in life. ... They often taught me in a soft voice and guided me with great patience. I assume they had read children's psychology and knew how to deal with a little boy and then a teenager like me in puberty When I was in primary, middle and high school, teachers never doubted the way of holding our hands and spoon-feeding us with the prescribed book knowledge and much extra work in and outside the school. Parents always expected them to do exactly so. But my parents did not feel this right. They never gave me pressure, and never imposed on me extra homework. It was me that oftentimes approached them for assistance, such as reciting words for the spelling bee contest, and helping me with some difficult grammatical points. No more, no extras. ... They let me decide what's best for me. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

5.4 Vignette of Xiaogang

Xiaogang was born in 1997 in the capital city of Shanxi Province in North China. He is the only child of his family of the Han nationality and grew up as a city boy. He has no siblings but 5 cousins on both parents' sides. Xiaogang is the 2nd-generation university student from his family, on his father's side. He has been learning English for 12 years, majoring in international business at his university in Shanghai.

5.4.1 *English Learning at Public Primary School*

When he was in Grade One of primary school, Xiaogang started English learning at a carefully chosen private institute in his home city, where the propaganda of an early start in English was popular. He learned English with foreign teachers once a

week, and enjoyed the way he was awarded little gifts in class, because such reward mechanism was not available in primary schools in town.

One year later, Xiaogang's family moved to an east coast city, where the school's English program started in Grade Three. In Xiaogang's memory, the past year's English learning at his home city facilitated his English learning in school, as he recited easily all words in Unit One of the textbook on the first night of the new semester, which made him feel confident and superior to others.

In school, there were six parallel grades with eight parallel classes in each. There were over thirty students in Xiaogang's class. As a core subject, English was given three times a week which lasted 1 hour for each. One more English class was added in Semester Two of Grade Five. Textbooks with supplementary materials were used for class lecturing each semester. Xiaogang liked English classes and English teachers that taught the class. According to Xiaogang, two female Chinese English teachers that taught him from Grades Three to Five were most unforgettable. They were always smiling and encouraged students to learn by singing English songs or chanting nursery rhymes from the textbook.

In primary school, dictation was a frequent quiz with penalties if one did not perform well, making Xiaogang and his classmates feel scared to struggle in this class activity. Xiaogang recalled this English learning experience by saying,

... What impressed me most so far was dictation in class. This word, dictation, was the first most "advanced" English word I learned then. ... Dictation was given every two weeks. If one didn't work well, he would be asked to talk to the teacher in the teachers' office after school and explained why he failed. The teacher always reminded us as well as our parents of the importance of this class activity, dictation. If one did well in dictation, the teacher would praise him [publicly] in class.... I started slow [in vocabulary recitation]. I felt it was a demanding task for me. I had no idea of the pronunciation, so I labeled Chinese *pinyin* romanization to help pronunciation [in English]. I didn't know whether others used this trick. I liked it. It indeed worked for me. I had no idea whether the whole class liked English or not, because we all were afraid of teachers and tried our best in dictation every time. This class activity of dictation lasted till [the end of] the first semester of Grade 5. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Other than dictation in class, fluent text recitation was also a hard routine task every month. Xiaogang recalled it by saying,

... there was always one text in a unit that was required to recite fluently. It was the routine each month. We were required to recite at least one text each month. Teachers would dictate and ask us to write it down from memory. If you could not make it, you would be asked to stand in the corner of the classroom, and then copy the text several times in the teachers' office until you could do it. ... I was asked to do so once because I did not write the text correct. ... You know, even if you could do this all correct, you would not be awarded, as teachers might think this is just a little task that you ought to cover. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

To Xiaogang, vocabulary recitation was demanding because he had little idea of English pronunciation, though text recitation was easy but boring. He played a smart trick of labeling *pinyin*, the Chinese phonetics, to help his English pronunciation and recitation in class. Xiaogang did not attend any private English institute

after moving with his family to the East; instead, he spent time on tapes attached to the textbooks to hone his listening ability at home.

In Grade Four, more helpful vocabularies were introduced. Xiaogang noticed that he was able to make meaningful connections between English as a foreign language and Chinese, his first language, which was more like building a bridge to connect an unknown world and his own. However, it was at this learning period that his English proficiency fluctuated when testing became intensified. Grammar frustrated him, making him barely pass the examinations. His interest in English started to diminish when his learning confidence was hit. Xiaogang recalled this hard time by saying,

... in Grade 4 we started to learn the language points of time and tense. It was then I started to feel bored about it. ... My score was poor. I was barely passing. ... I felt bad then and started to lose interest in it. I felt it was useless and was about to give it up. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaogang's mother noticed his frustration. She had a talk with him by reminding him of the importance of English in today's world, guiding him to English readings, the NCE book series, and other bilingual books as extracurricular enrichment. Xiaogang liked reading; he was convinced and followed his mother's suggestion. Within 1 year in Grade Five, he rose to No. 1 in class with enlarged vocabulary, enhanced language sense and reading ability. This change made Xiaogang regain his confidence and competence in English learning. He attended the national *Hope Cup* English contest and was awarded the 2nd prize, which motivated him in language study and made him understand better the old Chinese saying of *no pains, no gains*. Then, he skipped Grade Six due to his academic excellence and moved onto Grade Seven at a local public middle school.

In spite of being a precocious student when young, Xiaogang grew cognizant early of his ELL identity and the role of English in the broader Chinese society. He reflected his early interpretation of English and English learning by saying,

... I didn't have a passion for English learning at the very beginning; I just felt it was fun but useless. It was a school thing. I never thought it would be used for real communication, or one day I would use it to converse with native speakers of English. I never thought I would land in Shanghai for higher education or study abroad. I assumed I would grow up and settle down where I was born and grew up.

In my early life, there was no such a place for English, at most a couple of foreign logos on the street. These left with me an impression that English is useless in my life. When I proceeded to Grade 4, my mom felt I have to learn English well for more and better chances in life. Hence, she purchased English reading materials for me. All was in English. Nobody helped. When I encountered new words, I looked them up in the dictionary by myself. I had an English-Chinese Dictionary at home. I only focused on the meaning [of new words and phrases] in Chinese. ... I started to practice reading and gradually realized it was fun. I love reading since young. Meanwhile, you know, fictions are indeed engaging.

... Both in the society and in my school, the general proficiency of English is poor. Few people care about it. Since I am from Central China, people are apt to reject this foreign language mentally and practically. This is because they may feel it is unnecessary in life. It is nothing but a subject study in school. Even if you rank first academically, it is no big

deal. ... I had excellent scores upon graduation from primary school. I was No. 1 in the whole school district. This was of little help, indeed, as we moved to another city. I entered a public middle school there, and I remained top in school. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

5.4.2 English Learning at Public Middle School

In Xiaogang's view, English teaching in middle school was more systematic with progressive difficulty levels. Other than thicker and more difficult textbooks, more supplementary materials and handouts were used. Testing intensified since Grade Seven, students had to recite unit-based texts and work on prescribed workbooks and model test papers. More homework was assigned, which required an average of three hours to cover. When students failed the study tasks, they would be reported to parents for a private parent-teacher meeting or not allowed to attend school for a couple of weeks.

Since Xiaogang skipped Grade Six in primary school, he was 1 year younger than most of his peers in middle school. He realized this age limit and worked harder and longer to close the cognitive gap by staying focused in class time and accomplishing homework on time. His love of extensive reading also benefited him in school. At home, his parents helped find a female tutor who had a Ph.D. in English for home tutoring since the beginning of the 2nd semester of Grade Seven when Xiaogang was planning for a renowned U.S. university, which has long been his dream destination. This tutor came once a week, tutoring him for 3 h each time on English phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar. This home tutoring lasted one and a half years till the end of the 2nd semester of Grade Eight. Xiaogang reflected the influence of the tutoring experience on his language study by saying,

... I hoped to learn more in English. My English was very good then, and I expected further progress. At that time we lived in East China. There were more chances that English could be used. I had a preliminary planning for my life then. I wanted to go to Columbia University. I searched online, it ranked Top 100. It is a super university. ... This was not imaginary or whimsical. I shared this with my home tutor and asked her to help me with vocabulary, grammar, phonetics, and the like. I also talked to people around about my goal. These conversations helped develop my own attitude of future life.

... The home tutoring has been influential in my English learning. My knowledge of phonetics started then. Her English pronunciation was beautiful. She helped improve my pronunciation in English. Second, she pushed me in enlarging my vocabulary through recitation. I couldn't figure out then what kind of vocabulary she asked me to recite, because in my eyes they were all long and difficult. I assume they were at the difficulty level of CET 4 and 6. They were tough [then] for a middle schooler like me. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

In school, Xiaogang and several of his like-minded peers that embraced the common academic ambition in English learning created a little English learning

community to motivate and support each other as a team for achieving their academic goals. Xiaogang recalled this peer support experience by saying,

... we shared each other's new understanding of the content of each unit, what was new in [language points] in this class, how the English homework would be handled better, and how an English dialogue would be built in a meaning-making way. This study team was amazing. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

As an A-level student in school, Xiaogang displayed sharp insights into the gap between primary school and middle school English programs in the province where he finished primary and secondary education. He earned good test results, but remained unsatisfied on how English was taught and tested in school,

... Shandong province is a province that highlights the *Gaokao* and accordingly the examination-oriented teaching, learning and assessment. The overall educational level in Shandong is high. Intensive examination-oriented education started early in middle school. This explains the reason. ... Piles of exam papers poured down on us right in Grade 7. Homework wouldn't be completed till 9 or 10 p.m. every night. We would always spend three hours and above on homework. Teachers were strict with us, too.

... we had six core subjects in school, Chinese language arts, math, English, history, geography and moral education. Other than physics and chemistry, we had all that was basically required in high school. Physics was offered in Grade 8, while chemistry in Grade 9. Other than textbook knowledge, our teachers spent class time on supplementary materials and enrichment handouts which scaffolded the textbook contents. These were more challenging compared with the textbook knowledge. ... As for the English subject, in addition to the handouts from the teacher, I had two more at hand to work on. I purchased them. I had stronger interest in English learning than other subjects. I loved to work on it.

... in school, you had to work on piles of grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers. You had to accumulate language points and review constantly what you had learned. You had to recite texts in all textbook units. And, if you couldn't do these tasks well, you would be reported to your parents and they had to be present at school to meet the teachers.

If you failed in submitting the homework, you would be required to stay at home for a couple of weeks before you could return to school. There were no private schools in our city, so there was harsh competition among all public schools. Examination scores matter; your scores speak. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaogang, as a gifted teenager, behaved in school and was favored by teachers for his academic excellence. He received As in all core subject studies and always ranked top in his grade. He was always the first in English testing. He was No. 1 among all citywide middle school graduates in the HSEE.

5.4.3 *English Learning at Public High School*

Throughout the province, there was no listening or speaking in high school English program because these language skills were not required in the *Gaokao*. What was taught in high school English classroom was flattened to reading comprehension

and *Gaokao*-based writing. This constituted no learning difficulties for Xiaogang, who had been trained excellent in rote learning and test-taking skills since middle school years through excessive grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers. He investigated his learning methods during this learning stage by saying,

... everything turned out to be easy in high school English without listening and speaking. We had at least one English class each day, sometimes there were two. Actually I had no particular learning methods; I had much less academic burden in English learning. ... All the words in test papers were easy [to me]. It was like reading Chinese. When you have done piles of model test papers, it was easy to work on one more. Model test papers had been haunting on us all year round in high school. We had to cover four reading passages with over 700 words in each. It was a piece of cake [to me]. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaogang was most impressed by his homeroom teacher in Grade Eleven who taught English and guided him like a motherly mentor in language study. He depicted this motherly English teacher by saying,

... she knew a lot about the simple truths in life. She shared her lived experience and comforted us in the darkness of high school years. She taught English, but more than that, she inspired us with warm encouragement and helped us with possible solutions to the problems we encountered in high school life and study. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

In Grade Twelve, because of his academic excellence, Xiaogang was chosen for the Gifted Class which aimed at the best universities in the country. Only fifteen science students were chosen based on the ranking of their comprehensive finals in Grades Ten and Eleven, compared with over sixty in the rest of each parallel science class. These fifteen God-chosen-few students, namely ten males and five females, enjoyed the best learning facilities and teacher resources provided by the school,

... we had pretty big room for each in the classroom; we have our own lockers. Six core subject teachers only served us. It was indeed convenient to find them for questions and assistance. The school expected us high; the goal set for us was the best universities [nationwide]. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Despite the seemingly desirable learning environment, Xiaogang referred to this academic period as the most remorseful time he had ever lived, which caused in him mental problems and affected his academic performance in the *Gaokao*,

... I didn't like this class. I didn't like the learning methods that the class favored. I didn't like the homeroom teacher; she cared nothing but our test scores. She was mean. She only chatted with the very best ones while neglected coldly the rest in class. ... I was then ranked middle in my class. She never cared about me or talked to me. I often felt I was marginalized because I was not ranked top. I had too much pressure in this class and hence developed some mental problems, such as over-anxiety before the *Gaokao*. ... In this Gifted Class, unbearable pressure from teachers and peers was like endless nightmare, haunting on you day and night. Such external factors greatly affected my inner motivation, though the material conditions and resources were much better in this Class than the rest. Teachers were highly responsible and nice, except for the homeroom teacher. She was rather demanding and mean to us. ... It was the most remorseful thing that I entered this

class, and I encountered my *Waterloo* failure in the *Gaokao*. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

It was also in the year of Grade Twelve that a Virginia professor group came to observe the class performance and classroom management in this Gifted Class. Xiaogang engaged in conversation with these visiting American professors during class break, but soon realized his academic limits in oral capacity. He was saying,

... I was trying to participate, but couldn't understand what they said. I may be able to understand what they said if it were put in black and white, but I couldn't figure out the meaning of the words when they were speaking. I feel my oral work was poor as I was not able to raise good questions. This was all because there was no such listening or speaking practice in class or they were not required in the *Gaokao*. ... There was listening when we were in Grade 10, but when we proceeded to Grade 11, it was cancelled. There was no testing for listening or speaking in the *Gaokao* throughout the whole province.

... To me, the high school English program in this province was not bad because it only required reading and writing; but in the long run, it was indeed a lame decision province-wide. This decision affected 540,000 12th graders that year. Our English learning in high school was poorly incomplete. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Though the teacher resources and material conditions were optimum in the Gifted Class, Xiaogang often felt overwhelmed by the haunting academic and peer pressure which made his mental health deteriorated. In spite of all high expectations from the school, his teachers, and parents, Xiaogang failed the *Gaokao* with his final test results far below his average model test scores of 30–40 points. He, hence, missed his first and second choice universities.

Upon reflecting his past years' English learning experience in high school, Xiaogang used the rhetoric of a *waste of time* to summarize his "bitter harvest." He explored, from a mature ELL's perspective, how English was taught and tested in Grade Twelve of high school, and shed light on his interpretation of foreign language study,

... English in high school had little difficulty level; I could teach that [in high school], too. It was nothing but working on model test papers to make you familiarized with the test formats and language points. No more extension or outreach regarding grammar or language points in Grade 12. It was all for the *Gaokao*. In Grade 10, there was extensive reading on English newspapers or other handouts. Teachers continued to lecture on grammar. All English grammar was covered in Semester 1 of Grade 11. When we proceeded to Grades 11 and 12, extensive reading and other enrichment were all cancelled. All we had to do was to work on model test papers to enhance our familiarity of the test formats and language points that would be possibly tested in the *Gaokao*. In class, teachers only lectured on model test papers. I really hated Grade 12. It was a sheer waste of my time on those useless intensive exercises. I was already at 140 and more [in English tests] in Grade 11, it was impossible to attain a full score of 150 in the *Gaokao*. Nobody could attain a full score in writing.

It was in Grades 9 and 10 that I felt I was closest to the essence of English language study, the core of the English language. I feel this out of my own endeavor and my teachers' encouragement and assistance. I had extensive reading in Grade 9 and my English teacher's guidance in Grade 10. Grades 11 and 12 were filled up with model test papers and all sorts of intensive grammar and vocabulary exercises. I don't like examination-oriented and

workbook-stuffed teaching and learning. It is useless to me. I don't think I needed model test papers in Grade 11 when I felt my vocabulary was sufficient in assisting me on reading comprehension and writing. I feel the high school English program was nothing but two things, vocabulary and grammar. Your familiarity with grammar depends on grammar test items in model test papers. This requires test-taking skills. Fixed collocations require test-taking skills and rote learning, other than reading comprehension skills. The use of prepositions and variations of verbs are important in high school English, but they are secondary now in University EAP program.

In middle school and high school English classes, teachers would point out how grammar worked in a sentence, but they would not explain the function of this sentence. They only guaranteed that you worked right on similar test items, other than guiding you to enjoy the flow or the beauty of a sentence construction. ... My English in Grade 10 was poor, I had no idea why. I had no test-taking skills then and always did poor in quiz and examination. When I moved to Grades 11 and 12, it jumped up to 130 and more. I assume that I made leapfrog progress through a huge number of grammar mistakes I had made in Grade 10. I learned a good lesson from them.

... To me, the examination-oriented, workbook-stuffed learning was helpful only in the examination-oriented teaching, learning and testing. When there would be no examination in teaching, such learning could encounter a dead end. I don't think these test items were practical in real communication. In middle and high school English programs, each test item was highly directive on a specific grammar point, but when you converse with others daily, or when you write an IELTS writing, you would not care much about a [particular] grammar point.

My understanding of the core of a language is, it doesn't perch on how a word could be beautifully used; instead, it is how when all words are integrated into a neatly-organized sentence or text. I feel this is the charm of a language, though unfortunately, it was not revealed in middle or high school English programs. I didn't see the variety and communicativeness of a language, like English in my past years' learning. Instead, English examination always focused on testing one's competence on grammar or vocabulary. I was so benumbed in working on model test papers. It didn't make any sense to me. It was all examination oriented and a waste of time. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

5.4.4 EAP Learning at University

In the first year of university, Xiaogang was assigned to University EAP program with English-medium instructions which included Comprehensive EAP offered by Chinese EAP teachers and academic writing by foreign teachers from the *EF*. The former covered academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking with four credits and used EAP textbooks by Pearson, while the latter took up one credit and used handouts and other text materials in class. There was one credit on autonomous learning online. Two parallel University EAP class types with the same teaching progress were available with the class size of around twenty students. Xiaogang was in one of these classes because of his high test result in the placement test upon entering university.

After the newness of the Experimental Class in the first month, Xiaogang encountered enormous learning difficulties. He noticed, first, the unit content was

different from what he had learned in high school; second, he, as well as the majority of the class, could hardly keep the pace with his foreign and Chinese EAP teachers when English became the classroom language. He recalled this English learning experience by saying,

... the teaching methods remained the same at large, such as class lecturing, previewing, reviewing, homework, textbook use, and the like, but the difficulty level of reading and writing in EAP classes soared to the IELTS reading and writing level. It was far more challenging than that of CET 4. ... I couldn't follow the pace of the EAP class offered by both foreign and Chinese professors. I also felt difficult in critical thinking and academic listening. I never learned such stuff in high school. My accuracy was low. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

Xiaogang quickly realized that the lack of training in the skills of listening and speaking in high school became his Achilles' heel in University EAP classroom. When the whole class was informed that the assessment proportion was 4:4:2, which meant that 40% of the final was from the final examination result, the other 40% was from research work and presentation, and the rest 20% was one's attendance and class performance, the fear of not passing started to haunt Xiaogang, as he felt the risk of not passing the final.

When there is a will, there is a way. Xiaogang resorted to the required academic vocabulary in CET 4 and 6 and the IELTS test for the breakthrough. The changed learning goals for University EAP made him invest more time in comprehending longer academic texts and scientific writing with internationally acknowledged academic integrity and norms. Besides, there were thorny study tasks such as research projects, listening with note taking, group discussion, oral presentation, and public speech. Everything was unfamiliar and difficult to a newcomer like him. Xiaogang compared his English learning in high school and at university by saying,

... the latter [University EAP] focuses less on grammar; that's the biggest gap between these two programs. What we learned in high school English was grammar, collocations and time and tense; and these were frequently tested. While at university, the focus lies in your comprehension of the content of a longer academic text and the acquisition of key words and information in a longer and more tangled paragraph. The requirements in writing also changed. When in high school, the writing was simple. You just needed to clearly describe a thing. Now, it is different. You have to work on sentence construction, paragraph organization, flow and logic in writing, the correct use of punctuations, awareness of plagiarism, and the like.

In high school, we were tested on understanding the main idea of a passage, the meaning of a word or a sentence. You were tested on a specific language point. Now we are tested mainly on the comprehension of the transition between paragraphs, the logic order of a text and your interpretation of a thesis statement. I feel these test items intend to develop our awareness of the way of thinking in differing academic scenarios.

This gap once bothered me for quite a while. These were all new. Nobody told me before that this would be University English. My high school peers who now study at other universities don't have such University English program. Theirs is like what we had in high school, the simplistic extension of high school English with more vocabulary and longer texts in each unit. They say they have never heard of such a thing like University EAP. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

As a university student that majored in international trade, Xiaogang had other core courses given through English-medium instructions. He recalled, upon the completion of the orientation week in Semester One, that he hunched the academic difficulties and was determined to overcome expected and unexpected challenges within the shortest time for academic survival. Though it was challenging in digesting foreign textbooks and other head-on academic adversities, he was convinced that all was a matter of time investment and endeavor. Hence, he adopted the easiest but most practical learning strategy of autonomous learning with constant preview and review. Xiaogang made learning plans, investing enormous time and perseverance in the changed learning scenario for academic success and a better future. He described how he gradually made hard-earned academic progress by saying,

... I previewed and reviewed each class. I scrutinized textbooks and handouts distributed by teachers. Other than the affordable study load assigned by teachers, I myself read and listened extensively. I read the texts in *Key Concept* and other reading materials in English distributed by teachers which cover all aspects of the societal life, such as domestic and international news, economy and journal papers. I worked on the content-based exercises attached. I was endeavoring to figure out the exact meaning of each single word and phrase. I also worked on supplementary textbooks for the purpose of self study and enrichment.

... I spent time on celebrity speeches every evening. At first, I understood little, then I could comprehend a couple of words, then I could digest more words, phrases, sentences and the whole text. I didn't have such training on listening when in high school, so it all started from zero. ... I also immersed myself in listening model test items to stimulate my listening ability. I would repeat some listening audios many times till I fully comprehended them.

... I practiced IELTS writing every week and volunteered to lead the research team for the project work. I learned to cooperate with my team and coordinate the workload for each. Acquaintances work together. We welcomed reliable eager beavers. I had no choice; I challenged my gut for tiny steps forward. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

When he was reflecting on his past English learning experience, Xiaogang said these activities not only helped with the expansion of his academic vocabulary, enhanced his ability in reading longer academic texts, but also cultivated in him perseverant learning spirit, serious scientific attitude, and a strong sense of team cooperation and leadership. These abilities assisted him in building organic inter-connections between disciplinary studies. Other than the abovementioned academic activities, Xiaogang signed up for a weekend English tutorial program customized for the IELTS test to enhance his academic listening and speaking competence.

Other than adjusting himself positively to the new changes at university, Xiaogang continued to practice self-discipline autonomously, living on a full life schedule for his university life. He was saying that,

... I get up at 7:15 in the morning and remain in bed for half an hour practicing vocabulary recitation. It usually lasts 30 min to 7:45 am. Then I make bed, brush my teeth and wash my face before leaving for morning classes at 8:15. I usually buy breakfast on the road to campus. Generally, I have 8 to 10 classes a day. If there are 10 classes, classes are over at 19:30 in the evening. If there are 8, it is [over] around 17:00 in the afternoon. When classes are over late in the evening, I return to the dorm for a quick nap before having dinner, doing

homework and getting in some free reading. Generally, other than class time, I spend at least one hour and a half a day on vocabulary, homework, reading and listening. That is my weekday life. ... On Fridays, I often have half a day for classes as the afternoon time is always for quiz and test on different disciplinary studies. Over the weekend when I finish tutorials, I go swimming. This is, to some extent, like my high school life. I like to have my life full like this. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

Other than being independent and proactive in academic study, Xiaogang was keen on the social and volunteer work. He served as the president of the student union, and partook in school-sponsored volunteer work with native speakers of English. Meanwhile, he developed a clear blueprint of his future academic trajectory by saying,

...I am planning to partake in a collegial exchange program in the 3rd school year, and upon university graduation, I aspire to study at an American graduate school. Now I am getting myself ready for it. I know I have to work harder before I can make it happen. I have been endeavoring to it. I have to make further progress in academic listening and public speech without notes, but sometimes I would still worry about my proficiency level. I may need a foreign scenario of English for a couple of years before I could comprehend without difficulties.

I am also learning a second foreign language, Spanish. It is a language for international trade, and English and Spanish belong to the Latin family of languages, I can see similarities and differences between these two languages. To me, Spanish is very difficult. Sometimes, I become confused about the spelling, pronunciation and grammar. But the harvest is obvious. I have learned how to trill in Spanish, and its unique culture and custom. These are scaffolding to my English learning. I learn not only the language itself, but also its geographical characteristics and cultures. Though the study load is heavy, I am investing for my future; in particular, I am planning to study abroad. I need to learn it well. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

5.4.5 Family Support and Parental Influence on English Learning

In Xiaogang's eyes, his parents' influence on his love of English remains strong, and their care is more than most parents of their age. They started their only son's home literacy when he was between 1 and 2 years old. Though neither of them used English for work purposes, they cared about their only son's English literacy at an early age. Xiaogang recalled this by saying with gratitude,

... when I was a 1st grader at school, my mother took field trip to many popular private English institutes in town and carefully chose the one in city center for my early start in English. She believed that was the best one regarding the foreign teacher resources and learning environment. Since it was far away from home, every weekend morning, my mom got up early, woke me up, made breakfast for me and took me to the morning classes by public transportation. ... I was very reluctant in traveling that far for foreign language study. This was because it was far away from home and I had to get up early in the morning every weekend. We didn't live in the city center, while the classes began at 8 in the morning. So, my mom and I had to get up very early at 6 in the morning and take public

transportation to the learning center right in the downtown area. I had no choice but to follow her. Anyway, I don't think I could make it then without her. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

With his mother's perseverance in his early start in English, Xiaogang spent a whole year there learning with foreign teachers.

In Grade Four of primary school when Xiaogang felt frustrated in language study, his mother navigated him to reading English fictions, the NCE book series, and more bilingual readings. This suggestion unfolded before Xiaogang a brand-new world through extensive reading, and enlightened him with fun and joy in free reading praxis with practical academic rewards in test results. According to Xiaogang, his parents were also generous in giving him pocket money to purchase English reference books that he aspired to read from the bookstores in town.

Since Xiaogang embarked directly on Grade Seven in middle school when he finished Grade Five, his parents played a role in helping him realize the academic and cognitive gap between him and his even-age peers. Again, Xiaogang used the rhetoric of *family influence* to refer to the parental care of his academic study,

... they [Xiaogang's parents] taught me the value of hard work in one's school success. I worked harder and longer than my classmates. If they worked on one exercise item, I would do two. I stayed focused in class and accomplished homework on time. I read extensively, such as on history. I developed such a love of reading when I was little. I started to read when I was between one and two years old. This was home literacy; my parents guided me. When one cultivates a love of reading when young, the positive influence could be life-long. The more he reads, the more he absorbs, the better he grows. Meanwhile, one's memory works best when young. As for me, I not only read, but also apply what I read in life. My dad also encouraged me to travel with him in winter and summer breaks to see this beautiful world; he said this could make me a better person. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Unlike many Chinese parents who care narrowly about their children's test results in school, Xiaogang's parents hold a different perspective. They have created a friendly home environment for learning, and helped with learning difficulties and life problems that Xiaogang encountered at school. Xiaogang was saying that,

... my parents wouldn't care narrowly about my test scores. They would take a look at them, like most parents, but they would not force me to learn for a higher score. Even when I didn't do well in examination, my mom didn't blame me. Instead, she encouraged me to find solutions and bought me *New Concept*. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

In summer and winter breaks, Xiaogang's father would take him on traveling to different places throughout the country to see the world. Being a book lover since young, Xiaogang self-claimed proudly as a man on the road. He was saying,

... I have been to many places with my father or alone in the country. It is a family tradition. ... Traveling to me is richer and more meaningful than reading in my study. ... Reading a book is like conversing with a person. But through traveling, I converse with different people from different places with different mindsets. We chat. I see how they live their lives, what kind of constructive influences may their experience have on mine. I would automatically make connections between other people's lives and mine. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

In Grade Eleven of high school, when Xiaogang was not sure whether to choose the science class or the liberal arts class in high school, his father again offered a helping hand, as Xiaogang was explaining that,

... my dad felt a science major would have more choices and career opportunities in the long run upon graduation. I was not decisive and didn't know what I really wanted then. I was O.K. with both. I followed my father's suggestion because he was always more experienced; I have trust in my dad. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

When Xiaogang failed the *Gaokao* and missed his choice of universities, he was so upset that he was planning to redo Grade Twelve and the *Gaokao*. It was his father that comforted him and helped him decide the university in Shanghai for a new academic start though it was his 3rd choice university. "The geographical advantage was sometimes more important than the school itself, you can do well too" (Interview One, October 1st, 2015), Xiaogang recalled his father's comforts and encouragement.

Within Xiaogang's family, none of family members or relatives have ever lived abroad or spoken a foreign language like English for the work or survival purposes. It was all Xiaogang's endeavor in collecting the accessible information for the overseas study from his university teachers and peers. He had no such knowledge, information, or resources in middle or high school; at that time, what he had access to was only book knowledge or news from TV about the outside world. When he was planning to study the history of economics in an American graduate school upon university graduation, Xiaogang not only calculated its marginal effect of studying abroad but also shared the idea with his parents, who expressed full support and promised financial support to help fulfill his academic trajectory abroad.

Chapter 6

Emergent Themes Surrounding Learner Vignettes



Based on the introduction of learner vignettes through thick description (Geertz, 1973) in Chap. 5, this chapter explores nine emergent themes and the pertinent literature to understand the participants' past and present academic English learning experience and the broader societal context where their perspectives on the learning of academic English are made meaningful. These themes, along with their background and subthemes, are presented in the following parallel sections.

6.1 English Learning at Primary Level

Based on the national policy of foreign language education (Cai, 2003, 2014; Chang, 2006; Wang, 2007a) and the gap in English language teaching countrywide due to the geographical and regional differences, the start time for formal primary school English program varies. In most provinces, it starts in Grade Three of primary school. This is because English became an officially recognized subject in the primary school curriculum from Grade Three until September 2001 with the issue of *Basic Requirement for Primary School English* (BRPSE) (2001) by the Ministry of Education (MoE Document, 2001). Only in a few big cities, such as Shanghai, it begins in Grade One. The nationally authorized English textbooks in successive grades are used. Some school-based supplementary materials may also be added for classroom use in private primary schools in some big cities.

Throughout the country, textbooks produced for use in primary schools must undergo censorship by the national textbook review committee under the MoE before they pass the review and then are formally recommended to the nation's schools. Up until the end of 2004, more than 20 sets of textbooks have passed reviews and are in use in different provinces (Wang, 2007a). Most of these textbooks are joint-venture productions by a Chinese publisher and a foreign publisher since the government "does not encourage the complete import" of foreign textbooks but promotes "cooperation" (p. 95) based on the consideration that foreign

textbooks need to be localized to meet the “needs of the Basic Requirement” and the “needs of learners in Chinese contexts” (p. 96). This national textbook guideline sets the foreground for English textbooks in use in different provinces of the country.

All four participants started their English learning in school at different times: Two started in Grade Three (Meimei and Xiaogang), one in Grade One (Dandan), and the fourth in kindergarten (Xiaobo). They used different English textbooks. To most of them, English was a foreign thing in life before they started primary school.

6.1.1 English Textbooks Are “Dull”

Coming from different provinces, the participants in this study used different English textbooks in school. For instance, Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaogang used the PEP English series, while Xiaobo used Oxford English textbooks of Shanghai edition. Despite being top students with little academic stress in early English learning, they expressed unanimously a discouraging attitude toward their textbooks in use. Dandan’s view was most salient,

... We used the PEP English textbooks in school; but I did not like them. Everything was rigid, such as dialogue contents, illustrations, and format. ... Our English teachers would only follow what the textbooks provided. ... *Cambridge Young Learners’ English* (CYLE) was much better. I started to learn CYLE when I was attending *Dashan* as a 5th grader. I felt the illustrations in it were modern, appealing and vivacious. It contained rich content, such as songs, plays and foreign cultures. *New Concept English* (NCE) was rigid in form, but its content was very good, such as humors. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Other unfavorable comments regarding the attractiveness of illustrations and the difficulty level of the unit-based content include “easy and simplistic” (Dandan, Interview One, October 9th, 2015; Xiaogang, Interview One, October 1st, 2015) and “dull and flattened” (Xiaobo, Interview One, October 1st, 2015). Little impression was left by these participants on the text characters or unit contents because they served limited communication purposes.

According to Wang (2007a), the principle and performance descriptors postulated in the *Basic Requirement for Primary School English* aim at “opportunities to experience language” and facilitate learners’ “own discovery of meaning as a first-hand experience” (p. 95). However, this was reflected limitedly from the voices of the participants in this study. Dandan recalled that “everything [in the textbooks] was rigid, such as the dialogue, contents, illustrations and format” (Interview One, October 9th, 2015). Her view was echoed by other participants who used the PEP English textbooks in school. Furthermore, she compared the qualities of supplementary readings she used outside the school, finding illustrations in *Cambridge Young Learners’ English* were “much more modern, appealing and vivacious” with “rich content, such as songs, plays and foreign cultures,” while *New Concept English* was “rigid in form”, despite that the content was “very good, such as

humors” (*ibid.*). Though these materials are produced by foreign publishers, they seem to address nicely the learning needs of today’s Chinese ELLs at a lower age.

Xiaobo was the only participant that started English learning from kindergarten and used Oxford English series of Shanghai edition in school. He shared similar opinions towards the English textbooks he used, feeling them “dull like puppets” and sentence patterns “simplistic and boring” (Interview One, October 1st, 2015). Xiaobo doubted that the school should have had better choices other than offering flattened textbooks to students year by year.

Years had passed since these participants were learning English as a required school subject at a lower level. Their collective voices on English textbooks in use reflect not only the important role of textbooks when English is taught in schools but also a thorny problem of the quality of domestic English textbooks used by today’s ELLs at the primary education level. Zhou (2006), the former Minister of Education, commented that knowledge learning for Chinese students is a “principal, ... foundation-building task” in school (p. 163). The problem is, however, with English becoming a critical means of global communication in the new millennium (Short, Boniche, Kim, & Li, 2001), the nationally recommended English textbooks, the carrier of beginning knowledge of a leading foreign language demanded in the changed national primary school curriculum, have become unpopular and unappealing to its young learners due to the dullness and simplification in their form and content.

6.1.2 English Learning in Classroom: Good Behavior is Key

Behaviorist theories of learning were influential in the field of ELT in the past century. These theories feature a stimulus–response association through habit formation, operant conditioning, and reinforcement with an emphasis on successful error-free learning in small and prepared steps and stages. Through drill practice and imitation, behaviorist study habits would be formed, reinforced, and strengthened (Thorndike, 1921; Watson, 1925; Skinner, 1957). Bloom (1956) and Gagné (1965) stressed consistent repetition and review in learning because these activities serve to reinforce the responses and help to produce the whole. Pittman (1963) furthered Firth’s and Halliday’s studies on the relationship between the language structure and the context and situation in which the language is used. He claimed that the principal classroom activity in teaching English structure would be the oral practice of the structures of the language, and the oral practice of the controlled sentence patterns should be given in the situations designed to give the greatest amount of practice in English speech to students. Later in the 1990 s, Greeno, Collins, and Resnick (1996) discussed the role of behaviorist theories of learning in facilitating the efficient transmission of the information and basic skills to learners in a neatly organized manner. In behaviorist advocators’ view of language study, behaviors are learned habits, accounting for how such habits are formed to influence the process of language learning.

These behaviorist and structuralist linguists, along with their educational philosophy rooted in their learning theories, found their faithful alliances in the field of ELT in China. Since the latter half of the past century, English has enjoyed the largest number of learners among all foreign languages taught in school (Chang, 2006; Wang, 2007a). According to the *Basic Requirement for Primary School English* (BRPSE) (2001), the framework of the strands for Level 1 (Grades Three and Four) is designed as: Listen and Do, Speak and Sing, Play and Act, Read and Write, and Audio and Visual, while for Level 2 (Grades Five and Six), the strands are: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Play and Act, and Audio and Visual (Wang, 2007a). Accordingly, the behaviorist philosophy of English teaching and learning is instilled into the primary school curriculum, syllabus, and lesson planning because the overall goal is to assist students to learn English as a “first-hand experience” through an activity-based approach (Wang, 2007a, p. 95).

The participants in this study recalled their past classroom learning of academic English and teacher lecturing with simplified class activities. To them, these approaches were traditional but dominating. Dandan was saying,

... Within a week, we had 3 days that had English. There was one day that we had two periods of English; in the rest two days there was one period per day. Each period lasted 40 min. ... We seldom had class activities such as singing English songs or watching English cartoons and movies. Chances are that we were asked to create a dialogue based on what was learned in the textbook unit and play before the whole class. There were a couple of demo classes each semester and teachers from other primary schools would be invited [to observe us]. We did not have foreign teachers in primary school. Our English teachers would only follow whatever the textbooks provided. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Generally, English learning in lower grades is basic and stress-free to develop among little pupils an interest; from Grade Three and onward, more vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar knowledge are systematically introduced. Dandan recalled how primary English was taught, learned, and tested by saying,

... Learning English in Grades 1 and 2 was like playing. It was to develop an interest [in this foreign language], I assumed. It was in Grade 3 that the school started to teach [English] systematically. I was interested in it then. ... Systematic teaching started in Grade 3. The teacher taught us pronunciation, not grammar. In school, English classes were a dry routine, as teachers only followed whatever the textbooks provided. ... There were no intriguing class activities, such as singing English songs or watching cartoons or movies. The chances are that we were asked to create a dialogue based on what was learned in the textbook unit and play before the whole class.

... What impressed me was that vocabulary retention was highlighted because she [her English teacher] would write the words in each unit on a card and required rote learning by us all. My English teacher in Grade 6, instead, lectured the text organization and structure. She was demanding on text translation and listening, and required us to listen to the tape everyday at home. Tapes were within the textbook package and used in class ever since Grade 3 and onward. This practice became frequent in Grade 6. In class quizzes, there was listening to the audio materials repetitively. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

What is revealed in Dandan's account of her English learning experience in primary school is twofold: First, in school, English, as a foreign language to little Chinese ELLs, is routinely taught like a traditional school subject other than a communication means or an eye-opening channel through which the learners are enabled to view a different world. Second, the typical behavioral responses to the physical stimuli, such as imitation, repetition, and habit formation, are meticulously highlighted in English learning. Though English in lower grades serves to develop an interest among little pupils, without engaging and curiosity-arousing learning activities (Malone, 1981; Piaget, 1970) or the socially and semiotically mediated learning (Vygotsky, cited in Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006) within the socio-cultural settings (Saville-Troike, 2006), it becomes inevitable that they gradually lose interest in language study. "They sat still, looking at the teacher absent-minded [in English class]" (Dandan, Interview One, October 9th, 2015); Dandan's words verifies how her classmates behaved with a defeated learning motivation and efficiency in English learning at the primary level.

Similar situation happened to other participants as they experienced oppressive English teaching and learning in primary school akin to Dandan's. Xiaobo complained his English classes and class activities of vocabulary recitation by saying,

... It was all about Oxford English Shanghai and its workbooks. [In] Oxford English, there were Danny, Alice and other characters [in the text units]. They were all like puppets... That [memorizing English vocabulary] was a must [in school]. We had to recite all the words and texts. ... I spent around one full month on reciting a reference book [for preparing the spelling bee contest in Grade 5]. ... I was good at it with super memory.

... They [My English teachers] did not care. There were people that slept in class. I grew up in a suburban district in Shanghai. Teachers cared little about us. They simply let us go because they [English teachers] were not homeroom teachers. They muddled in class... I followed their demands regarding the written and oral homework. ... [In] Grade 5, I started to realize the importance of exams. ... There were some [in-school English tutorials]. But when a new school headmaster arrived when we were in Grade 6, all were canceled, and changed to self-study periods. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

When asked about his interest in English learning and impression on English teachers in primary school, Xiaobo uttered straightforward that

... I couldn't tell whether I liked it [English learning] or not. I never thought about it so far. It was all about exams. English programs in school were all required. You can't decide. ... [Other than the textbooks required in school,] I used some supplementary materials. They were for exams, too. I didn't have a particular feel of it [English learning]. ... I have little impression of them [my English teachers in school] now, too. It is all over. (*ibid.*)

It seems to Xiaobo that in school, both English teaching and learning was less engaging, and his English teachers were uncaring. To him, a good memory was vital to the success of language study in school since the major study tasks were reciting and memorizing. Like Dandan, Xiaobo was also referring to the successful error-free learning that the behaviorist learning theories preferred through the changed behaviors formed, reinforced, and strengthened by imitation, repetition, and drill practices. Furthermore, Xiaobo detected the test-orientedness in English

learning and realized the importance of good test results in examination, or in other words, he was largely driven by the external motivation, or the washback effect of the behaviorist assessment, on his English learning.

Xiaogang was from North China. When Grade One was over, he moved with his parents to a coastal city in East China. Xiaogang recalled how he was struggling with the class activity of vocabulary recitation and how the dictation of English vocabulary and texts was demanded in classroom learning with behaviorist practices and assessment,

... I started to learn English when I was a 1st grader [in my home city]. ... We moved to another city. Later on in Grade 3, the English program was officially offered in school. We all had to learn it. ... There were always 1 or 2 textbooks each semester. We also had supplementary materials. Teachers would lecture on both. ... [In class,] the teacher would play tapes and taught us how to sing English songs. There were some songs in textbooks, or she would prepare powerpoints to show us the words in the song. I liked this. It was fun.

... as for vocabulary recitation, I started slow. I felt it was a demanding task for me. I had no idea of the pronunciation, so I labeled Chinese *pinyin* romanization to help pronunciation [in English]. I didn't know whether others used this trick. I liked it. It indeed worked on me. Many of us used this trick and created funny pronunciation [in English learning].

I don't have any impression on characters [in the text unit], though I remember well some texts. There was always one text in a unit that was required to recite fluently. That was the routine each month. We would have to recite at least one text each month. Teachers would dictate and ask us to write it down from memory. ... [If you could not make it,] you would be asked to stand in the corner of the classroom, and then copy that text several times in the teachers' office. I was asked to do so once because I failed in writing the text correct. You know, even if you could do this right, you would not be awarded, as teachers may think this is just a little study task that you ought to cover.

... What impressed me most so far was dictation [in primary school]. This word, dictation, was the first most 'advanced' English word I had learned then. Dictation was given every two weeks. If one didn't work well, he would be asked to talk to the teacher in the teachers' office and explained why he didn't perform well. The teacher would remind us of the importance of this study task, dictation. If one did well in dictation, the teacher would praise him in class. I had no idea whether the whole class liked English or not, but we all were afraid of the teacher and tried our best in dictation every time. The class activity of dictation lasted till the end of the first semester of Grade 5. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaogang's experience manifests the typical behaviorist stimulus-response through the habit formation, operant conditioning, and repeated reinforcement for improved learner behavior. Though the assessment for primary school English should focus on enhancing students' overall language proficiencies (Wang, 2007a), what happened in the classroom reveals that the drill practices like recitation and dictation remain as the semblance of normality which has been repetitively applied for successful error-free learning. In the beginning, Xiaogang felt good about himself and superior to others on the first night of school. Later, when the newness in English language faded, he started to struggle,

... I didn't like it much at the very beginning; I just felt it was fun and useless. I never thought this [English] would be used for communication, or one day I would use it to converse with foreigners. ... In my early life, there was no such a place for English, at most

a couple of foreign logos on the street. These left with me an impression that English is useless in my life. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Other than Dandan, Xiaobo, and Xiaogang that depicted the behaviorist ELT in school and their tricky countermeasures in language acquisition, Meimei recounted her perspective of academic English learning at this stage by saying,

... I attended a public primary school in my hometown. The English program started in Grade 3, if I remember correct. We started to have official English textbooks and classes. My class was big with 63 class members; altogether there were 3 classes in a grade, which means there were around 190 members in my grade. I come from a third-tier city of Middle-South China, and my school used the PEP English textbooks. Before Grade 3, I had never heard of English, nor attended any English-related tutorial learning. ...I started to search for private English tutorial programs available for the sake of self-enrichment when I was in Grade 4 and signed up for one when I proceeded to Grade 5.

... In primary school from Grades 3 to 6, I had two female teachers. ... To me, the English program in Grades 3 and 4 was easy and left with me no impression, though we had one to two classes per week. My impression [on English learning] in Grades 5 and 6 is also blurry. I had extra three-hour tutorials at *Pinyin* English on Saturday mornings with a small class size of no more than 20 class members. I did not spend much time on English offered in school. My focus was on the English tutorial program outside the school, though the latter wasn't hard either.

While in school, due to the class size, my English teacher could hardly take care of us in class. In fact, she seldom interacted with us before and after class. At the higher grades [Grades 5 and 6] in primary school, teacher's expectation included recognizing required English words in a double-sided sheet, and some simple sentence patterns such as greetings and asking for names or places. So, there were more recitations and dictations. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

What is seen from Meimei's English learning experience is that the typical behaviorist practices of imitation, recitation, and dictation were prevailing in her English classes. Like other participants' English teachers who insisted on the changed behavior and successful error-free learning in higher grades, Meimei's English teacher was not only less caring, but also by no exception practicing behaviorist teaching with her pupils. What made Meimei typical in this study is that she learned to facilitate her classroom learning of English by actively resorting to the private tutorials outside the school.

Apparently, these participants started to feel the impending academic pressure and realized the importance of better test results and school ranking when they proceeded to higher grades. More of strict academic requirements, such as vocabulary and unit-based text dictation, text translation, grammar points, and tape listening, are introduced as students face the primary school graduation. To these pupils, some would prepare for the competitive graduation testing if they hoped to attend a private middle school. Dandan reflected on her lived experience by saying,

... In Grade 6, text organization and structure was lectured. The teacher was demanding on text translation and listening and required us to listen to the tape every day at home. This practice became frequent in Grade 6. In class quiz, there was listening to the audio materials repetitively. I started to feel academic pressure in Grade 6 upon graduating. I knew it was not easy to be accepted by a good school. I hoped to be accepted by the only bilingual

middle school in our city. Its English Entrance Examination was difficult. Therefore, I needed an uplift (*sic*) in my grades. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Similarly, Meimei recalled that her English teachers' expectation in higher grades included reciting English words in double-sided sheets and simple sentence patterns such as greetings and asking for names or places. She started English tutorials at a local private institute since Grade Five to consolidate classroom learning. Xiaobo signed up for an English spelling bee contest to enhance his vocabulary acquisition with his parents' assistance. Xiaogang, instead, practiced extensive reading of English fictions and the *New Concept English* series after a talk with his mother on the importance of language study in school for a possibly better future. This home reading activity and habit proved beneficial when Xiaogang was saying "... due to its larger vocabulary [in NCE series], I felt it enlarged my vocabulary recognition and enhanced my sense of language, hence making me competent in all kinds of quizzes and exams" (Interview One, October 1st, 2015).

All their efforts indicate that in primary school years, these participants had developed motivation for English learning. They learned to form respective study skills and habits and apply varied learning behaviors to keep themselves academically competitive for school success.

6.1.3 Summary

In a broader domestic sociopolitical scenario in China, there seems no such a place for English as a foreign language. There are foreign logos and signs on the street, but they would exert limited influence on students' learning of English as a required school subject at different educational levels. Despite that the test-oriented evaluation is "not encouraged" for the primary education (Wang, 2007a, p. 95), it is de facto applied for better test results and peer competition. Xiaogang complained about this practice as he spoke of his early struggles with test results,

... I once did very poorly in an English final exam. That was in Semester 1 of Grade 4. Exams and tests became frequent. Mid-term exams and final term exams became a must. At that time, we started to learn the language points of time and tense. It was then I started to feel bored about it. My score was so poor. I was barely passing. ... You know, at that time, I felt bad and started to lose interest in it. I felt it was useless and was about to give up. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

In primary school English classroom, behaviorist teachers use the "sequenced, well-structured" curriculum to guide them pedagogically on assessing, motivating, and reinforcing their ELLs (Fosnot and Perry, 2005, p. 9). They present language points, raise questions, expect feedbacks to arouse learner response, and apply positive reinforcement for correct answers and repetition of the cycle to ensure correct learning. They harvest limited success in several of their students who do well in testing; the majority, adversely, may lose interest in the behaviorist ELT and begin to drop.

The participants in this study saw in school low learning efficiency in language study among their peers and explored why they did not make it. Xiaobo attributed it to the teacher factors as they muddled in class. Meimei thought that the bigger class size was the contributing factor as it was difficult for teachers to interact with each pupil before, during, and after class. Dandan said one of her teachers tried situational teaching with stimulations, but such efforts were not expectedly rewarded; instead, they discouraged ELLs,

... Most of my peers quickly lost interest [in English] when we proceeded to higher grades. They might feel language in nature was for communication, or probably language itself was boring. There was no such communicative environment or communicative needs. We were all Chinese and conversed with each other in Chinese daily. However, they had to obey class disciplines. They sat still, looking absent-minded at the teacher. Teachers saw this and knew the situation. My second English teacher sometimes rewarded students with listening ears with small school supplies, such as rubbers or pencils. It didn't work well as it was the minority that received her rewards; the majority disliked learning and cared little about winning rewards from the teacher. ... Even such situational teaching failed in intriguing us, as many of us felt bored and didn't cooperate in class. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

As an effective language teaching tool, behaviorism and structuralism, which claim the quantity of imitation, repetition, reinforcement, and habit formation in the traditional learning and acquisition, have played a role on ELT worldwide in the 20th century. Up to now, in many places of the world, the behaviorist and structuralistic teaching and learning theories remain influential since they are proved effective and work in the eye of teachers with a behaviorist mindset.

The consistent repetition, review, and observable and testable behaviors such as recitation, dictation, quiz, and examination are necessary (Bloom, 1956; Gagné, 1965). However, the downfall of such mechanistic pedagogical practices is also inevitable as they quench the learner curiosity and learning motivation, deteriorate classroom dynamics, and make classroom learning inefficient. These participants have seen the point and believed that their subject teachers knew the situation, though they were struggling to be empowered so to be transformative in language teaching.

6.2 English Learning at Secondary Level

China offers the 9-year free compulsory education to all school-age children, which goes from 6-year public primary school to 3-year public middle school. The country's secondary education is mostly comprised of middle schools and high schools. Some of these schools are public, while the rest are mainly private which require higher tuition and selection tests for top students with academic excellence.

In the majority of secondary schools (Chang, 2006; Wang, 2007a), English continues to be a required core subject with a more systematic focus on vocabulary and grammar. When students finish middle school in Grade Nine, they attend the unified high school entrance examinations (HSEE) citywide or province-wide to

enter high school or technical secondary school. In this study, only middle and high school students were studied because it is largely this student cohort that is qualified for the *Gaokao* to proceed to higher education.

When the participants entered middle school, there were traditional public middle schools and rising private middle schools available in different provinces. A modern and alternative education of private bilingual middle school is entering Chinese people's lives, offering both the traditional English program by Chinese English teachers and its parallel English medium instruction (EMI) program integrated with foreign cultures and English language arts given by teachers of foreign nationalities. Among these participants, Dandan was the only one who entered such an alternative private middle school. She had a very different English learning experience compared with the rest who entered traditional public middle schools.

6.2.1 In Public Middle School: Life as a Pre-Scripted Routine

The majority of China's public middle schools follow a 3-year educational system which runs from Grades Six to Nine. This is except for middle schools in Shanghai, where there are 4 years for middle school from Grades Five to Nine. Throughout the country, some public middle schools and most private middle schools require primary school graduation reports or an entrance examination to select top students. English grammar continues to be an indispensable part in the curriculum in middle school and is more systematically taught with the introduction of more linguistic terms and conceptions. Among the participants in this study, three (Meimei, Xiaobo, and Xiaogang) entered public middle schools which represent the greater majority of primary school graduates, and one (Dandan) entered a local private bilingual middle school due to her excellent test results in the recruitment test.

In many public middle schools, PEP English textbook series continue to be used. More supplementary materials and model test papers are adopted by schools to hone students' test-taking skills. This is because when the 9-year compulsory education ends in Grade Nine of middle school, all 9th graders face the highly competitive HSEE citywide or province-wide before they are qualified for high school education.

Meimei

Upon graduating from primary school, Meimei entered a local public middle school. She recalled her English learning experience from Grades Seven to Nine by saying that

... in Grades 7 and 8, we had three English classes per week, with each class lasting 40 min.... As for the English textbooks, I only worked on the vocabulary part and the workbook. ... The English textbook was easy in Grade 7 since it was largely a transition grade between primary school and middle school. But when we proceeded to Grade 8, everything in English became more difficult with more vocabulary and difficult grammar

points. ... To me, I had little expectation of the English program that my school offered. My focus of English learning was not on classroom learning, but on the English tutorial program outside the school, which was at a much higher difficulty level.

... English in testing was not easy though its textbooks were easy; if one wanted to attain a higher grade in testing, he had to work on all kinds of model test papers distributed by the teacher or purchased by himself. There were no class activities, foreign festivals, movies or songs, or other projects available in school. In middle school, when teachers wrote on the blackboard, some good students, I mean, mainly female students, or a couple of male students, would take notes. As students, our task was to work on textbooks, workbooks and model test papers. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Meimei noticed the gradual difficulty level of language study in middle school. According to her, if one aspired to rank top in testing, he had to “attend some private English tutoring” outside the school like her, or to “work on model test papers distributed by the teacher or purchased by himself” (Interview One, October 11th, 2015). During this time, Meimei used what she had learned from private English institutes outside the school to consolidate her English competence for testing in school and the HSEE because it was at a much higher difficulty level. In her words,

... previewing, reviewing, homework, in-class interaction, quiz and feedback ... were basic but important in middle school English learning. To me, middle school English program was like a fixed routine with classes, unit-based dictations and whole-class morning reading. If one failed in passing dictations, such dictation would go with around 20 words, he had to do a make-up under the surveillance of the English class representative at the teachers’ office. The majority of my class often needed to do the make-up dictations and some would cheat. I liked morning reading but many did not care; since we read together, nobody knew who did it, while who did not. It all depended on one’s learning attitude.

... Generally, my English was good at that time in our grade; it was not a headache to me. ... I followed the learning schedule and knowledge framework of English designed by my teachers from the English tutorial center, which started off with the overall grammar knowledge enriched with pertinent exercises. After each class, I would review my class notes and then do the workbook. I managed to study in class at school; but my focus was the outreach from the tutorial program. Everything I did was for the High School Entrance Examinations at the end of Grade 9. (*ibid.*)

In addition, Meimei referred to a learning episode in Grade Nine. She and her like-minded classmates strived as a team for a renowned high school in the home province. She was saying,

... At the winter break in Grade 9, there were 4 or 5 of us in our class that decided to apply for a renowned high school at the capital city of our province which had autonomous recruitment testing in late March every year. We were informed that in its recruitment examination, a large part was English, and the difficulty level [of English subject] was far beyond the difficulty level prescribed in the middle school English curriculum. ... We five that were planning to take the autonomous recruitment examinations sat together as a study group in class with the permission of the homeroom teacher. We created a learning community with the same academic goal and worked hard. Every day, we reviewed the vocabulary accumulated and buried ourselves in model test papers; life was full but rich then. It was the peak time in my English learning. Though I did not make it due to some

personal reasons, and there was only one of us who was eventually accepted, it was an unforgettable and rewarding English learning experience.

As a middle school student, Meimei developed good study habits and skills for English learning. She volunteered to create a learning community with her peers, striving toward the common goal. It was during this time that Meimei recognized the leading study task in middle school was to work on textbooks, workbooks, and model test papers to hone test-taking skills for expected school success.

Xiaobo

Xiaobo entered Class One with other top students based on the placement test results upon entering middle school. They were then immediately recommended to various workbooks on listening comprehension, cloze, and other unit-based exercises to boost overall English competence. He noticed the difficulty level in grammar and the gap in language study between primary school and middle school. To Xiaobo, his learning method was his test-taking skills. He recalled his English learning experience by saying,

... There were eight parallel classes with approximately 40 students in each class, ... altogether over 300 students in one grade [in middle school]. I feel no pressure because I was in Class One, the best class in our school district, according to the official ranking record from school. We had placement test; the best students were grouped in Class One. The rest were all assigned to parallel classes.

... [As for grammar study,] there was grammar in Grades 1 to 5, though teachers would not lecture on it. They [English teachers] started to teach grammar systematically in Grade 6. There were more technical terms that were new to us Chinese students. Teachers used specific examples for illustration in explaining grammar in English.

... They [English teachers] did help much [in preparing us for testing]. [But in class,] they just followed the routine, textbook, tape, blackboard notes, homework and exam papers.... No movie time or drama time in class. No way. ... Most Chinese teachers are alike. ... We were required to work on workbooks on listening comprehension, cloze, unit-based reading comprehension, and the like. As for learning methods, I don't feel the difference, to be frank, you just worked on more workbooks.

... I sometimes ranked first in exams. ... I was fast [in exams]. ... I wouldn't say my English capacity was good. My test-wise skills were super. I was pushed all by exams. I had no choice. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Other than grammar, workbooks, and routine-like lecturing, Xiaobo recalled the increased testing in middle school and how he lived through it by saying,

... When we moved to Grade 9, there was excessive testing. Sometimes there were three exams during weekdays and extra classes or exams over the weekend. I felt the impending pressure in Grade 8 because there were Excellence Selection Exams. If you hoped to study in a better high school, you had to rank first in these important exams before you were qualified for the independent recruitment exams offered by the municipal key high schools. These exams were only for the very best ones.

... I worked on more workbooks and model test papers. They were much more challenging. Textbooks were rather easy. The reference materials were mainly from the teacher's and my parents' recommendation. ... I worked on them all by myself. Teachers also realized

textbooks were easy, they knew this. They demanded us to take notes from blackboard [in class].

...in English classes, I was busy in taking notes from blackboard. ... There were strict requirements that we must prepare a thick notebook on mistakes, in which grammar rules were shortened into formulas for quick review before exams. This was new in middle school. We never did it in primary school. It went systematic and helpful, anyway. ... [Since middle school,] you wouldn't harvest good exam results if you did not enrich yourself with more extracurricular tasks. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

On reflecting, Xiaobo referred to his English learning in middle school as most “effective” because he started to realize the concept of learning efficiency since Grade Eight and practiced it, though he teased himself as “limited in English proficiency but super in test-taking skills” (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015). There was academic pressure in Grade Nine with three examinations during weekdays and extra classes and testing over the weekend. Xiaobo was working harder and more on grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers. As a middle school teenager, he grew to realize the weight of the intensified study tasks and excellent test results for a better academic future.

Xiaogang

As a precocious overachiever in primary school, Xiaogang skipped Grade Six because of his excellence in core subject studies. In the province where Xiaogang moved to with his parents, the educational level was comparatively high; the test-oriented teaching, learning, and assessment hence started early in middle school. Xiaogang recalled his English learning experience by making a comparison between his language study in primary school and middle school,

... It was more systematic in the middle school English program. It was for fun and interest cultivation in primary English textbooks. Things changed in middle school English textbooks. I felt there was more difficulty level in textbooks. What should be taught first, next and further was all carefully designed and organized. Even if one didn't learn English well in primary school, he could start anew from the middle school English program.

I had peers in middle school that were interested in English. We shared with each other the content of a new unit, what was new in this class, how English homework would be handled, and how an English dialogue would be built. ... Intensive exam-oriented education started early in middle school. That explains the reason. Piles of exams poured down on us right in Grade 7. Homework wouldn't be completed till 9 or 10 p.m. at night. We would always spend 3 h and above on homework. Teachers were strict with us, too.

Other than textbook knowledge, our teachers would spend class time on supplementary materials and enrichment handouts which would scaffold the textbook content. These were more challenging compared with the textbook knowledge. As for the English subject, other than the handouts from the teacher, I also had two more workbooks at hand to work on. I purchased them. I had stronger interest in English than other school subjects. I loved to work on it [English]. I felt my family influence on this aspect is strong.

... [There was] nothing particularly new [in the English program in middle school]. You had to focus on piles of grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers. You had to accumulate constantly new language points while reviewing what you had learned. Other than that, you had to recite all texts in the textbook units correct. And, if you couldn't

do these study tasks well, you would be reported to your parents and they had to be present at school to talk to your teacher.

If you failed in submitting homework, you would be required to stay at home for a couple of weeks before you could return to school. You know, there was no private school in our city, so there was harsh competition among all public schools. Exam scores matter [in these public middle schools]. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Summary of Meimei, Xiaobo, and Xiaogang

These participants' voices on their past academic English learning experience in middle school reveal how the power of the behaviorist English teaching shaped their language study habits. Skinner's (1968) educational tenet of viewing learning as changed learner behavior with emphasis on modification finds its manifestation among today's Chinese middle school students under the haunting pressure of the HSEE and the *Gaokao*. Entering the new millennium, English has become an "important means of carrying out the Open Policy and communication with other countries," and learning a foreign language is one of the "basic requirements for 21st century citizens" (*English Syllabus*, 2000, p. 1). Nevertheless, what's favored in public middle school classroom remains as aggravated observable and testable teaching and learning behaviors to measure the degree of learning and to evaluate the efficiency of positive reinforcement, other than the condition of learning (Dai and Chen, 2007).

For students who learn to adjust themselves to the changed English learning environment early in middle school, it would be easier to keep the pace and remain top. In the case of Xiaogang who noticed that the middle school English program was more neatly designed and organized with the gradual difficulty levels upon entering middle school, he was able to seek actively for solutions with the support from his parents for the changed learning scenario, such as having home tutoring to enhance his English competence, and organizing a study group in school to generate peer support in language study. All such positive learner behaviors, in Xiaogang's view, contributed to his school success, when he was saying,

... I was always No. 1 in all kinds of English exams. I was No. 1 among all graduates of my age citywide in the High School entrance English exam. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaogang's case represents a small number of middle school achievers who manage to adjust themselves to behaviorist learning with good study habits, learner autonomy, and learning motivation. Coincidentally, similar success stories were also recounted by Meimei, Xiaobo, and Dandan. More recent findings reveal the English learning difficulties encountered by today's middle school students nationwide (Dang, 2008; Zhao, 2013; Wang, 2014; Yu, 2015). When rote memorization of English vocabulary, cramming classroom learning on grammar, excessive workbook assignment and model test papers, and peer pressure for better test results have the "normalization" of language study in middle school (Yu, 2015, p. 63), test-oriented ELT, along with its banking model of rigidness, would defeat many average students in terms of interest, motivation, and achievement, making them struggle and hopelessly drop (Zhao, 2013).

Freire (1970/2001) critiqued provocatively the oppressive approach in education which transforms students into “receiving objects” while teachers into “depositor, prescriber, domesticator” out of a “mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness” (p. 77). Three participants that attended public middle school discussed how they survived behaviorist middle school years with similar countermeasures. It is painfully evident that with the completion of 9-year compulsory education at middle school, the behaviorist model of ELT contributes partly to the student differentiation, as some of them rise to high school while the rest have other alternatives or drop out.

6.2.2 In Private Bilingual Middle School: Life Could Be so Diverse

Cummins (2008) defined bilingual education as the “use of two (or more) languages of instruction at some point in a student’s school career” (p. xii). He referred to its research (August and Shanahan, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006) that verifies “considerable confidence” that can be placed in its positive outcomes (Creese and Blackledge, 2010, p. 103). Literature over the last 15 years has documented the rise, application, and influence of English-and-Chinese bilingual education at different educational levels nationwide to meet the rumbling waves of globalization and internationalization of education (Che, 2006; Deng et al., 2012; Li, 2006; Yang and Dai, 2005; Yang and Sheng, 2003; Zhu and Yu, 2010; Zhu, 2014, 2015a, 2015b).

Among the four participants, Dandan was the only one that entered a local private bilingual middle school because of her excellent test results in the MSEE. It was the only and best private bilingual middle school in her home city that featured its traditional English program and the parallel EMI curriculum. Nationwide, such alternative middle school English program is emerging and on the rise, with the dynamic integration of the traditional English program offered by Chinese English teachers and the foreign culture enriched English classes by foreign teachers from the leading English-speaking countries, such as the U.S. and the U.K. Dandan boarded for 3 years, working with her peers and teachers from different cultural backgrounds on English as a required core subject in school.

Within these years, Dandan was not only “impressed by foreign teachers’ alternative teaching” which embraced the foreign culture integrated curriculum design but also was “enlightened and empowered” (Interview One, October 9th, 2015) by the school visit program through which she spent half a month at an American school, which was the sister school of her own.

English Learning with Teachers of Foreign Nationalities

Different from the traditional English program in the majority of public and private middle schools throughout the country, the private bilingual middle school that

Dandan attended offers a parallel English curriculum integrated with the traditional grammar-oriented English teaching provided by Chinese English teachers and the foreign culture enriched English-medium instructions by foreign teachers. According to Dandan, such parallel curriculum was mutually designed, developed, and offered by English teachers from different cultural backgrounds. She recounted what she started to learn and experience since Grade Seven in this bilingual middle school,

... It was the best bilingual middle school in the city. ... Since it was an English characterized bilingual middle school, the class size for English classes, whether they were given by foreign teachers or Chinese teachers, was small with around 26 students. When we had other school subjects such as mathematics and Chinese language arts, two classes would merge and the student number doubled.

I started to have foreign teachers that taught us once a week since Grade 7. There were altogether 7 or 8 foreign teachers, the majority of whom were from America. We had English-medium instructions in foreign teachers' classes. They only taught us English. Their classes were light and fun. We were allowed to eat snacks, move and interrupt them [with questions]. They were easy-going, different from our poker-faced Chinese teachers lecturing in class. Though we were long accustomed to Chinese teachers' rigid teaching styles, the majority of the class preferred foreign teachers. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

To a Chinese teenager like Dandan from a Central China city, it was new and exciting to have foreign teachers and an alternative ELT approach at the secondary level of school education. In Dandan's eyes, her American teachers were easy-going and amiable; and their English-medium instructions were engaging and fun. In a traditional middle school classroom, students are largely allowed to sit still, take notes, and follow teachers' demands. Here in this private bilingual middle school, students could have more active interactions in class with teachers if they have questions. This attributed to Dandan's remark that students preferred foreign teachers and their alternative teaching styles other than their poker-faced Chinese teachers who lectured less creatively in class.

Other than English classes given by foreign teachers, Dandan was also impressed by hands-on activities hosted by them in the celebration of important foreign festivals in school, such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. She recalled these cultural celebrations with twinkling eyes by saying,

... on these occasions, we were all excited to participate. Our foreign teachers not only introduced us the pertinent vocabulary, stories, movies and cultural rituals, but also hosted exciting celebrations in school. ... There was also Trade Festival every year, in which teachers and students sold their hand-made stuff to collect money for people from disaster areas [within the country]. Our foreign teachers wore costumes and sold hot dogs at this event. These cultural activities were so engaging; they stirred the whole school. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

In addition to the intriguing celebrations of foreign festivals and cultural events, there were English Corner and Special Class offered by foreign teachers. According to Dandan, only one student out of each class was chosen to attend this one-hour

Special Class at lunch break every Monday. She was the one chosen from her class to attend during lunch break. Dandan was saying with pride that,

... Other than the [school] routine, there was English Corner and Special Class by foreign teachers. One student out of each class would be chosen to attend the one-hour special class offered by the foreign teacher at lunch break every Monday. I was the one chosen from my class to attend this Special Class. (in a proud tone with smile) I remembered my American teacher enriched the class with reading materials that introduced America and the American culture. These materials were difficult in vocabulary and content, but I cherish them and now still keep them. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Dandan's description verifies that she did not reject more difficult enrichment materials from her American teacher in this Special Class. Instead, she cherished these learning materials and still keeps them till today. She seems to prefer these more challenging learning resources other than traditional PEP textbooks. Dandan's voice on how text materials were applied for classroom use by her American and Chinese teachers reveals a simple truth in the SLA theory, which is, the SL learners need to be placed in a meaningful language environment where a higher level of linguistic proficiency is provided to motivate their learner morale (Krashen, 1982). This comprehension hypothesis theory articulates that, in language teaching and learning, the learning materials and activities should be developed challenging and curiosity-arousing at the *i + 1* level to engage language learners for better learning outcomes (Malone, 1981; Piaget, 1970/2001).

Visiting the American Sister School

Other than nontraditional learning with foreign teachers in school, Dandan was chosen in Grade Nine for a school visit opportunity to the sister school in the U.S for half a month. She accounted this study tour as an important learning journey with native speakers of English and the chance to see and feel the outside world. She was saying,

... Our school had a sister school in Wisconsin, U.S., which had a junior high and a senior high. A foreign teacher from the senior high at our school once invited us in the Special Class to SKYPE with her senior high students in Wisconsin on one evening. We chatted on movie stars, football stars, popular music, and the like. I could understand and converse with my American peers.... There were exchange programs between the two schools with a competitive selection test with two interviews if one wished for joining [the program]. One interview was from my school; the other was from America.

... Altogether five or six of us were chosen for that year's exchange program. ... I was a 9th grader then. ... We traveled there and stayed at the homestay for half a month. Most of my Chinese peers' homestays were from the junior high, while mine was from the senior high. I spent half of my time attending classes with my American peers at the junior high, whilst the rest half at the senior high. ... I saw how they learned in school, and chatted with them over various topics. We were also taken to Minnesota and Chicago for sightseeing for about three days. Though it was the coldest season with snowing to knees, I really liked the living and learning environment. People were kind and nice. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

This school visit experience broadened Dandan's academic horizon and developed in her plans for advanced English learning and the determination of graduate study in the U.S. upon university graduation, as she was saying,

... This exchange experience was my only journey abroad and developed in me an ambition of studying in America. I was impressed, and thereby developed an ambition of studying in America. If I hope to use English for communication purposes, good oral ability is a must. If I wish for more, I must read more English novels and literature. I am planning to take the TOEFL test because TOEFL is valid for two years. I aspire to apply for an American graduate school upon [university] graduation. I've purchased practice tests for TOEFL and plan to work on them by myself. My expectation for the TOEFL ibt is over 100; if I choose the IELTS test, it is 7.5 out of 9.0. The preparation for TOEFL or IELTS differs greatly from that for the *Gaokao*. (Interview Three, October 12th, 2015)

Dandan also referred to an episode she experienced in the U.S. which made her reflect and critique the practical efficiency of her past academic English learning in school. She was saying,

... when I was at my American homestay, I met a German counterpart who was as well in her exchange program. She had learned English for 7 years then, while I had 9 years' English learning experience. She had much better overall proficiency in English than I did, though. Her exchange program lasted one year, while we could only afford half a month as we had to fly back to prepare the High School Entrance Examination after six months' time. I wished I had stayed longer in the U.S. As for the exchange program, I feel the Eastern regions have done better than Middle-Western provinces, as there is gap in the conventional ideologies between easterners and middle-westerners on foreign language study. First of all, people from the Central and Western regions regard English as a subject study and care little about the oral ability in English. Many university graduates cannot communicate effectively, and their pronunciation is awful. They are not to blame as the environment they live in does not offer the opportunity for the practical use of a foreign language like English. Meanwhile, there are more foreign enterprises and foreigners that work and live in East China, making the international contact and cooperation frequent and welcomed, and English learning an early start in home literacy and school education. (*ibid.*)

In general, what is revealed in Dandan's reflections on her language study with foreign teachers and the school visit experience in the U.S. is that such lived experience has enlightened and empowered her as a conscious and passionate ELL for English learning during schooldays. She described her English learning experience at this stage as "invaluable but not unique" among today's university youth or middle and high school students (Interview Three, October 12th, 2015), as now more of such bilingual secondary schools and bilingual primary schools have been mushrooming, observed, and researched (Chen and Song, 2007; Lei, 2012; Li et al., 2004; Li & Wu, 2007; Liu, 2008a, b; Li & Li, 2012; Yan, 2004; Zhu, 2003a, b).

Dandan's English learning experience in middle school demonstrates that English-and-Chinese bilingual education in China's middle school English program today may be a contributing factor to the academic success of the group of students that is part of such English language education program. It represents a small but infinitely important discrepant event that is not, otherwise, evident among all participants of this study but meaning-making for this particular participant and those who receive similar school education in today's diverse Chinese society.

Assessing for the Examination Purposes

The English language education that Dandan received in middle school was optimum, though she realized soon one of many gaps between primary school and middle school English programs with regard to the intensified “one-way summative assessment” (Dandan, Interview Three, October 12th, 2015). This assessment was exclusively for testing purposes and reached its climax in Grade Nine, the graduating grade of middle school. Dandan was saying,

... What was changed significantly in middle school was the assessment. In primary school, there was no frequent testing; but in middle school, all of a sudden, it became regular and frequent. ... Upon entering middle school, we were immediately assigned to study groups, with four to five peers in each. Since then, there were in-class quizzes each week on all the core subjects, such as math, Chinese language arts and English, and major testing, such as monthly tests, middle and final-term examinations, on these required school subjects. All test results were carefully recorded within the study groups for both the individual ranking and the group ranking. If the group ranking was progressing or lagging way behind for a while, parents would be informed by the homeroom teacher through the School-Parent-Connection. (*ibid.*)

Dandan’s recognition of the importance of testing and the behaviorist model of language study in middle school verifies what other participants have manifested through their respective English learning experience in public middle schools. As a top student, Dandan experienced the augmentation and intensification of various testing and assessment as the explicit division of English learning in primary school and middle school for academic success and for the HSEE. Her account of the role of the school-parent-connection reveals the power of school authorities over and parents’ intervention on an ELL’s success in language acquisition, as well as the washback effect of the aggravated observable tests and assessment on his school achievement (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Huang, 2005; Liu & Gu, 2013).

6.2.3 *In High School: Schooldays as Flattened and Stressed*

All high schools nationwide are of 3 school years from Grades Ten to Twelve. Students are qualified for high school when they finish middle school and pass the HSEE. Most high schools are public, while some are private. A few high schools have independent recruitment tests for top middle school graduates. In this study, all four participants succeeded in the HSEE in their home provinces and entered high school. Xiaobo was the only one that entered a top private high school in his home city Shanghai, while the rest went to public high school of excellent local reputation. In school, they received optimum education: Two entered the Gifted Class because of their high test results ranking in the HSEE, while the other two entered the parallel classes. Dandan and Xiaobo boarded in school, while Meimei and Xiaogang remained as day students.

The PEP English textbooks continue to be used in high school. More supplementary materials, such as grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers, are added to the English program since all high school graduates, whether be they liberal arts students or science students, face the *Gaokao* when they finish Grade Twelve, the graduating grade of high school. Academic pressure zooms and haunts each high school student with intensified workbooks and model test papers because of the *Gaokao*, the most high-stakes recruitment testing nationwide.

Despite the academic and peer pressure and high expectations from both parents and teachers, the majority of Chinese high school students embrace the same lofty dream and high motivation of entering a renowned university (Fan, 2010, 2011; Li, 2005; Zhou, 2006). All four participants in this study also devoured to the book knowledge of English language, worked as hard as they ever could, and developed more cognitive abilities and study habits and skills during high school years.

Schooldays in High School: "Everything was for the Gaokao!"

Xiaobo continued to use Oxford English textbook series in high school, while Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaogang used the PEP English series. To them, English in high school was affordable with prescribed vocabulary, grammar, basic reading, listening, and writing for general purposes. When the assessment mechanism in high school played a more decisive role in students' academic success and reflected the washback effect in teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Huang, 2005; Liu & Gu, 2013), it reached its climax in the *Gaokao* (Zheng & Chen, 2013). In these participants' eyes, this mechanism entailed top-down from all insiders no reconciliation but unconditional obedience to its due role as the institutional *baton* (Chang, 2006; Dai, 2014; Huang, 2003; Ou & Yang, 2014; Zhou, 2014), and therefore profoundly affected all parties within.

Though coming from different school types and provinces, they four shared similar stories of their learning experience in high school. They spent relentless hours and brainwork (Huang, 2003; Ou & Yang, 2014; Zhou, 2014) on the test-oriented materials during and after class hours distributed by their teachers or purchased by themselves, such as the 21st-century English newspaper, grammar and vocabulary workbooks, and model test papers. They were enhancing learner behavior and performance for the examination purposes (Dai & Chen, 2007; Huang, 2003; Li, 2000) and honing test-taking skills for increased testing and the *Gaokao* in Grade Twelve of high school.

Dandan

Upon entering high school, Dandan was assigned to the Experimental Class because of her good test results in the HSEE; one year later, in Grade Eleven, she chose to enter the liberal arts class. She referred to her academic English learning in this period by saying,

... In high school, I had two Chinese English teachers. One taught me when I was in Experimental Class as a 10th grader, while the other taught me when I was transferred to the liberal arts class in Grades 11 and 12. ... Other than the PEP English textbooks, we used the 21st century English newspaper in class. ... I was assigned to the Experimental Class in Grade 10 because of my high comprehensive finals in the HSEE. The differences between the Experimental Class and the parallel classes include, first, the former had fewest students in number with the finest quality faculties; second, it enjoyed the priority in all teaching facilities that the school could provide, and was always firstly informed with the contest information. However, I felt more academic pressure in Experimental Class because my peers were all top students from middle schools [in my home city], and teachers accordingly raised the difficulty level in the academic study.

Though there was heavy academic pressure in high school, the pressure from English was affordable [to me]. I maintained good grades. When I was transferred to the liberal arts class as an 11th grader, I continued to work on endless grammar and vocabulary workbooks recommended by my teachers as they would lecture on these exercise items in class. We were also required to learn model essays by rote in the past years' *Gaokao*. I have never done that because I doubted such practice. It could be of help for the exam purposes but it was not good for authentic learning. Those model essays were in the same writing format. I did not feel any need for rote learning. [During this time,] I developed an interest in foreign movies and learned English from reading my dad's English novels, or the ones I purchased from the bookstores or borrowed from the library. I also watched [foreign] movies recommended by *Microblogs* or my peers. Reading English novels helped improve my reading ability, making test items in reading comprehension easy to handle. Extensive reading on English books and classroom learning of vocabulary and grammar with teachers were important in high school. I started extensive reading in English as an 11th grader. Though the school schedule was tight, I squeezed time for reading, such as time in recess, during lunch break, dinner break and bedtime. Luckily, the school authority did not stop students like me from reading other than textbooks. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

To Dandan, language was living when she was using it to engage in school activities and public speech contests. She also needed it as a survival tool with native speakers of English for communication purposes during the school visit in the U.S. Despite that she had been learning English for over 13 years in and outside the school, Dandan seemed unsatisfied with the outcome of her language study. She felt that the learner behavior and performance was narrowly reinforced in the preparation of the *Gaokao*, during which English became disconnected with the study of other school subjects.

The behaviorist practice and *authoritarianism* (Freire, 2005) penetrated Dandan's high school classroom. The teacher authority imposed oppressive instructions on teenage learners to transform their English learning experience into a linear and flattened single story in the name of *All for the Gaokao* (Freire, 1970/2001; Robinson, 2010). Dandan questioned her high school language study through rote memorization and working on excessive grammar workbooks and model test papers, saying "to some extent, they could help raise my test results and address the test-oriented purposes;" however, on critical reflection, she doubted its long-term efficacy for learner autonomy by inquiring that "I felt my time [in high school] wasted on these useless things" (Interview Three, October 12th, 2015).

Meimei

Dandan's complaint about the behaviorist effect of the banking model of English learning in high school was shared by other participants such as Meimei. In Meimei's view, language study in high school was more test-oriented for the *Gaokao*. She was saying,

... There were great changes in my English learning in high school. ... We practiced listening in class, but that was indeed dry and boring. We had a listening workbook, in which the exercise items were identical with the test items in the University Entrance English Examination. We started such test-oriented routine training ever since Grade 10 [in high school]. First, we were required to work on the exercises in the listening part, the teacher then, would announce the answers. ... In high school, I had only 4 English classes per week, and my English teacher was poor in curriculum design and lesson planning. ... The official high school English is easy, as long as one is able to handle the prescribed vocabulary and grammar knowledge, basic listening skills and common writing topics.

... In Grade 12, before the *Gaokao*, we were fully exposed to intensive training on model test papers, for instance, at that time the everyday homework would include one or two model test papers [in the required subjects for the *Gaokao*]. Though there was heavy pressure on most of us, I was O.K. as English was not a study burden to me in high school. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Meimei started the test-oriented routine training since Grade Ten. She recalled earnestly her English learning as "dry and boring" (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015). In class, the teaching was shrunk within the framework of textbook lecturing, and students had to finish the homogeneous vocabulary and grammar exercises before correct answers were announced by the teacher. In Grade Twelve before the *Gaokao*, the entire class was exposed again to the intensive training on model test papers in class time, and more was assigned as everyday routine homework to hone test-wise skills for success in the *Gaokao*.

Xiaobo

Xiaobo's English learning experience in high school was akin to Dandan's and Meimei's. According to Xiaobo, there were twelve classes in his grade, among which four were Experimental Classes, and the rest were parallel classes. Xiaobo used the rhetoric of "unbearable pressure" (Interview One, October 1st, 2015) to visualize his academic struggles throughout the first year of high school by saying that

... my middle school teachers did not prepare me well for the key high school in the city. I have to complain here. For instance, when we were on some language points in class, the rest of class all raised hand, claiming that they had learned before. I was the only one that knew nothing about such knowledge. On the other hand, the schedule was tight. It was almost unbearable. I was boarding then. I had to get up at 5:30 am and do morning exercises at 6:00 sharp. This lasted for three years. ... I could hardly afford this killing schedule. ... The homework was unbearable, too. All dorms were blacked out at 10:30 at night, but that was the time we were all on homework. So we had to use an emergency lamp with dim light to move on. If we were caught in using it, we would be reported [to the school administration].

... I busied myself on a biology contest, endless homework and model test papers, and [the preparation for the] university independent recruitment exams. We were buried with model test papers. Oftentimes they were our homework. ... Few of us could accomplish them. I did [learn geography in middle school], but teachers only lectured on textbooks. I encountered a huge gap in high school geography classes. I had disadvantages compared with my peers who were from private middle schools in the city. I had to spend more time on my weakness; therefore, I spent little time on English. ... I felt rather bad about my English learning [at this period]. (*ibid.*)

Xiaobo's academic weakness in both core and minor school subjects such as English, biology, and geography was attributed to the knowledge gap among students like him in the first year of high school (Song, 2010). This was not only due to the unbalanced educational resources in different school districts but also the irrational pursuit of high-efficiency classroom for teaching efficiency and classroom instruction under the concept of the "new instrumental value" in high school teaching and learning throughout the country (Yang, 2016, p. 3).

Nevertheless, Xiaobo spared no efforts on his language study. He discussed the content of his used textbooks, how English class was organized, and how he was learning English in high school by saying,

... [English] Textbooks were easy. We mainly worked on model test papers. Teachers did not lecture on textbook contents. There was some time that I felt reluctant in following the teacher in class. I focused on my own pace. ... Grammar was not difficult. My grammar was good in high school. ... In high school, I worked out time for it [vocabulary study]. I remember that in Grade 10, I managed to squeeze time for longer sentence translation, challenging reading comprehension and focused grammar study. I finished a thick English workbook. ... I picked up CET 4 and 6 vocabulary books for recitation. I even finished one third of the IELTS vocabulary book. ... There was more, such as listening and reading comprehension. I slept less than 5 h a day.

... I spent the class time on vocabulary and grammar. When I finished those workbooks, I would summarize the key and difficult points in my own words. As for reading comprehension, I finished CET 4 passages and some CET 6 passages. I even signed up for a tutorial class in my school. At first I felt it was helpful, but then, I gave up. It was because classes were on weekends and I was always exhausted throughout the weekdays. This was a vicious circle in my high school years. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

In Xiaobo's eyes, the biggest problem he encountered was time management. He was complaining based on critical reflections,

... my life was linear (*sic*): dorm and class. ... I slept less than 5 h a day. ... I had no time for my own life. ... Students [like me] from the parallel classes did not have chances for the exchange programs. ... My life in Grades 10, 11 and 12 was only for the *Gaokao*. ... Everything was test-oriented for that [the *Gaokao*]. (*ibid.*)

With a much heavier school schedule and workload, Xiaobo often slept over the IT and geography classes, or rested his head on the desk for a short while during break. He insisted that the subject of English in the high school curriculum was not for communication purposes, because his oral English class in Grade Ten was short-lived for only one semester before it was canceled for other purposes. "I forgot everything in high school. ...I have no memory on them [English textbooks]," he was grumbling,

... All was test-oriented in high school. Teachers cared about nothing but the average score of the whole class. They didn't care about us as individuals. They cared about your testing results and rankings [in your class and grade]. As I said, I didn't remember anything in my high school English textbooks. I feel they were useless. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaobo was overwhelmed with his language study because everything was test-oriented: most of his time in Grades Ten, Eleven, and Twelve was “wasted” on endless homogeneous homework and model test papers for the university independent recruitment examination and the *Gaokao* (Interview One, October 1st, 2015). Meanwhile, teachers cared nothing about students' well-being but their test results and ranking in class and throughout the grade. This developed in Xiaobo a feeling of “empty and panic” (*ibid.*) when he realized he did not have a life of his own.

Xiaobo's learning anxiety and predicament of the test-oriented language study were not uncommon among today's high school students (Huang, 2003; Liu, 2011; Liu, Dong, & Zhou, 2008; Shen, 2009; Wang & Shen, 2015; Wu & Duan, 2006). As a conscious high school teenager, Xiaobo detected his “limited English learning effect” (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015) by saying

... I spent most time on exams and model test papers. They worked, though the actual learning effect was limited. The efficiency was low and undesirable. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Other than that, Xiaobo remained irritated about the test-oriented banking model of language study in high school by saying

...In high school, the exam pressure was pouring down on us. Every endeavor was for the *Gaokao*. ...It is the last thing that I would ever live again Grade 12, the darkest time ever in my life. ... I can learn autonomously when I am able to take control of my time. But in high school, no time was mine.

I feel I was pushed and spoon-fed to learn all the way from primary to high school. You know, all was test oriented. This was inevitable. All learning serves the *Gaokao*. ... But the problem is, when we grow up to teenagers, such nursing teaching can be a burden and restraint, especially in high school learning. ... It would waste our time. When you are required to work on piles of model test papers, you would feel it was a sheer waste of time. You had no choice but to do so.

I respect and I am appreciative of all my teachers. They were all highly responsible to us. I wished I had worked harder and better. Sometimes I feel I am mean to them. This is simply because I felt they demanded too much on us. I felt a waste of time at my best days in high school, though I never cut classes or turned in the homework late. I don't care about the school size. I think it depends on your ability of interpersonal communication. I seldom used school library from primary to high school. Time was all spent in classroom. I doubt there was a school library available. We were all educated to be good test takers, qualified test takers, machine-like test takers.

... I was deep buried in all sorts of model tests. I felt hopeless and helpless. Nobody would like to be labeled as a machine-like test taker. This would basically deny his existence as a human being and rationality of his consistent endeavor. I would name myself as a qualified test taker, though it sounds mean and harsh. You know, when one is buried with endless model test papers and has to work on them day and night, 24/7, on such repetitive and mechanical mental labor, isn't it a living machine! Anyway, we were too young then and

would not admit we were performing like a living machine. Our world was small and restrained. Life was linear and simplistic. The *Gaokao* was the only focus and goal in life. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

In spite of academic adversities in high school and at university, Xiaobo learned to summarize the key and difficult language points in his words for reviewing. He also learned to resort to iPhone App to assist his vocabulary retention (Jin, 2015; Yi & Deng, 2016; Zhou, 2016a, b) by saying,

... [in high school,] I used iPhone App to assist vocabulary learning. I got half the results with twice the effort. This is because that vocabulary was a tiny part of the whole English learning. ... In the first school year at university, vocabulary was an easy thing to me. Things changed in the second year as I realized I had to spend more time on it. I used to squeeze at least one hour on vocabulary. Now I also make use of iPhone App to create some vocabulary booklets to assist this task. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaogang

Being an overachiever of language study in primary school and middle school, Xiaogang maintained his academic advantage in high school. Since listening and speaking were cut off from the high school English curriculum in the province because they would not be tested in the *Gaokao*, what is left was working on model test papers to hone test-wise skills. The teaching focus, accordingly, was simplified to reading comprehension and test-oriented writing to help develop students' test-taking skills. Xiaogang felt much less stressed because everything, such as the textbook content and test items, became easy,

... High school English was easy; the English program in all three grades was easy. ... What is left in high school English learning was nothing but reading parts and model test papers. We focused only on reading comprehension and writing for the *Gaokao*. ... My English in Grade 10 was poor, I had no idea why. I had no test-wise skills then and always did poor in exams. But when I moved to Grades 11 and 12, it jumped up to 130 and more. I assume I made leapfrog progress through a huge number of mistakes I had made in Grade 10. ... The total score was 150, my score was always over 140 [in Grade 12]. I don't think I have any special learning methods. I just feel English at that time was easy. The test items were easy. The test form was easy. Everything was a piece of cake [for me].

All words in test papers were easy; it was like reading Chinese. Besides, when you had done piles of model test papers, it was no big deal to work on one more. Model test papers had been haunting on us all year round in high school days. We had to cover four reading passages with over 700 words in each.

... I didn't see the variety and communicativeness of a language, like English. Instead, English exams always focused on testing one's competence on grammar and vocabulary. I feel this is dry and boring. But at that time, I was so benumbed in working on model test papers. It didn't make any sense to me. I was simply dealing with homework. That's it. It was all exam-oriented. It was a sheer waste of time. (Interview One, October, 1st, 2015)

On recalling this, Xiaogang referred to academic English learning in high school as nothing but vocabulary and grammar. He teased that he too, could teach high school because there would be no difficulty as long as one crammed vocabulary and grammar workbooks and model test papers (Liu & Li, 2008). Xiaogang compared

the difference between English teaching and learning in Grade Ten, the beginning grade of high school, and Grade Twelve, the graduating grade when all students were preparing for the *Gaokao*. He was saying,

... [English learning in Grade 12 was] easy, very easy. I don't think there was any difficulty level. I could teach that. It was nothing but working on model test papers to make you familiarized with the test format and language points. No extension or outreach in Grade 12. It was all for the *Gaokao*. [In class,] teachers would point out how grammar worked in a certain sentence, but they would not explain the function of this sentence. They only guaranteed that you would work right on the similar test items, other than guiding you to enjoy the flow or beauty of a sentence.

... You know, in Grade 10, there was extensive reading on English newspapers or other handouts. Teachers would as well continue to lecture on grammar. All English grammar was covered in Semester 1 of Grade 11. But, when we proceeded to Grades 11 and 12, extensive reading and other enrichment were all cancelled. All we had to do was to work on piles of model test papers to enhance our familiarity of the test format and language points that would be tested. In class, teachers only lectured on model test papers. ... We had classes from Sunday to Saturday since Grade 10, and there were a couple of days per month for a short break. So we only had three days off per month in high school years. In class, we focused on model test papers or self study. If one had any questions, he could ask. Since I was a science student in high school, I often approached teachers for answers.

... I really hated Grade 12. It was a sheer waste of my time on those useless intensive exercises. I was already at 140 and more in Grade 11, it was impossible to attain a full score in the *Gaokao*. Nobody could do that. Nobody could attain a full score in composition. (Interview One, October, 1st, 2015)

Like other participants, Xiaogang found little academic outreach in Grade Twelve as *all* was for the *Gaokao*. He witnessed and experienced that when English teaching and learning in Grades Eleven and Twelve was deliberately curtailed to serve the test-orientedness for the *Gaokao*, what is left in class time was cramming grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers to enhance test takers' familiarity with the test format and language points that would be flawlessly tested. With regard to the test-oriented, grammar-stuffed language study in high school, Xiaogang expressed considerable resentment by saying,

... I had extensive reading in Grade 9 and teacher's guidance in Grade 10. Grades 11 and 12 were filled up with model test papers and all sorts of intensified grammar and vocabulary workbooks. ... Everything was test-oriented, to be exact, the *Gaokao*-oriented. ... When I proceeded to high school, my English teachers asked us to read the *New Concept English* series. I didn't follow because the *Gaokao* would not test what this series teaches.

There were some [English contests] in middle and high school, but I attended none, since our class schedule was tight. I had no time for these contests. If you would partake, you had to cut classes. Further, English contests wouldn't help the *Gaokao*, in my province, only the prizes from the science contests matter. ... I had some peers that won the prizes in some English contests, but those prizes wouldn't work for the *Gaokao*. If you wished to have additional scores in the *Gaokao* based on the national additional score policy in the *Gaokao*, you had to won prizes in the high-level science contests, such as in the disciplinary fields of high school physics, chemistry, biology and math.

... I don't like the exam-oriented and exercise-stuffed teaching and learning. It is useless to me. I don't think I would need more model test papers in Grade 11 when I felt my

vocabulary was sufficient in assisting me on reading comprehension and writing. (Interview One, October, 1st, 2015)

Again, when he was exploring the meaning of language study in high school to his overall academic English learning experience in the past schooling, Xiaogang claimed that it was a “waste of my time on these redundant exercise items” (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015). He seemed right because no matter how many grammar workbooks and model test papers one crams himself with, it is “impossible to attain a full score in the *Gaokao* English test paper. ... Nobody could do that in writing” (*ibid.*). Furthermore, when he was exploring language study at university and the general mindset of his peers, Xiaogang discussed the aftermath of the *Gaokao* on himself as well as on others,

... [When there is little test-orientedness in English teaching and learning at university, we all encounter] a dead end. And I don't think these test items [we covered in high school] were practical in real communication. You know, each test item was highly directive on a specific grammar point, but when you converse with others daily, or when you write an IELTS test writing, you won't care much about a [particular] grammar point.

... I didn't see the variety and communicativeness of a language, like English. Instead, English exams [in middle and high school] always focused on testing one's competence on grammar and vocabulary. I feel this is dry and boring. But at that time, I was so benumbed in working on model test papers. It didn't make any sense to me. I was simply dealing with homework. That's it. It was all exam-oriented. It was a sheer waste of time.

... They [my peers at university] care less about academic studies. The majority feels they live for exams, and there is no need to work hard. When they pass, they could be one step closer to a graduate school or a good employment. That's the fixed ideology in high school. (Interview One, October, 1st, 2015)

Summary of Dandan, Meimei, Xiaobo, and Xiaogang

Like his peer participants' viewpoints on language study in high school, Xiaogang's response highlights the penetration of learner behavior modification in the controlled, teacher-centered school environment for successful error-free learning by the consistent review and reinforcement of the repetitive drill practices and imitation (Bloom, 1956; Gagné, 1965; Greeno et al., 1996; Skinner, 1968). Within the oppressive, *Gaokao*-centered social context where a single story of learning for success permeates, these factors conspire to transform the otherwise intriguing language study to the capitalist “banking model” of education (Freire, 2005). They flatten the complicated language learning to simplified test-taking skills and honing for one test, the *Gaokao*, and instill in students a fear of freedom and authoritarianism to internalize the “dominator's shadow and the authoritarian ideology of the administration” (*ibid.*).

When the majority of high school students demonstrates an ever-growing explicit phenomenon of test anxiety (Cassady, 2004; Huang, 2003; Mo, Wang, & Wang, 1999; Wang, 2007b, 2014; Wei, 2000), there is reason to reexamine what

today's Chinese ELLs value in their language study experience, and what are the attributional manifestations among, between, and within them before they can be better served and benefit from their lived learning experience.

6.3 Emergent Awareness of Self-Disciplined Autonomous Learning

As an important study habit, autonomous learning is not only key to school success when students proceed to higher grades (Chen, 2008; Gao, 2010; Guo, 2014), but also indispensable to their sustainable development and cultivation of the life-long learning awareness (Hua, 2011; You, 2012; Zhu & Wei, 2016). High school constitutes a critical period in one's growth when students' awareness of autonomous learning starts to grow (Liu & Li, 2008; You, 2012; Zhou, 2015). The participants discussed their emergent awareness of autonomous learning with self-discipline: Some (Dandan, Meimei and Xiaogang) recognized it earlier in middle school or high school, while some (Xiaobo) developed it later at university. They explored through cordial reflections how autonomous learning was cultivated and applied in and outside their school settings.

Dandan

Dandan attributed her school success to autonomous learning on the NCE series from her father at home and other enrichment readings and materials that were distributed or recommended by her Chinese and American teachers and school peers. She was saying,

... I would not say that teachers' role meant a lot in my English learning. My harvest came from autonomous learning on the NCE series, interactions with foreign teachers, reading English books and other text materials, watching movies, and my overseas experience at our sister school in Wisconsin. Such experience mattered. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Dandan claimed to have limited ability for autonomous learning before high school. Her learning method then was to follow whatever teachers instructed. Grade Eleven was the division when she was guided to learn by and for herself as the school encouraged learner autonomy and advocated so. This made Dandan cognitively and technically ready for autonomous learning. She interpreted her understanding of this concept by saying,

... I have passion for English learning since I was a primary school kid. Before Grade 11, I followed whatever teachers taught; then I learned to study by myself and for myself. Grade 11 was a division; before that I did not have the ability for autonomous learning, and I did not have time. In Grade 11 I chose to study the liberal arts, which allowed me more time on the core subjects. It was then I was ready, cognitively, for autonomous learning, and I aspired to enrich myself.

Autonomous learning, I think, err... is based on solid English proficiency and perseverance in learning. Such ability is not developed overnight, instead, it is cultivated. I was preparing

for it for a long time till I proceeded to Grade 11. My high school advocated [among us] autonomous learning; this helped.

In Grade 6 in primary school, I hoped to attend a local bilingual middle school. I did not care about that till I was a 6th grader. I had to meet the minimum cut-off line. In middle school, I had foreign teachers and the exchange program experience. I read more by myself. I realized the importance of English learning. In high school, I felt grades matter. My middle school English teacher advised me to finish the NCE 1 and 2 for better English reading ability. I made it by myself. Then, my high school teacher had higher expectation on me, such as advising me to strive for the university CET 4 level and to expand my vocabulary. I again achieved it. I expected greater academic progress. My University EAP teacher has a blueprint for us by achieving a higher score in the IELTS writing test. In the first year in university, I realized the new goal of becoming a simultaneous interpreter in career trajectory. (Interview Three, October 12th, 2015)

This interpretation of Dandan’s language study, along with her emergent awareness of the self-disciplined autonomous learning at different educational levels, crystallizes how a Chinese ELL recognizes, nurtures, and practices autonomous learning with her internal perseverance and external support (Liu & Li, 2008; You, 2012).

Meimei

Other than Dandan that uttered her viewpoints of autonomous learning in English, other participants also recognized its value and practiced in their way. When in Grade Eight, the teacher refused to teach in the messed classroom and asked students to self-study, Meimei shunned off the noise with self-discipline to focus on the homework from her English tutorials or to review other school subjects. Though having no idea of the term *autonomous learning* or *learner autonomy*, Meimei practiced it by focusing either on the study load outside the school or on review work to consolidate her classroom learning.

Xiaobo

Xiaobo was unique among all four participants because he claimed to have no interest in spending his time or his parents’ money on private English tutorials or home tutoring. Instead, he chose to work by and for himself on the recommended grammar workbooks and model test papers of core school subjects, such as math and English, to facilitate classroom learning and to hone test-taking skills. “... I would judge through the *practical* results. I chose to study at home” (Interview One, October 1st, 2015), he continued, saying,

... I followed my own pace and worked on huge amount of exercises. I was willing to do so. My achievements were stable; though my Chinese language arts was not so desirable, my excellence in math could make up the gap. I finished a whole math workbook in Grade 8. ... When my classmates were working on homework, I was working on more challenging extracurricular tasks. ... I focused on those with higher difficulty levels. Since the difficulty level of homework remained low, I had to challenge myself and rank high in exams. ... I have done much more than my peers. ... I finished a thick English workbook. ... When I finished those exercises, I would summarize the key and difficult points in my own words. As for reading comprehension, I finished CET 4 passages and some CET 6 passages. (Interview One, October 1st 2015)

Not attending private English tutorials or having home tutoring did not prevent Xiaobo from achieving school success. He was aware of the importance of self-learning and developed a strong sense of learner autonomy in the subject studies in middle school and high school. This was manifested in his study habit of note taking in English classes and of summarizing in his words the formula-like grammar rules for reviewing before examination. To him, these activities had “pragmatic results” in his language study (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015).

Xiaogang

Xiaogang had an early love of reading. His autonomous learning started in Grade Four, concomitantly with gradual extensive reading on various English readings recommended by his mother. Generally, Xiaogang described himself as highly self-disciplined: “I can do time management and handle my study and life. There was academic and peer pressure in my middle school and high school days, but it wouldn’t affect my own study plan much” (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015).

In high school, Xiaogang started the NCE series by himself with the assistance of an English-Chinese dictionary for the meaning of new words and expressions. At university, learner autonomy was required in University EAP program as “one [credit] goes to online autonomous learning” (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015). In Xiaogang’s view, autonomous learning may not fit everybody in second education where the banking model of teaching, learning, and assessment and behaviorist performance was more preferred, though it was a “must for the [academic] survival” at university (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015). Xiaogang was saying,

...In high school, I was pushed to learn; it was passive learning. ... In middle and high school, teachers only want us to output exactly what they’ve input, no more. Such fixed model doesn’t fit university. Nobody would expect it. We aspire to learn to fish by ourselves. We must learn self-discipline and autonomous learning at higher learning. Those who heavily rely on teachers and others are bound to be losers in academic study and life. ... Now I am learning [my disciplines] autonomously to address my authentic learning needs not only in EAP but also in other core courses which require English medium instructions. My state of learning and learning efficiency has fundamentally transformed.

... I feel it could be the change of the educational philosophies. When I was in high school, teachers would over-emphasize the importance of test results, while at university, teachers wouldn’t do that. Scores are not the only thing in life, and we have more important things to cover. At university, what is stressed is the cultivation of your interpersonal communication abilities and your comprehensive qualities. (*ibid.*)

Xiaogang’s insight into the best time for cultivating autonomous learning and learner autonomy among middle and high school students reveals a thorny discrepancy between the students’ rising perceptual cognition on this respect and the actual obstructions from the behaviorist teacher authorities and institutions (Liu & Li, 2008). Xiaogang felt that many peers of his generation could be regarded as the victim of the behaviorist, banking model of school education, “...they are simply components other than a powered machine [for learning]. This is universal in educational system [in our country]” (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015).

Xiaogang was poignant when analyzing the slothful mindset among his university peers and his understanding of the sense of learner autonomy and of self-empowerment for university study by saying,

... I felt then what I learned [in English] in school was different from real life English that I see from the TV series or other programs. I see the grammar was weird, [and] the way they think, speak and behave was different from what I read from school textbooks. I learned study skills in middle school and high school, but I see these were not so helpful in real communication with native speakers of English. They were useless.

... We grow up in a fixed culture of obedience and a single story of success. The Confucius thoughts are penetrating. [In middle school and high school,] teachers would not allow your innovation or creativity, as answers are all fixed. They just want what they've input. No more. ... Actually this [critical thinking and curiosity] was deliberately oppressed. It is hard to escape its influence. Through University EAP program, I realize the gap between what I have learned before and what I am learning in English [at the tertiary level]. Some people may question the education they receive, some may not. Why bother so? You just receive it and accept it. Why you have to question or challenge it! To those who are sluggish or reluctant to inquire, higher education means nothing to them. I feel higher education fits those who are brave to learn by themselves and for themselves and to explore and question it for the universal truth. (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015)

Xiaogang's comments reveal that there are university youth that are reluctant to stay further oppressed in higher learning. These students might not know the terms such as autonomous learning, learner autonomy, learner rights, and learner empowerment when they were led to the oppressive banking model of school education at the school age. They grew aware of the detriment in the years of oppressive learning and resorted to different means, such as reading, as positive and effective self-redemption. No student favors test-orientedness. However, as long as the *baton* role of the HSEE and the *Gaokao* remains, it would continue to exert the dominant power over today's middle school and high school graduates who aspire to cross the single-log bridge for higher education to surrender to its absolute authority.

6.4 Shadow Education: An Alternative Way to School Success

In history, academic success is a paramount issue among Chinese intellectuals (Zheng & Chen, 2013). The old Chinese saying of "To be a scholar is to be the top of the society" has been engrained in the Chinese society. Entering the new millennium, this saying continues to live with each Chinese family that has a school-age child. Literature over the last 30 years has increasingly documented the rise of shadow education and its influence on school success in East Asia (in particular Japan, South Korea and China), North America, and the EU countries (Bray, 1999, 2005; Bray & Liu, 2015; Chu, 2009; Du & Shi, 2013; Peng, 2008; Zhan, 2013; Wang, 2015; Xu, 2009; Yang, 2012).

Among today's Chinese ELLs, the shadow education, or the private supplementary tutoring, is not uncommon in their growing up. Since the class time for English is insufficient in most mainstream public schools, the majority of primary, middle, and high school students, largely under peer pressure and the pressure from parents (Chen & Bai, 2015; Gao, Zhao, & Zhang, 2016), resort to private English tutoring or home tutoring to facilitate language study in school. A few of them, instead, choose to cram themselves with grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers for the same purposes (Zhang, Chen, & Liu, 2015; Liu, 2016; Ma & Wang, 2016; Shen, 2014; Wu & Tang, 2009). This manifests the prevailing propaganda and popular mindset of "Don't let your child lose at the starting line" and "Having one step ahead than others" (Wang, 2015; Zhang, Chen, & Liu, 2015).

Three major forms of receiving shadow education on English at extracurricular time, namely attending private English institutes, having home tutoring, and cramming English by one's self, were explored and discussed with the voices and insights of all four participants. Since they are part of the bigger picture of the whole student population that once had, or are having such extracurricular reinforcement, their past academic English learning experience best represents such academic endeavor and social ethos for school success throughout the country.

6.4.1 Attending Private English Institute

Recent research on primary, middle, and high school students attending private English institutes demonstrate an ambivalent attitude on this extracurricular activity for the purpose of school success on core subjects, such as English, Chinese language arts, and math (Chen & Chen, 2015; Fang & Xue, 2014; Jin & Bai, 2013; Li, Hu, & Hao, 2013; Liu, 2016; Peng, 2011; Peng & Zhou, 2008; Shen, 2014; Wu & Tang, 2009; Yue, 2013; Zhang, Chen, & Liu, 2015). The majority of today's ELLs choose to attend private English institutes outside the school to enhance their English abilities, which is deemed as a *necessary* addition to language study in school. With the prevailing propaganda about the scaffolding role of private supplementary tutoring to the reinforcement of classroom learning (Wang, 2015; Zhang, Chen, & Liu, 2015), most of these institutes boast for the high-stakes examination purposes with added values on foreign culture enrichment, in particular, the British and American culture. In this study, Dandan and Meimei represent a broader student population that receives private English tutorials outside the school.

Dandan

Dandan attended two private institutes for English learning apart from the official English program in school. The first institute she attended as a 5th grader was not rigid for examination purposes. Instead, she learned foreign cultures and English pronunciation and signed up twice for the public speech contests in English. Upon referring to this learning experience, Dandan was saying that,

... altogether I attended two English tutorial programs. The first one I attended when I was a 5th grader was *Dashan* English tutorial center. I went there every weekend. The class size was small, around 10 even-aged peers. Each period lasted two hours. I spent one year there. I liked the teacher there because she did not teach for the exam purposes. Instead, she taught foreign cultures and how to pronounce in English. She drew our attention to oral ability and grammar. She used the NCE and other supplementary materials. There were English public speech festivals at *Dashan*. I attended two and was awarded the 1st prize. We did not have such activities in school. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

One year later, Dandan's parents suggested another institute which gained a good local reputation by the quality of its test-oriented tutorials. Dandan had classes twice a week for 3 months at this institute as she needed a leap in her test results for the MSEE. She was saying,

... in Grade 6, my parents suggested another English tutorial center because some of my classmates attended there. I went there in the weekdays after school, twice a week, and each period lasted two hours. I spent around two to three months in this new center. It gained a good reputation through its test-oriented tutorial. The class size was big, around 30 to 40 peers in one class. Since I hoped to be accepted by the bilingual middle school, which was the best middle school in my home city, and its English Entrance Examination was difficult, I needed an uplift in my test grades. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Meimei

Unlike Dandan, Meimei had an 8-year English learning experience at three different private English institutes outside the school she attended, which proved helpful and consolidated her classroom learning of English. To her, different from school teachers, teachers at these private English institutes that often interact with students in and after class play a role on her language study since she has special preference and reliance on teachers in subject studies. In Grade Five, Meimei learned to use QQ, a domestic online socializing media like Facebook, to interact with teachers from the institute to facilitate English learning. It is these teachers that guided her onto a "right path in English learning autonomously" (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015).

The second institute that Meimei attended was a cramming school, where English was taught at a much higher difficulty level for examination purposes for the HSEE. During the time when the teacher–student relation was broken in school, Meimei followed the learning schedule and knowledge framework designed by teachers from this English institute to retain her learner morale and to minimize the effect of a disordered classroom environment. The complete grammar knowledge consolidated with the intensified vocabulary and grammar exercises guaranteed her competitiveness for the HSEE. She continued private English tutorials in high school and collected three thick grammar notebooks for constant reviewing then and now. When the intensified teaching and training for the *Gaokao* started in Grade Ten, she resorted to person-to-person customized English tutorials to solidify her test-taking skills and overall language competence. Upon reflecting on the influence that these private institutes had on her academic English learning in school, Meimei was saying,

... I come from a small city; ... I started the private English tutoring since Grade 5 in primary school; it went all the way to Grade 9 nonstop. ... I have altogether attended three English tutorial centers outside the school. One was Cambridge Young Learners' center. I did not mention it because I might only have had classes there for one semester. Now I have little impression on it. The second was *Pinyin English*. The third was *Sunshine English*; I remember it because the school head was called Sunshine. Personally, I prefer small-class teaching; but when I was at *Sunshine* in Grades 8 and 9, the class size was very big with over 100 students. I don't care much about the class size because I would always sit in the front. There were a couple of times when I was late for class I sat at the back seat. It was a waste of time. People who sat at the back paid little attention in class.

... These English tutorial programs outside the school helped build up a good foundation for my English learning, in particular, my test results. I seldom reviewed the textbooks, but I always achieved good grades. It seemed my English was really good.

... I chose to attend English tutorial classes because I like to learn English. This is the only thing that I have persevered with for years with full support from my parents, though none of my family or relatives have worked in a field that requires English as a working language.

... [the] sprint class [at the private English institute in Grade 9] unfolded to me a bigger world of English that I had not yet seen. First of all, it was vocabulary. We were required to master 1,000 words, which was the first gap between middle school English and high school English. Next, it was grammar. We learned 8 time and tense in middle school, but in this sprint class, the teacher demanded that we learn all 16 time and tense. Then came the gap in writing. In middle school English, we were only required to write no more than 50 words within the topic of self-introduction. In this sprint class, the teacher taught us to write on broader topics. I started to feel huge pressure in English learning; but it was then that my interest in English grew stronger. I enjoyed reading in English. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Meimei also referred to *English First* (EF), one more private English institute that she was attending in the past year at university. She recalled her learning there, and investigated the reasons for sacrificing her weekend time on English learning. She was saying,

... I also attended classes on Saturdays at EF for my oral proficiency. I spent the whole day [on weekend] there. I would do some listening and reading practices based on my customized EF online program. Sometimes I would do writing. When a unit is over, I would have a face-to-face instruction at the EF center. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

6.4.2 Having English Home Tutoring

Other than attending private institutes to facilitate language study for school success, having English home tutoring for the same purpose is also a preferred choice among today's Chinese ELLs and their parents (Zhang & Wang, 2010; Zhuo, 1999). Unlike the former, English home tutoring is often highly learner-customized and saves time on commuting. Through face-to-face tailored tutoring, the tutor helps in accordance with the student's aptitude (Zhang & Wang, 2010), while the student receives

focused attention and care in studying target subject and is more inclined to develop learner morale and student–teacher relation with the tutor (Zhuo, 1999). In this study, Meimei’s and Xiaogang’s home tutoring experience demonstrate the enriched academic English learning experience through home tutoring.

Meimei

Meimei had home tutoring for language study in both middle school and high school. The first tutor was a female teacher from a private English institute she once attended in the summer of Grade Nine when the HSEE was over. Meimei had ten customized classes with her on grammar study and reading comprehension. This home tutoring was systematic on English grammar and proved influential on Meimei’s English competence, as it enhanced her language abilities and instilled the centrality of grammar in her foreign language study. Meimei recalled this learning experience by saying,

... I had one-to-one tutorial with the teacher from Sunshine tutorial center. It was in the summer of Grade 9 when the High School Entrance Examinations were over. I had such passion for English then and realized the gap in my English learning. Hence, I ordered the one-to-one tutorial with her at my home. There were altogether 10 customized classes on grammar and reading comprehension.

... She had clear logic and helped construct the framework of grammar. Grammar is of utmost importance; it is a guide. 12 time and tense is important. Subordinate clauses, such as noun and adverbial clauses, are important. It is vital to learn them and know how to use them [in writing]. When in high school, most of my peers were poorly aware of the importance of grammar, I had realized its centrality in English learning. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

The other home tutoring started in Grade Eleven of high school when Meimei had only four English classes per week, and the English teacher was poor in lesson planning. Again, she felt English in school was insufficient to fulfill her learning needs. She ordered customized home tutoring on grammar and reading comprehension with the same tutor teacher every Friday afternoon after school. This enabled her to become “more enlightened on clauses and other language points” and improved her reading comprehension skills through longer passage reading (Interview One, October 11th, 2015). She felt

gratified (sic) with my slow but solid progress. Then in the second semester of Grade 11, I had again one-to-one tutorial program with her. There were altogether five focused classes on reading comprehension. She taught me reading comprehension strategies and enhanced my reading skills through longer passage reading (*ibid.*).

Through home tutoring on English grammar and reading, Meimei rose to top 5 in her grade. Meanwhile, her English abilities empowered her to “deal with tough examinations with ease” (*ibid.*). In Grade Twelve, she was even planning to apply for a university in Hong Kong due to her strong English competence.

Xiaogang

As a top student in school, Xiaogang had a one-year-and-a-half home tutoring experience on English phonetics since Semester Two of Grade Seven. He was referring to the reason that he expected home tutoring,

... I hoped to learn more in English. My English was very good then, and I hoped to make further progress. At that time we lived in a city in East China. There were more chances that English could be used. Further, I have had a preliminary planning for my life then. ... My plan was to study abroad at Columbia University in the U.S. You know, I searched online, and landed myself at Columbia University. It ranks Top 100. It was super.

I shared this with my home tutor and asked her to help me with vocabulary, grammar, phonetics, and the like. She home tutored me for one year and a half till the end of the Semester 2 of Grade 8. She had the doctoral degree in English. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

According to Xiaogang, his home tutoring was not for school records but for the enrichment purposes since his English competence was already very good. He aspired for greater progress, but realized his strong learning needs in language study could not be fulfilled in school. Besides, as a precocious young man, he developed a preliminary academic ambition by applying for a world-renowned U.S. university. He shared his goal with his home tutor who possessed a doctoral degree in English and worked with her on vocabulary, grammar, and phonetics. This experience consolidated his language study and played an important role on his cognitive growth, as Xiaogang recalled,

...She came once a week and tutored me for three hours. She would ask how a word was spelled. Other than vocabulary, she tutored me on grammar. At that time, time and tense [in grammar] was taught in school. Hence, she enhanced these grammar points with extensive exercise items. ... It [This home tutoring experience] has been influential in my English learning. My knowledge of phonetics started then. Her English pronunciation was beautiful. I liked it. She [the home tutor] helped to improve my pronunciation in English. Furthermore, she pushed me forward by enlarging my vocabulary through recitation. I couldn't figure out then what kind of vocabulary she required me to recite [for dictation purposes], because in my eyes they were all long and difficult. I assume they were at the level of CET 4 and 6. They were rather tough for a middle schooler like me. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

What is revealed from Meimei's and Xiaogang's English learning experience with their home tutors is that English home tutoring, as the "optimum individualized tutorial method" to assist students' classroom learning (Zhang & Wang, 2010, p. 108), has its positive role on their higher motivation for language study and on their school success. Though not every Chinese family could or would afford English home tutoring due to a variety of the socioeconomic and sociocultural reasons (Gao, Zhao, & Zhang, 2016; Ran, 2016; Wang, 2016; Zhuo, 1999), it is an important indicator to investigate the attributional manifestations among, between, and within today's Chinese ELLs' English learning experience outside the school.

6.4.3 *Cramming English by One's Self*

Other than having private English tutorials or home tutoring to facilitate language study for school success, some Chinese students choose to cram English by themselves with grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers to hone test-taking skills for the examination purposes, in particular, the *Gaokao*. Typically, Xiaobo was one of them. Born and grew up in Shanghai where the business of private English tutoring prevails, Xiaobo never resorted to any private institute or home tutoring outside the school for better English learning; instead, he chose to immerse himself in extracurricular English learning by working on grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers at home. This was not because his parents could not help at home, or he did not like English, or the family could hardly afford the tuition for attending private English institutes or having English home tutoring. According to Xiaobo, he possessed academic aspirations. He compared language study at private English institutes and by one's self, saying,

... I didn't think they [private English institutes] would help much, so I never attended any. I had friends who attended some. I didn't feel they worked better than I did at school. I think it was a waste of parents' money. I would judge through the practical results. I chose to study at home. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaobo boasted himself as growing up with test-wise English and math workbooks. To him, the only and best way to enhance English ability and skills for quick school success was to work on various grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers recommended by teachers and his parents. In high school, Xiaobo squeezed time for longer sentence translation and reading comprehension. He focused on grammar study and picked up CET 4 and 6 vocabulary books for recitation. Furthermore, he finished a thick English workbook and one-third of the IELTS vocabulary book, and he was working harder and more than most of his peers for better test-taking skills and test results.

Xiaobo was proud of his stable school achievements, saying when his classmates were working on the homework assigned by subject teachers, he was on more challenging extracurricular tasks for better test results and higher class ranking in testing. When he reflected on how he crammed by himself with listening in Grade Twelve of high school for the *Gaokao*, he was saying that,

... [In high school], the listening practice was insufficient. I started to realize this when I was graduating from high school; my listening was so poor. I was only required to practice listening for the purpose of the *Gaokao*. ... I spent day and night, cramming myself with listening audios for the *Gaokao*. Listening ability requires long-term accumulation other than short-term cramming practices, otherwise it wouldn't be helpful or effective for solid progress. ... [T]he cramming practice [was] vital for the *Gaokao*, but it was only helpful in the short term. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Hence, Xiaobo was confident in his self-cramming learning strategy and insisted that “[y]ou wouldn't harvest good exam results if you did not enrich yourself with more extracurricular tasks” (Interview One, October 1st, 2015). “They [exams and

model test papers] worked,” claimed Xiaobo straightforward, “though the actual learning effect was limited. The efficiency was low and undesirable” (*ibid.*).

Cramming worked on Xiaobo’s language study in high school because it fulfilled his learning needs of having “pragmatic results,” which meant “quick school success” (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015). Xiaobo’s choice on cramming English by himself for the examination purposes was not uncommon. Throughout the country, thousands of primary, middle, and high school students apply this trick for the same purpose for school success (Han, 2014; Li, 2014; Yang, 2016; Zheng, 2005, 2009). Yang (2016) critiqued such “new instrumentalism” valued by the test-oriented education through abetting cramming practices (p. 3), emphasizing rigid behaviorist teaching efficiency and classroom instruction. When the school education is flattened to classroom teaching in a narrowed sense, while the classroom teaching is further flattened to test-taking skills for knowledge-cramming and examination-centered education, argued Yang, it is a miserable “regression” (p. 4) to Skinner’s behaviorist stimulus–response model of direct method for successful error-free learning.

Behaviorist direct method does have a *rapid spike* effect on producing learning machines for quick school success and docile workers for economic growth and the world’s labor market (Spring, 2007). However, in the long run, it is literally a fatal detriment to the education with a holistic and humanistic philosophy towards a global common good (Nava, 2001; Spring, 2007; Seymour, 2004).

6.5 Optimum Education, Peer Pressure, and Finding an Outlet

Dandan and Xiaogang received the optimum education in high school due to their good HSEE test results. Such education is preferably available for top students who have the potentials to enter the best universities when they finish high school. They are the fewest in number, and qualified to enjoy the “finest quality faculties” and “all the best teaching facilities” that the school could ever provide (Xiaogang, Interview One, October 1st, 2015; Dandan, Interview One, October 9th, 2015), though these God’s favored ones are oftentimes confronted with enormous academic and peer pressure when they are chosen for such privileged education.

The moment when Dandan and Xiaogang were chosen for the Experimental Class and the Gifted Class in school, enormous pressure started to pour down and to accompany like an intangible shadow. Peer pressure, along with the ever-rising academic intensity, difficulty, stress, and high expectations from the family, accumulated to its climax in high school. Dandan recalled the Experimental Class she entered in Grade Ten upon entering high school by saying,

... I was assigned to the Experimental Class in Grade 10 because of my excellent test results in the High School Entrance Examinations. The differences between Experimental Class and the parallel class include, first, the former had fewest students in number with the

finest quality faculties; second, it enjoyed priority in [using] all the best teaching facilities that the school could provide, and was always firstly informed with the contest information [city-wide, province-wide and nationwide]. I felt more academic pressure in the Experimental Class because my peers were top students from middle schools citywide, and teachers accordingly raised the difficulty level in the academic study. ...Other than the PEP English textbooks, we used the 21st century English newspaper in class. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Unlike Dandan that entered the Experimental Class in Grade Ten for optimum education, Xiaogang was chosen for the Gifted Class in Grade Twelve, the graduating grade in high school, for optimum education. He recalled the academic bars for entering this Gifted Class and his “most remorseful” learning experience that followed by saying,

... Your comprehensive scores in Grades 10 and 11 [would decide whether you were qualified for the Gifted Class]. This class was only for the very best ones in science classes. There were only 15 students [in the Gifted Class], while the rest were in parallel class with over 60 in each. The academic pressure in the Gifted Class was unbearable.

... there were only 15 of us in this Gifted Class, while in the rest parallel classes there were over 60 [peers]. We had pretty big room for each [in the Gifted Class]. Second, all the six core subject teachers only served us. It was indeed convenient to find them for questions and assistance. We had 10 males and 5 females. We were all expected to enter the best universities of the country. Teachers were highly responsible and nice, except for the homeroom teacher in the Gifted Class. She was rather demanding and mean to us.

...I didn't like that class. I didn't the learning methods that class favored. I didn't like the homeroom teacher, as she cared nothing but our test scores. She was mean. ... She only chatted with the very best one while coldly neglected the rest in class. I was then ranked middle in the gifted class. She never cared about me or talked to me. I often felt I was marginalized because I was not ranked top. ... Well, the most remorseful thing was that I entered the Gifted Class. This meant I gave up my homeroom teacher who then taught us English and my own classmates in Grades 10 and 11.

Well, I harvested my Waterloo in the *Gaokao*. I had too much pressure in this class and developed some mental problems, such as over-anxiety before the *Gaokao*. In this Gifted Class, unbearable pressure from teachers and peers was like endless nightmare, haunting on you day and night. Such external factors greatly affected my inner motivation, though the material conditions and resources were much more desirable in this Gifted Class.

... I didn't get the chance to attend my first and second choice universities. ... I was so upset then and was planning to redo Grade 12 and the *Gaokao* next year. I didn't exert myself in that year's *Gaokao*. I was below my average in 30-40 points. This school was my third choice. I chose it only because it is in Shanghai. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Both as top students in high school that were chosen for optimum education, Dandan and Xiaogang possessed different perspectives towards what they had experienced in such gifted education that was only available for the very few. On reflecting the meaning of this particular learning experience in high school, Dandan referred to its pressure as affordable; while to Xiaogang, it was an endless nightmare, causing serious trauma such as overanxiety before the *Gaokao*.

To those who would take the *Gaokao* when they finish high school to enter university, academic and peer pressure is always inevitable. As an overachiever in

primary, middle, and high school because of his academic excellence, Xiaogang had particular insights into the impact of such pressure from both the inside and outside by saying,

... Academic and peer pressure can be both good and bad to us. In middle and high school, when we haven't realized the importance of English, proper academic pressure from exams can be a positive academic stimulation. But, once when we find out its vital role in our academic life, such pressure could be very negative. Why? It is simply because once you realize such critical role in subject studies, you would grow to be anxious before the exam. You would worry about it, and it would haunt on you all the way. If you fail in exams, you know, there are possible contingencies that one may fail in the test-oriented education, you would, [short pause], feel rather overwhelmed, lost and pessimistic about your objectives. Your self-esteem would fall. (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015)

Xiaogang seemed calm and unbiased when he was referring to the stress on high school students like him because it could be positive and motivating in learning. However, he was also straightforward and sharp on how it would affect one's mental health and make him afraid of failing. When he was recalling his frustration in academic listening, Xiaogang referred to such fear,

... Many of my peers felt the same way. We then became much less motivated in academic listening since we encountered failure over and again. Failure leads to fear and withdrawal. This means we are trapped in a vicious circle of negative learning, in which we could hardly exert ourselves in this aspect (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015).

What is revealed is the impact of the test-oriented education on learners with a "relationship between fear and difficulty" (Freire, 2005, p. 49). Freire discussed the reason for fearing, arguing that the solution is not "allowing that fear to paralyze us, not allowing that fear to persuade us to quit, to face a challenging situation without an effort, without a fight" (p. 50). Instead, it is to seek for active solution.

In this study, all four participants admitted the stress from the *Gaokao*. Like what Freire (2005) analyzed in dealing with fear, difficulty, and insecurity in the educational process, these Chinese ELLs responded to their stress and mental health through different means. Dandan was saying,

... I developed an interest in foreign movies then [in high school] and learned English from reading my dad's English novels, or the ones I purchased from bookstores or borrowed from library. I also watched movies recommended by *Microblogs* or [by] my peers. Reading English novels helped improve my reading ability, making test items in reading comprehension easy [to me]. Extensive reading on English books and classroom learning of vocabulary and grammar with teachers were important in high school. I started extensive reading in English as an 11th grader. Though the school schedule was tight, I squeezed time for reading, such as time in recess, during lunch break, dinner break and bedtime. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Manifestly, Dandan resorted to English readings and foreign movies for relaxation and enrichment during this period. To her, academic pressure in high school was affordable and she was able to maintain a balanced life and study with good school records.

Meimei gained academic confidence in high school through attending private English institutes and having English home tutoring outside the school. She

remained ardent in language study and sought actively for more systematic, customized English home tutoring to enhance her English competence. To her, the pressure was “O.K., as English was not a burden in high school, ... though there was heavy pressure on most of us” (Interview One, October 11th, 2015). Other than subject studies in high school, Meimei developed a love of reading in English, a desire of applying for an international university because of her strong English competence, and a passion for studying modern drama during busy high school years. She was saying,

... I like modern drama. ... in the summer of Grade 11 when I finished the proficiency test, I traveled to Shanghai alone for a modern drama *A Dreamlike Dream* by the producer LAI Shengchuan. It lasted for eight hours. ... London is the cradle of drama. I aspire to have an overseas experience there. (*ibid.*)

Self-boasting as a pragmatist, Xiaobo learned to outsmart the test-oriented teaching with excellent test results. Claiming to have no effective language study methods in high school, he used his strategic skills of cramming English and math workbooks with higher difficulty levels and challenging study tasks for better test results. He was saying, “... I followed my own pace and worked on huge amounts of exercises [in high school]. I was willing to do so” (Interview One, October 1st, 2015).

As a precocious book lover and early reader, Xiaogang enriched his high school life through reading history and theology for “assistance, support, and guidance” (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015). He also travelled with his father to different places to see the world during winter and summer breaks. Xiaogang was referring to this aspect by saying,

... Reading a book is like conversing with a person. But through traveling, I converse with different people from different places with different mood. We chat. I see how they live their lives, what kind of constructive influences may their experience have on mine. I would automatically make connections between other people’s life and mine. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

In Xiaogang’s view, reading and traveling were the means that he preferred to release academic stress. He not only loved to see the life of people around him and to find the influences of their lived experience on his own, but also built the meaning-making connections between the lives of both parties.

6.6 Chinese English Teachers of Different Qualities

The teachers’ role on students’ academic success is crucial as they not only teach them knowledge but also help them grow physically and mentally (Chen, 2001; Ding, 2001; Li, 2000) and enable them to read critically for changes (Freire, 2005; Ren, 1997). This is particularly true in student’s academic English learning experience (Huang & Benson, 2007; Rao, 2012; Zhang, 2007). All four participants claimed to be more or less influenced by their English teachers in school or at

private English tutorials. Due to the distinctness of their language study in primary, middle, and high school and at university, these participants identified their teachers of different qualities as caring, supportive ones, and uncaring ones. The former guided them like a mentor and supported their learning with full responsibility, while the latter discouraged the learner morale and quenched the passion for English learning.

All four participants were influenced by caring, supportive teachers at different learning stages. These teachers, whether of Chinese or foreign nationalities, worked responsibly with “logic thinking, professional knowledge, good disposition, and full commitment to students” (Meimei, Interview Three, October 16th, 2015). They not only cared about the meticulous learning process in previewing, teacher–student interaction, reviewing, homework, examinations, and student feedback, but also guided their learners patiently with loving care like a motherly mentor (Davis, 2003, 2011; Gay, 2000). Additionally, they inspired and encouraged the latter to learn English as much as they could, serving as a positive motivating force in the academic growth of these university youth.

In the ensuing sections, three representative types of caring, supportive teachers as well as uncaring teachers were discussed, namely school teachers that taught not for examination purposes, University EAP teachers as navigating beacon and inspiration, and uncaring teachers that discouraged learning.

6.6.1 School Teachers that Taught not for Examination Purposes

Among the participants, Xiaogang and Dandan displayed a clear memory of their Chinese English teachers in primary school. Xiaogang recalled that his English teachers were always smiling and encouraging in English classes. Dandan referred to one of her English teachers who taught in the higher grade in primary school by saying,

... Sometimes in and after class, she rewarded students with listening ears with small school supplies, such as rubbers or pencils. ... She impressed me most as she was highly responsible for each class. She had detailed lesson plans and prepared all kinds of teaching aids based on the content of each unit. She had a big bag to keep various teaching aids she made by hand, funny little things, like colored word cards and other props. ... I felt she cared about me because ... I remembered sometimes when she met me at school she would advise me to work harder. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

In Xiaogang’s and Dandan’s views, these devoted teachers were respected as they empowered their little pupils to learn through their dedication to classroom teaching and motherly loving care in words and deeds. Though English remains as a foreign language to Chinese ELLs, and there exists a huge regional gap in the primary level ELT, these teachers used encouraging words and hand-made teaching

aids, such as colored word cards and other teaching gadgets, to empower students for high learner morale and to facilitate their otherwise boring language study.

In middle school and high school, with the progressive difficulty levels in the English curriculum, teachers became stricter in class. Meimei recalled her middle school English teachers who demanded a serious learning attitude through the old *carrot-and-stick* approach, pushing those with the intermediate and low achievements forward. In high school, her Chinese English teachers applied the modern technology of powerpoints in class and broadened her horizon with the dazzling foreign cultures and other interesting topics based on their overseas study experience and rich lived experience. These living stories from her Chinese English teachers played a role on Meimei, making her feel that teachers who dared to share, to teach, and to criticize possessed sincere loving care for students (Davis, 2003, 2011; Freire, 2005; Gay, 2000; Noddings, 1992). According to Meimei, 80% of her learning motivation and inspiration came from teachers she met, and how much and well she could learn depended on how the teacher would guide and instruct. Xiaogang referred to one of his caring Chinese English teacher in the first year of high school by saying,

... I liked her because she was a good mentor to me. She knew a lot about simple truths in life. She would share and comfort us in the darkness of high school years. She would inspire me with warm encouragement and help me with some possible solutions to the problems I encountered in life and study. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaogang was impressed by his homeroom teacher in Grades Ten and Eleven because she cared students. She shared simple truths in life with her students and comforted them with soothing conversations and carefree jokes when they were under enormous academic pressure for the *Gaokao*. She inspired them with warm encouragement and helped them with possible solutions to various problems they encountered in life and study. To Xiaogang, this teacher's motherly care, support, and positive influences fulfilled his vulnerable mental needs during the sensitive period of high school, and fostered his emotional and intellectual growth (Davis, 2003, 2011; Noddings, 1992). This explains why Xiaogang felt it was the "most remorseful thing" that he gave up this homeroom teacher who then taught them English to enter the Gifted Class.

In the bilingual middle school, Dandan had a young female homeroom teacher who was more passionate and confident in teaching than other senior teachers. She documented students' learning difficulties and life puzzles in a thick notebook and offered earnest help through private conversations with advice and possible solutions after class. The good teacher-student connections developed thereby, which was best manifested when students felt they were treated fair and nice like friends. Other than Chinese English teachers, there were easy-going American teachers who taught English in a way different from their poker-faced Chinese counterparts. Dandan liked their culture-integrated teaching and partook actively in the English Corner and Special Class integrated in the English curriculum. When she proceeded to high school, Dandan met a male teacher whom she respected as a teacher of conscience and responsibility. She referred to him and his teaching philosophy as follows,

... he taught not for exam purposes. He knew the *Gaokao* was not everything to us, as literacy cultivation was equally important. He added English and American cultures and oral expressions, even though these would not be tested in the *Gaokao*. We liked his teaching, especially those useful expressions [he taught in class]. Though there was no English oral test in the HSEE or the *Gaokao*, even there were no oral tests in finals, we learned actively. I think oral ability was equally important to listening, reading, and writing, or even more important, for if one would not engage in language research, most of time he would use it [the language] for communication. Hence, speaking is utmost important. People around me did not think so since there was no oral test in school, making speaking inferior to other language skills. I had many peers from primary to high school that had a good demand of reading, writing and listening abilities, but they were *dumb* in English. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

This male teacher enlightened his English classes by incorporating English and American cultures and authentic expressions in teaching planning to inform that the literacy cultivation was equally crucial in one's cognitive growth. Students liked him and his nontraditional teaching not for examination purposes. They learned with full endeavor though there was no oral English test in the finals or the *Gaokao*.

What is revealed in these participants' utterances is that caring and supportive teachers matter in their students' early years of language study and academic success (Davis, 2011; Gay, 2000; Good & Brophy, 1978, 1994). These teachers demonstrated the professionalism of "patience, persistence, facilitation, validation and empowerment" in enabling and motivating student to learn in socially responsible ways (Gay, 2000, p. 47).

6.6.2 University EAP Teachers as Navigating Beacon and Inspiration

Upon entering university, all four participants attended the placement test and were assigned to University EAP program offered by both Chinese and foreign teachers. With foreign EAP textbooks in use, they were confronted with unprecedented challenges and learning difficulties when the concepts and knowledge of critical thinking, independent research abilities, and research paper construction were wrapped up in teaching and study tasks. They soon found that their EAP teachers' mentor role of navigating and supporting again played a role on their University EAP learning.

Though they had different EAP teachers in the past year's language study, all participants remained impressed of teacher influence and recounted it with respect and awe regarding their distinctive dispositions and teaching styles. These University EAP teachers were grouped into three types:

- The first type was "amiable" in personality but "flexible, responsible and assertive" teacher (Meimei, Interview Two, October 12th, 2015). This type of teacher demanded textbooks in class, exploring the intention of foreign textbook developers and how University EAP should be best approached in their hands.

They stayed focused at a moderate pace on what they felt important and helpful to their learners, such as the key concepts and study skills in EAP.

- The second type was “resourceful and talkative” with “popular personal charisma” teacher (Meimei, Interview Two, October 12th, 2015). This type of teacher maintained good relations with students and knew how to make classes easy and fruitful. Meimei recalled her teacher in Semester Two who introduced the different philosophical schools, saying this teacher opened a door before her to the wisdom of philosophy through the literature. Her research passion in this field was hence ignited by her ardent self-exploration and extensive reading in sleepless nights.
- The third type was a “quick-tongued savvy and think tank” teacher (Meimei, Interview Two, October 12th, 2015). This type of teacher spoon-fed the class at a fast pace with an avalanche of learning resources in and outside the class, making students sometimes overwhelmed with insufficient time for digesting these ample academic inputs.

Other than their versatile and distinctive professionalism, these teachers navigated classes patiently in learning and exploring more efficient language study at university level. The great efforts demonstrated in University EAP teaching and learning in terms of word choice brainstorming, paragraph and text construction, and research summary writing with model examples and meticulous instructions proved rewarding. This is because these activities helped eliminate the “creeping fear and anxiety in Semester 1 of the first school year” (Meimei, Interview Two, October 12th, 2015). Writing skills in the IELTS test were added when critical thinking and the structure and framework of formal writing were lectured, which enlightened students on the affordability of University EAP threshold writing tasks and research projects. However, according to Meimei, if a student wished for creativeness in the depth and breadth of the content in writing, he had to “rack his minds and invest time” (*ibid.*). Meimei used the following rhetoric to describe her EAP teachers at university,

... I myself like English. I have more interaction with my EAP teachers. It is hard to say it is because I like English or I like these teachers. These factors are integrated. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

... [T]eachers matter in my English learning. I always take the initiative in conversing with my EAP teachers. They inspire and encourage me in learning. They help solve my learning difficulties. They enrich and broaden my horizon. They are influential. I find sympathy in conversing with them. I respect them because they present to me what English can work and cultivate on an individual. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Such heartfelt compliment on University EAP teachers echoed in Xiaogang’s words when he was comparing his Chinese English teachers in high school and at university that

... I feel all my high school English teachers and EAP teachers at university were professionals with full commitment. EAP teachers are far more competitive than their colleagues in high school, as they have more academic vocabulary, broader knowledge scope and better language proficiency. I feel I could teach high school, better than my high school

teachers; they lack in communication competence. They might be good at teaching writing, but they may not be able to communicate or listen well. I, instead, feel these two capacities are crucial to language learners. (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015)

Xiaogang lived in gratitude to his English teachers in high school and at university for initiating him into the knowledge of English language. Through the comparison on his Chinese English teachers, Xiaogang not only remarked on the teacher professionalism at the different educational levels but also manifested what a positive role a caring, supportive language teacher could play on her language learners regarding their overall language proficiency, and how important the communicative competence could be in foreign language study to an enthusiastic learner like Xiaogang.

6.6.3 *Uncaring Teachers that Discouraged Learning*

Unlike caring teachers that support students' progressive academic advancement and school success, there are uncaring ones that are characterized by "impatience, intolerance, dictations, and control" in school (Gay, 2000, p. 47). With discouraging attitudes, expectations, and behaviors, these teachers often devalue and demean the intellectual abilities and potentials of their students, thus causing "deleterious effects" (Gay, 2000, p. 46) on students' emotional and intellectual growth and obstruct their school success (Good & Brophy, 1994; Harry, 1992; Oakes, 1985). Some participants encountered uncaring English teachers in school.

Meimei and Xiaobo were dissatisfied with uncaring teachers they encountered in middle school because these teachers came with "irrational behaviors to students, such as throwing down the mouse, or the blackboard brush before us" (Meimei, Interview One, October 11th, 2015) or "muddled in class" like a dead routine (Xiaobo, Interview One, October 1st, 2015). Though these teachers were degree holders and had teacher certificates, their behaviorist mindset discouraged the learner morale and quenched their learners' passion for language study in school. Moreover, according to them, there was one typical type of uncaring teachers that was most common across the country: They cared only about their students' test results other than treating them as holistic individuals.

Meimei and Xiaobo felt the major reason for teachers' irresponsibility or "occupational incompetence" (Peter & Hull, 1969) was due to the larger class size of nearly fifty-five students in a class. "It was difficult for subject teachers to take care of each of us when the class was big," Meimei responded. Some teachers, particularly in suburban public schools, often adopted a *laissez-faire* approach to students. This was because in the country, an unspoken convention was that subject teachers, other than homeroom teachers, might not be privileged in school or by parents. Furthermore, when students' test results for the *Gaokao* were given top priority, other aspects of their physical and mental health were more or less neglected. Xiaobo attributed his failure in recalling the textbook content to the

teacher irresponsibility because his English teacher stopped lecturing on textbooks. In order to expect better test results from her students, she turned to lecturing on test items in model test papers.

The extreme case of uncaring teachers was from Xiaogang when he was chosen to the Gifted Class in Grade Twelve of high school. He soon realized that he did not like the learning atmosphere that the Class favored. The homeroom teacher was mean and cared nothing but her top students' test scores and ranking. Holding a sense of agony, Xiaogang was saying,

... She [the homeroom teacher of the Gifted Class] only chatted with the very best one while coldly neglected the rest in class. I was then ranked middle [in the Class]. She never cared about me or talked to me. I often felt I was marginalized because I was not ranked top. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

In Xiaogang's eyes, the coldness and inhumanity of this type of teacher could be detrimental to average students; she favored only the overachievers, displaying little loving care to the rest in class. What made an adolescent teenager like Xiaogang felt frustrated and agonized was her intentional neglect, which was mentally hurtful as this was attributed to a negative assumption that he was not good enough because he was not ranked top. This torment and the unbearable pressure from his classmates was like endless nightmare, which affected his integrative motivation and mental health before the *Gaokao*, despite that the material conditions and teacher resources were regarded as optimum in this Gifted Class.

Grounded on this unpleasant learning experience in high school, Xiaogang reflected the school education he received from primary, middle, and high school to university. He shed light on the teacher expectation and teacher influence on the basis of his learning experience, as well as much of his peers' by commenting that,

... Teachers [in primary, middle and high school] would not allow your innovation or creativity; actually this was deliberately oppressed. ... Exam answers are all fixed. They just want what they've input [in you]. No more. [At university,] it depends on what expectation teachers have on you. This may, in return, affect students' learning goals and study skills. If teachers themselves forge ahead with determination, their students would not remain lazy; if teacher are conformists, their students would be no better than that. (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015)

Evidently, students like Xiaogang were craving for caring, supportive teachers since teachers' Rosenthal expectation and influence (Rao, 2012) was invaluable and influential on their students' mental health development and academic success.

6.7 Different Motivations in English Learning

Motivation has been considered key to successful L2 learning (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 2001, 2005; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, 2011; Gardner, 1985; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Zhang & Kim, 2013). Gardner and Lambert (1972) defined motivation as integrative motivation, or intrinsic motivation, and

instrumental motivation, or extrinsic motivation. Literature over the last 40 years in SLA and ELT showed that both types of motivation play a role in the success of L2 learning (Rifai, 2010; Dörnyei, 1990; Gardner, 1979, 1988; Gardner & McIntyre, 1991; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Zhang & Kim, 2013).

In a country like China where English is the leading foreign language used in all walks of life and is required in the school curriculum at all educational levels, students learn the language for a variety of reasons, integratively as well as instrumentally. In this study, all four participants started academic English learning as a required core subject right around the school age in primary school. They continued language study in middle and high school and at university. Their voices on their learning motivations, along with the change of motivations in their schooldays, were investigated and analyzed for the attributes that accounted to the formation of learner morale and learning attitude in language study.

6.7.1 Learners and Integrative Motivation in English Learning

According to Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972), integrative, or intrinsic motivation, is identified with positive attitudes toward the target language group and a desire to integrate into it, or at least an interest in the culture of the target language and in meeting and interacting with members of the target language group (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). To ELLs in China, English is far from being part of a student's life but a required school subject largely for the examination purposes before entering university. Despite the socio-educational adversity for English learning, other than Xiaobo that insisted having no internal drives for language study in the past school years, other participants, such as Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaogang, discussed in depth their love of academic English learning grounded on different reasons.

Dandan

As one of the two female participants that had a standing passion for English learning, Dandan recalled her love of language study early in primary school by saying,

... Learning English in Grades 1 and 2 was like playing. It was to develop an interest [in this foreign language]. ...I liked English. ... I was interested in it then. I never bored about it. I had interest and confidence. I always gained good school grades. The study load was not heavy. I sought more extracurricular materials once I was informed by my classmates or people around. I had *Cambridge Young Learners' English* (CYLE) and *New Concept English* (NCE). I buried myself in NCE reading and listening when I was in Grade 6.

I had classmates that attended private English tutorials after school. There were a variety of such private English institutes in town. I was eager to go. ... I went there every weekend [for English learning enrichment]. ... I liked the teacher there because she did not teach for the test purposes. Instead, she taught foreign cultures and how to pronounce in English. She drew our attention to oral ability and grammar. She used the NCE books and other supplementary materials. There were English public speech festivals at *Dashan*. I partook in two, and was awarded the first prize. We did not have such activities in school. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

When in Grade Six, the graduating grade of primary school, the academic pressure was zooming, Dandan maintained high learner morale and remained passionate for language study, as she said with reflection,

... luckily, English study was not a burden to me [in Grade 6]. I did not have any particular learning strategies or methods. I just cared about it. Once when I was in the street and noticed unfamiliar English words, I would consult the dictionary. I had good memory, and was attentive in reading. I liked reading in English. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

In a tier-2 city in Central China, it is rare to have a primary school pupil like Dandan who demonstrated a strong intrinsic passion for learning a foreign language and for early awareness of learner autonomy. When English remained a headache to many sixth graders, Dandan, as an even-age pupil, cared more about the acquisition of unfamiliar words on the street and resorted actively to the assistance of dictionary for the exact meaning of new words.

In middle school, Dandan started to have foreign teachers that taught once a week since Grade Seven. She soon grew used to the English-medium instructions and engaged in the light and fun classes by foreign teachers. She was impressive of the Special Class that she proudly attended,

... One student out of each class was chosen to attend the one-hour Special Class offered by the foreign teacher at lunch break every Monday. I was the one chosen from my class [to attend it]. My American teacher enriched us with reading materials that introduced America and the American culture. These materials were difficult in vocabulary and content, but I still keep them. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

During this time, Dandan's learning methods in language study shaped up, and she started to make meaning-making connections between her subject studies. It was then that Dandan was endeavouring in applying English to the study of other disciplines and in practicing autonomous learning. She referred to these aspects as follows,

... I had my methods in English learning in middle school. I previewed texts before class. I was attentive in class. I followed teachers and took notes [in class]. I reviewed each class and did homework [in time]. I did extra reading. We subscribed some English newspaper [then] for the enrichment study purposes. My Chinese English teachers often required that we finished grammar exercises in the newspaper. I would further scrutinize articles within by myself. I took notes on translation in primary school, and continued on vocabulary and grammar in middle school. Grammar was easy.

Though the school did not offer any advanced teaching [in English], it offered us information about English contests school-wide and citywide, and at the provincial and national level. I have partaken many, such as the voice-over English speech contests at the school

level, the English knowledge contests at the city and provincial level, and the CCTV Star of Outlook English Contest. At that time, I would participate in 2 to 3 contests within one week. These contest experience were helpful. When I encountered difficulties in writing for the speech contests, I would resort to my Chinese English teacher and my foreign teacher [for assistance]. My foreign teacher refined my writing and helped me how to perform in a public speech contest. My confidence in English was rising every time I partook in these contests, and I was awarded the first or the second prizes [in them].

... in middle school, other than English, we had Chinese language arts, mathematics, politics, physics, chemistry, history, geography and biology, which were mainly offered in Chinese. Sometimes, geography, biology and music were taught in English. ... I learned these subjects well in the hope of scaffolding my English learning. It was like when I was reading a history book in English, I improved my vocabulary, grammar and [oral and written] expressions. I did all these largely by myself. Since I was boarding, the daily schedule [in school] was tight. I did not have much spare time for enrichment. Hence, over the weekends when I was home, I would read and recite my father's NCE books, which he had when in college. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

In Grade Nine of high school, Dandan signed up for the school visit program and was chosen to visit the sister school of her own in Wisconsin, U.S. She recalled this overseas exchange experience, expressing her strong interest in the school life of her American peers during her short stay and in interacting with more native speakers of English in and outside the school by saying,

... An American teacher from the senior high of Wisconsin once invited us in Special Class to SKYPE with some senior high students in Wisconsin on one evening. We chatted on movie stars, football stars and popular music. I could understand and converse with my American peers. ... I liked the living and learning environment [in Wisconsin]. ... I saw how English worked in people's daily life. Language is living. ... People were kind and nice. This exchange experience impressed me. I hence have developed an ambition of studying in America [upon university graduation]. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

This school visit experience fulfilled Dandan's eagerness in communicating with native speakers of English in the real-life settings and broadened her academic horizon as an active language learner. It helped develop her definite plans for English learning, overseas learning goals, and determination of applying for a U.S. graduate school upon university graduation. She was saying that,

... in my growing up, my parents have never taken me abroad other than this short exchange program. I have relatives that had settled down abroad and friends that are studying overseas, I wish I can make it, too. I feel if I hope to use English for communication purposes, good oral ability would be enough; if I wish for more, I would read more English novels and literature. I am planning to take the TOEFL test next year because TOEFL is valid for two years. I aspire to apply for an American graduate school upon graduation. I have purchased practice tests for TOEFL and plan to work on them myself. My expectation for TOEFL *ibt* is over 100; if I would do IELTS, it would be 7.5 out of 9.0. I feel the preparation for TOEFL or IELTS would be different from that for the *Gaokao*. In middle school, there were no such weekly tests; but when I was a 10th and 11th grader, for some time we had tests every two weeks, and then monthly tests, middle-term and final-term exams. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

With her good study habits of previewing, reviewing, and autonomous reading, Dandan did not feel stressed on English learning in Grade Nine upon graduating. In

high school with the soaring pressure for the *Gaokao*, she felt the study load of the subject of English was affordable and continued to maintain good school achievements. She also managed to squeeze time for autonomous learning on the NCE series, as she said,

... My middle school English teacher once said if I could finish NCE 1, I would attain the Grade 9 academic level. When I proceeded to Grade 7, she advised me to NCE 2. In high school, I started NCE 3. I have been reading NCE till today. I didn't know better English materials other than this. When one moves along its difficulty levels, it would take more time to read and digest. So I did not need to attend any after-school private English institutes in high school. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Meanwhile, when class time was crammed for the *Gaokao*, Dandan's passion for English language made her explore more effective means to scaffold her language study. She reflected earnestly on these means and her eagerness for extensive reading by saying,

... I developed an interest in foreign movies [then] and learned English by reading my dad's English novels, or the ones I purchased from bookstores or borrowed from the library. I also watched movies recommended by *Microblogs* or my peers. Reading English novels helped improve my reading ability, making test items in reading comprehension easy [to me].

Extensive reading on English books and classroom learning of vocabulary and grammar with teachers were important in high school. I started extensive reading in English as an 11th grader. Though the school schedule was tight, I squeezed time for reading, such as time in recess, during lunch break, dinner break, and bedtime. Luckily the school authority did not stop students like me from reading other than textbooks. (*ibid.*)

Further, Dandan uttered more thought-provoking reflections on her English learning at different school levels by summarizing,

...in primary school, I learned English as a subject for good grades. It was not until middle school that I started to see and realize how native speakers would use it for [real] communication purposes. At that time, I engaged in school activities and public speech contests, which have enhanced my overall English proficiency, confidence in learning, and growing passion for it. Then in Grade 9, the school-visit program sent me to Wisconsin, and I saw how English worked in people's daily life.

... Language is living. From primary, middle to high school, I have learned English for 12 years. But, I felt English learning was independent from other subject study because I did not see how it scaffolded my other subjects. Probably it helped, I am not sure. If so, it helped save time for other subject studies, such as mathematics, which was my headache. I did not have any particular learning methods in English, it was my passion and the bilingual environment that my bilingual middle school provided that has guided me forward. I would not say teachers' role meant a lot in my English learning. My harvest came from my autonomous learning on NCE, interactions with foreign teachers, reading English books and other text materials, watching movies, and my study tour experience in Wisconsin. These experience matter. (*ibid.*)

What is revealed essentially in Dandan's story of her integrative motivation on language study is effusive. At university, Dandan continued her study habits, "I keep pace with teachers and stay attentive; after class, I review and finish

homework. This is like what I did in high school; not to be outsmarted” (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015). Her perseverance in “learn[ing] English every day ever since high school” motivated her reading and listening on the NCE series and other learning materials to this date at university, reshaping her goals for stronger English competence for the potential overseas study opportunities (Interview Three, October 12th, 2015). Besides her University EAP program, Dandan was planning for learning one more foreign language, French. She was saying that,

... I feel my major has close connection with English. ... I will start French as my second foreign language next semester. I have interest in languages. I feel French and English are close in some vocabulary; hence, learning one more foreign language helps. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

Meimei

Meimei did not start English learning until Grade Three. The school drama experience in Grade Four was “impressive and intrigued me in English learning. ... [In Grade Five] I started to search for private English tutoring available for the sake of self-enrichment” (Interview One, October 11th, 2015). Meimei referred to the reason that she chose the first private English institute by saying,

... the reason I chose this private English institute was [that] its propaganda was eye-catching. It boasted itself *pinyin* English. It said one could learn English through Chinese pinyin, no need for learning English phonetic sounds. This sounds appealing to me. I read their flyer, attended a demo class, and decided to continue the study. I spent three years there, from Grades 5 to 7. They had their teaching materials which were called *Pinyin* English. I heard the school head was from Beijing, who once worked in the field of study abroad agency. (*ibid.*)

In the successive years, Meimei continued her extracurricular English learning at different private English institutes in her home city. These 7-year private English tutoring in a row after school time was the only thing that she had persevered with full support from her parents. In her view, English learning at private English institutes accompanied her through the hardship in the school English program and built a solid foundation for her language competence. Meimei recalled her passion for English tutorials as follows,

... I come from a small city; I have altogether attended three private English institutes outside the school. One was Cambridge Young Learner’s center. I did not mention it because I might have had classes there for one semester. Now I have little impression on it. The second was *Pinyin English*. The third was *Sunshine* English; I remember it because the school head was called Sunshine. Personally, I prefer small-class teaching; but when I was at *Sunshine* in Grades 8 and 9, the class size was very big with over 100 students. I don’t care much about the class size because I would always sit in the front. ... I chose to attend these private English institutes because I like to learn English. This is the only thing that I have persevered with for years with full support from my parents, though none of my family or relatives have worked in a field that requires English as a working language. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

In the first school year of high school, Meimei made two big decisions in life that were related to her language study: One was that she chose to stay in the class in

which the homeroom teacher taught English, the other was that she self-nominated to serve as the class representative of English. She was proud of her decisions that fulfilled her passion for English learning in high school. She was saying,

... I was tall from childhood, hence teachers often asked me to serve as the class representative of the P.E. classes, though I had little interest in this post. But when I proceeded to high school I simply wanted to serve as the class representative of English even though there would be trifles such as collecting homework, distributing homework, reporting quiz feedbacks, and the like. I was very strict with my peers. When they needed to do the make-ups, I would not allow them to cheat. I remained in this post for three full years in high school. I was proud of me on this post. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Other than working as the class representative of English, Meimei finished three thick notebooks full of grammar notes from her tutorial program after school. She keeps these notebooks at university and often turns to them for reviewing, regarding them as her priceless treasure with a strong sense of achievement. Attending these customized, face-to-face tutorials, according to Meimei, was to fulfill her passion for language study and to close the gap in her language proficiency. Hence, it was not unusual hearing her comment on the centrality of grammar in English learning and more of her customized classes to fulfill her English learning needs,

... Grammar is of utmost importance; it is the guide; time and tense is important. Subordinate clauses, such as noun and adverbial clauses, are important. It is vital to learn them and know how to use them. When in high school, most of my peers were poorly aware of the importance of grammar, I had realized its centrality in English learning.

Then, when I was in Grade 11, I felt English in high school was easy and I harvested little, and needed further enrichment. In high school I had only 4 English classes per week, and my English teacher was poor in curriculum design and lesson planning. Hence, I decided to have one more one-to-one tutorial program again with my Sunshine English teacher. ... I became more enlightened on clauses and other language points [through these tutorials]. I felt gratified with my slow but solid progress. ... At the time in Grade 12, I was even planning to apply for Hong Kong University. (*ibid.*)

Though the academic pressure was heavy in Grade Twelve, the graduating grade of high school, Meimei said she was O.K. with it, as English was not an academic burden. When others had to invest large chunks of time reviewing English before examinations, she

seldom reviewed English before monthly tests, or middle or final examinations. I would, half an hour prior to the [English] examination, take out my English textbooks and take a quick glance at the content in each unit since some test items, such as blank-filling, were directly from the texts, and I had to recite them all correct. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

At university, Meimei continued to have private English tutorials on listening and oral work. She was saying,

... [At this private English institute,] online instructions are integrated with face-to-face teaching. There is a topic embedded in each unit with videos. I made use of my lunch break to practice reading at school library. I hoped to guarantee that I have at least half an hour daily in reading and listening. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

Meimei was doing so because she had the learning goal of taking the IELTS test in the spring of 2016. She was developing her long-term planning for overseas graduate study on modern drama in London because “London is the cradle of drama. I aspire to have an overseas experience there” (*ibid.*). Based on the reflections of the influence of her past schooling experience for meaning, Meimei summarized her integrative motivation for language study by saying,

... It [my English learning] is intrigued by interest and passion. When you have a strong love of it, it would become the best guide. This is natural and the most effective way. ... First, I have consistent passion for English learning when young. Teachers play an important role [in my English learning]. They matter. Second, through years’ study, I have harvested in English learning. I am making progress in language proficiency, interpersonal communication, and self-cultivation. This is the [internal] motivation for my future study. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Xiaogang

Compared with Dandan and Meimei, Xiaogang’s intrinsic motivation in English learning grew late, as in the beginning he felt English was fun but useless in life. Xiaogang recalled his initial mindset of English learning by saying,

... I didn’t like it much at the very beginning. ... In my early life, there was no such a place for English, at most a couple of foreign logos on the street. These left with me an impression that English was useless in my life. ... I just felt it was fun but useless. I never thought this would be used for real communication, or one day I would use it to converse with foreigners. I never thought I would land in Shanghai for higher education or studying abroad. I assumed I would grow up and settle down where I was born. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Xiaogang started English learning with foreign teachers at a private English institute in his home city under his mother’s insistence when he was a 1st grader. Later on, this experience developed in him the internal drive for language study,

... On the first night [of Grade 3 in school] I managed to recite all words in unit 1. I felt good about myself. I had learned them before [with my foreign teachers]. I felt superior to others. (*ibid.*)

In Grade Four, Xiaogang’s mother purchased for him English readings such as New Concept English (NCE) series. This, according to Xiaogang, opened before him the window to a different world of unknown wonders. He was saying,

... I love reading since young. When I proceeded to Grade 4, my mom felt I have to learn English well. Hence, she purchased some English readings, like New Concept. All was in English. ... Fictions are always engaging.... I started to practice reading. ... Nobody helped. When I encountered new words, I would look them up in the dictionary by myself. I had English-Chinese Dictionary at home. I only focused on the meaning [in words] in Chinese. ... Gradually I realized it [English] was fun. ... Reading *New Concept* enlarged my vocabulary recognition and enhanced my sense of language due to its larger vocabulary tank, ... making me competent in all kinds of grammar workbooks and exams.... In Grade 4, when we moved on to more common words in English. I felt this was fun and helpful. I could make meaningful connections between a foreign language like English and my first language. It was like building a bridge to connect a strange world and your own. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

It is uncommon that Xiaogang, as a school-age pupil, developed such an insight into his language study. In the beginning, he appeared to be more able than others when he managed to recite the words in his English textbook; within years, he learned to work independently on text materials with an English-Chinese dictionary for the meaning of new words and expressions he encountered while reading. He interpreted the connection between the two languages and deemed his cognitive process as building a bridge to connect a “strange but exciting world [through English]” and “your known but unimaginative surroundings [his own life]” (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015).

Later in middle school, Xiaogang had a female home tutor with a Ph.D. in English who tutored him on vocabulary, grammar, phonetics, and reading. As a seventh grader in middle school, he aspired to learn more in English and to make further progress in this school subject. He was saying,

... at that time we lived in a city in East China. There were more chances that English could be used. ... I participated in an English contest once in primary school and was awarded the 2nd prize. It was called *Hope Cup*. This experience convinced me of an old Chinese saying of “no pains, no gains”. ... Furthermore, I have had a preliminary planning for my life then. ... I talked to my parents and people around and developed my own attitude of future life.... My plan was to study abroad at Columbia University in the U.S. ... I searched online, and landed myself at Columbia University. Columbia University ranks Top 100. It was super. [I wanted to go to U.S. because] there has been lots of news about this country. ... at that time, Obama was newly ascended as the U.S. president. Further, I see commonalities and differences between the two countries [China and the U.S.]. I searched U.S. universities. I shared this with my home tutor and asked her to help me [for greater progress in English]. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Unlike many of his peers that were forced to have private English tutorials for better test results, Xiaogang had his intrinsic motivation and determination for better English learning and plans for future paths when young. Meanwhile, he demonstrated a personality disposition rare in many of today’s university youth as being intelligent, ambitious, decisive, and technically resourceful for helpful information to facilitate his academic ambition.

Also in middle school English classes, Xiaogang developed his unique English learning methods through peer cooperation and peer support. He further created an English learning community in class with several of his like-minded classmates. He recalled this episode by saying,

... I had some peers in middle school that were interested in English [like me]. We shared with each other the content of a new unit, what was new in an English class, how the English homework would be handled, or how an English dialogue would be built. ... I would volunteer to build an English dialogue, though very few [people in my class] would. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Despite that English teaching in his public middle school followed a rigid banking model, Xiaogang maintained a stronger interest in English than other school subjects. He was saying, “... as for the English subject, other than piles of handouts from the teacher, I always had two or more [vocabulary and grammar workbooks and model test papers] at hand to work on. I purchased them. I loved to

work on them” (*ibid.*). This rightly addressed when he was saying “I have much less burden in high school,”

... I was always No. 1 in all kinds of English exams. I was No. 1 among all graduates citywide in the High School entrance English exam. High school English was easy; the English program in all three grades was easy. The total score was 150, my score was always over 140. I don’t think I have any special learning methods. I just feel English at that time was easy. The test items were easy, the test form was easy. Everything was easy.

This [reading comprehension in English] was easy. All the words in test papers were easy to me. It was like reading Chinese. Besides, when you have done piles of model test papers, it was a piece of cake to work on one more. (*ibid.*)

To Xiaogang, English in high school was of little difficulty. It was during this period of time that he started to explore his years of language study for the meaning,

... It was in Grades 9 and 10 that I was closest to the essence of English language study, the core of the English language. I feel this out of my own endeavor and teacher’s encouragement and assistance. I had extensive reading in Grade 9 and teacher guidance in Grade 10. Grades 11 and 12 were filled up with model test papers and all sorts of intensive exercises. I don’t like exam-oriented and exercise-stuffed teaching and learning. It is useless to me. I don’t think I would need model test papers in Grade 11 when I felt my vocabulary was sufficient in assisting me on reading comprehension and writing.

I think the high school English program was nothing but vocabulary and grammar. Your familiarity with grammar depends on grammar test items in model test papers. This requires test-wise skills. Fixed collocations require test-wise skills and rote learning, other than reading comprehension skills. Mastering the use of prepositions and of variation of verbs is paramount in high school English, but this is now secondary [at university]. ... Teachers would point out how grammar worked in a certain sentence, but they would not explain the function of this sentence. They only guaranteed [that] you would work right on the similar test items, other than guiding you to enjoy the flow or beauty of a sentence.

My understanding of the core of a language is, it doesn’t lie in how a word could be beautifully used, instead, it is how when all words are integrated into a neatly-organized sentence or text. I feel this is the charm of a language. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

Like Dandan who had the school visit experience to the Wisconsin school in the U.S., Xiaogang had a Virginia University professor group that flew in to observe the Gifted Class when he was in Grade Twelve of high school. He realized, during his interaction with these native speakers of English, that he had urgent intrinsic needs for English learning for communication purposes,

... We conversed with them [professors from Virginia University] during the break. I realized my oral work was poor as I was not able to raise good questions. This was all because there was no such oral testing required in the *Gaokao*. ... I couldn’t understand what they said. I might be able to understand what they said if all were put in black and white, but I couldn’t figure out the meaning of their utterances. There was no such practice on listening or speaking in the high school English program, in particular in Grade 12. Listening was cancelled in Grade 11. ... Personally, I would say, if we only focused on the final scores of the *Gaokao*, it [with listening excluded] was an advantage to me; but in the long run, it is indeed a lame decision province-wide. This decision affected 540,000 12th graders that year.

What I care about most is free and efficient communication between people. This is paramount in interpersonal communication. Then, I care about self-cultivation and quality revealed through good education. The more one experience, the better he understands the thing and people around, and the world. When my family moved to the East, I found there was a cognitive gap between me and my new schoolmates because I was one year younger than them. But I managed to close this gap through my perseverance and hard work.

I worked harder and longer than them. If they worked on one exercise item, I would do two, or even more. I stayed focused in class and accomplished homework on time. I read extensively, such as on history. I developed such a love of reading when I was little. I started to read when I was between one and two years old. This was home literacy. When one cultivates a love of reading when young, the positive influence could be life-long. The more he reads, the more he absorbs, the better he grows. Meanwhile, one's memory works best when young. As for me, I not only read, but also apply what I've read in life. Now, I have less time on reading because I have my hands full with the work from some school associations and the IELTS test preparation. I hope to prove my English competence through the IELTS test and to interact with native speakers of English. In IELTS oral, test takers work with a real examiner face to face. I like this feel. I like to communicate with people in person. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

As a precocious book lover, Xiaogang frequently referred to his love of books in different fields and of reading in English. He reflected on his integrative motivation in the past language study experience by saying so,

... There is always [learning] inertia in us. Nobody could always remain at the summit of his heyday, and it is hard as well to stay motivated long. When intrinsic motivation drops, his learning efficiency goes down, accordingly. This oftentimes happens in one's study. This occurred to me several times when I felt weary of learning at school. So, I turned to theology and history, and talked to people around to release my bad mood.

... Theology is the revelation of an epistemology. Since I felt mentally stressed, I need assistance, support and guidance. Theology involves the knowledge that history cannot reach. It is older than history and addresses the inner world of humans. In East, there is metaphysics, while theology is unique in the West. ... I am a language learner; I am learning their language [which means, English]. When I feel bored about it, I'd turn to the western world and its people, the native speakers of English, to see how they would interpret their souls.

... It was me that decided the books on theology since Grade 7 in middle school. I started reading theology in the summer of Grade 9 when I finished the High School Entrance Exams. All books were from street vendors. (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015)

Summary of Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaogang

Oxford and Shearin (1994) claimed that people who take positive attitudes toward the target language group and have a desire to integrate into it, or an interest in the culture of the target language and in meeting and interacting with the members of the target language group have integrative motivation in the learning of this target language. Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaogang demonstrated their integrative motivation in English learning through different means. Their love of English and passion for English learning, along with good study habits and consistent learner autonomy and ardent aspiration of communicating with native speakers of English and resolves in overseas studies, contributed to their hard-earned academic success in

English not only as a required school subject but also a strong and useful tool for connecting to the outside world.

6.7.2 *Learners and Instrumental Motivation in English Learning*

Unlike those who display integrative motivation in language study, people that have instrumental motivation demonstrate more functional reasons, such as passing a required examination, getting a desirable job, or career promotion (Dörnyei, 1990; Gardner, 1985). All four participants in this study (Dandan, Meimei, Xiaobo and Xiaogang) claimed to be pushed by instrumental, or extrinsic motivation due to the high-stakes tests and examinations in their growing up from formal schooling to university. This is inevitable that within a broader sociopolitical and economical context of banking education (Freire, 1970/2001, 2005; Yang, 2016), a single story of success prevails. These participants admitted that despite there was integrative motivation for English learning, instrumental motivation equally played a role on their past academic English learning experience and their consideration of the future paths and employment.

Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaogang

Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaogang expressed similar perspectives on instrumental motivation for language study, namely passing required examinations in school, mostly, the *Gaokao*, and finding ideal employment before and upon university graduation. When Dandan was referring to the second private English institute that she attended in primary school, she was saying,

... in Grade 6, my parents suggested another English tutorial center because some of my classmates attended there. It gained a good reputation through its test-oriented tutorial. ... Since I hoped to be admitted to the bilingual middle school, which was the best middle school in our city, and its English Entrance Examination was difficult, I needed an uplift in my grade. (Interview One, October 9th, 2015)

Also, parents' expectations constituted an important contributing factor for instrumental motivation for English learning when Dandan was saying,

... [my mom] felt language proficiency would help more. That's why she kept reminding me of the importance of English learning. ... My parents don't speak English. In my growing up, they kept reminding me of the importance of English learning, as they felt English is important for a better life. (*ibid.*)

Later, when she was envisioning her academic paths and future employment, Dandan referred to her interpretation of English competence in career choices by saying,

... my major has close connections with English. If I plan to engage in tourism management in Shanghai in future, there will be opportunities that I work with foreigners. ... As for the

goals in English learning, I want to become a simultaneous interpreter; this is my ultimate goal. I planned to sign up for an advanced interpretation tutorial program this semester, but time did not allow. I have to wait till time allows. I like English. I have talents in it. I prefer a challenging career with a good pay. I hope to find some training program but there is little sufficient and reliable information. I have passed CET 4, and I am planning an overseas study experience on hotel management upon graduating. If I fail in applying for an overseas graduate school, I will choose a graduate school home. (Interview Three, October 12th, 2015)

In Meimei's past schooling experience, the instrumental motivation for language study was also strong. It was revealed in her struggles with the broken classroom management in middle school when her English teacher refused to teach the class. Meimei endeavored to minimize the distraction in class and practiced self-study for the success in the HSEE. She was reflecting that,

...sometimes I developed the idea of not attending English classes because it was too noisy [in class time] and I could hardly concentrate myself. This situation lasted around two weeks. It was a waste of time. I only kept my own pace. I tried not to allow the bad classroom management to affect my study.

Personally, I followed the learning schedule and knowledge framework of English designed by my teachers from the English tutorial center, which started off with the overall grammar knowledge consolidated with pertinent exercises. After each class, I would review my class notes and then do the exercises. I managed to study in class at school; but my focus was the outreach from the tutorial program. Everything I did was for the High school Entrance Examinations at the end of Grade 9. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

According to Meimei, years of extracurricular tutoring at different private English institutes had equipped her with confidence and ease in examination, in other words, other than her consistent passion for academic English learning, her instrumental motivation was as well manifested in her success in English testing in and outside the school. It was like what she said,

... The most direct effect of my English tutorial programs in high school years was that I could deal with tough exams with ease. I remember once when everybody complained about the difficulty level of the middle-term exam, I felt good. It turned out that I ranked No. 1 in my grade. I was always among the top 5 in my grade in high school. The only thing that I did not do well in high school English was my handwriting. Because of it, I could not attain a full mark in English exams due to my poor handwriting.

... Though there was heavy pressure on most of us, I was O.K. as English was not a burden to me in high school. I seldom reviewed it before monthly tests, or middle or final exams. I would, half an hour before the English examination, take out my English textbooks and take a quick glance at the content in each unit since some test items, such as blank-filling, were directly from the texts, and I had to recite them well. (Interview One, October 11th, 2015)

Even at university without the looming pressure of the *Gaokao*, the in-class quizzes and other weekly and monthly examinations that she once had in middle school and high school, Meimei said that there was external motivation for language study,

... my sole external pressure so far is from the IELTS test. I need it for overseas study. I do not care much about the scholarship or expectations from teachers and parents. What I care most is my internal motivation. I like English because I have the passion for it. When I was the freshman, I attended a nationwide university student comprehensive English contest and the first Shanghai International Collegiate Conference on Science & Humanities. I was not awarded [with any prizes], but I learned a lot through these academic activities. (Interview Three, October 12th, 2015)

Despite that Meimei's present instrumental motivation was largely driven by passing the required and important examination like the IELTS test, her integrative motivation for English learning remained stronger than the temporal examination purposes.

In Xiaogang's view, whether in primary, middle or high school and at university, people always "have different objectives [in their studies]. Some people care [about their learning and learning difficulties], some don't. Birds of a feather flock together." (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015) Through exploring his multiple instrumental motivations for language study at different learning stages, Xiaogang recognized critically that English subject was not only vital for his future career but was also valued high for his academic outcome and comprehensive language proficiency. He referred to these aspects by saying,

... in primary school, my expectation was to speak English to show off myself. I hoped to have a feel of superiority to others as I could speak a foreign language. In middle school, I took English as a stepping stone for high school. In high school, it took the same role for entering university. ... I learned from *Hope Cup* that "No pains, no gains". I worked harder and longer than them [my class members]. If they worked on one exercise item, I would do two. ... I got a handle on all test items with a rather high accuracy rate in all English exams.

So far I feel English can be part of my life. Now I have far more opportunities in using it. I have become more motivated in using it well. This is because in Shanghai which is open and international with frequent foreign exchanges, there are more authentic opportunities in using English as a working language. Meanwhile, there are public signs in English, or bilingually. In this University EAP program, all handouts and textbooks are in English. All make me feel that I have to spend more time on it and use it better for differing purposes. Taking the geographical factors into consideration, it is admitted that the difference in geopolitics may lead to the change in needs for a foreign language. In the second-tier, third-tier cities and Mid-western provinces, the needs for taking English as a working of surviving language are much lower than in Shanghai. Hence, the geographical factors matter in our country.

... [To me,] the inner motivation has the priority. External motivation, at most, serves as one reason that I must learn English well, but it could not be the determinant. Why I aspire to learn English well is that I hope to make it become a tool and skill that I could use for survival purposes. (*ibid.*)

Xiaobo

Within the broader sociopolitical and educational climate of the banking model, oppressive schooling (Freire, 1970/2001), the test-oriented, behaviorist English teaching and learning is not uncommon throughout all educational levels in the

country (Han, 2014; Li, 2014; Yang, 2016; Zheng, 2009). One of its many social impacts is that it flattens the learner's motivation for learning.

Among all four participants, Xiaobo was the most unique as he insisted on having “no interest in English learning.” He followed “whatever teachers demanded [and others in class]” (Interview One, October 1st, 2015). This was his best labeling for language study as a required school subject. It is largely because, in Xiaobo's eyes, his motivation for language study was instrumental: it was “all about exams,” “all for the *Gaokao*,” and “I didn't have a particular feel of it [English]” (*ibid.*). Xiaobo gave prominence to the motivation for passing important examinations for school success when he was saying that,

... In the beginning, it was the pressure from the outside world when I saw my peers work so hard. It gradually internalized as my inner motivation. I followed my own pace and worked on more grammar workbooks and model test papers. I was willing to do so. My achievements were stable. My Chinese language arts was not so good, but my excellence in math could make up the gap. I have done much more than my peers. I realized the importance of exams for my future. It had much to do with my potential high school. It was all about my future. I had excellent test-wise skills. I simply worked harder and more. We were convinced of the importance of Excellence Selection Exams and worked all out for it.

I finished a whole math workbook in Grade 8. This enlightened and empowered me in math study. I could finish all homework with ease. When my classmates were working on homework, I was working on more challenging extracurricular tasks. I was a genius in math; but in English classes, I was busy in taking notes on blackboard. Well, I had strategic skills [for subject studies]. I would not do all math exercises; instead, I focused on those with higher difficulty levels. Since the difficulty level of homework remained low, I had to challenge myself and rank top in exams. You wouldn't harvest good exam results if you did not enrich yourself with more extracurricular tasks. ... I was careful then in planning my future high school. I wouldn't miss any possible chance in making myself stand out. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Furthermore, Xiaobo continued his smart instrumental *strategy* in disciplinary studies at university by saying, “this [motivation for passing required examinations] happens in my disciplinary studies at university, too. You get to work harder and more. And, there is test bank” (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015). When inquired about the reason why he chose to cram English by himself other than attending private English tutorials or having home tutoring to assist his English learning in school, Xiaobo expressed his viewpoint by asserting that,

... I didn't think they [private English tutorials and home tutoring] would help much, so I never attended any. I had friends who attended some. I didn't feel they worked better than me in school. I think it was a waste of parents' money. I would judge through the practical results. I chose to study [here, it means to cram English by self] at home. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

Unlike Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaogang who aspired to embark on graduate study overseas, Xiaobo was more determined in finding a desirable employment in Shanghai, his home city, upon university graduation. He was saying,

... I would say... I would get a job in a renowned company first and work for a couple of years, then I would think about applying for a graduate school. This may make my resume

look good. I would prefer a foreign company, so my English has to be good. This is because, first, the salary is good. The corporate culture is more dynamic, open, tolerant and fair. I don't like state-owned enterprises. I don't like the culture there. It is more conventional and bureaucratic. Though it is known that you will have to work harder and longer and get more grey hair early in a foreign company. Well, I just expect an equal and fair working environment. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

... I hope to accumulate some working experience before I would think about graduate study. ... But, before I could be hired in a foreign company upon graduation, and whether I could survive in the first few years, I would have to compete against all graduates then. I would have to be competitive in English, grow familiar in using office software such WORD, PPT and EXCEL. Further, I have to do well in annual reports and presentation. Now, I am good at neither. I have been struggling with all sorts of written assignments. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

So now, my goal is to finish all the required course studies, passing the IELTS test and getting the degree on time. I don't mean to study abroad right upon graduation. I am a pragmatist (sic), and feel what I need most is more practical working experience. (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015)

Self-claiming as a pragmatist, Xiaobo had a first-move career consideration, which is, his pragmatic learning needs for University EAP and practical computer skills as instrumental motivation for the job employment. This life manner, de facto, was manifested earlier when he was discussing his efforts in a municipal English contest as an 8th grader in middle school,

... It [signing up for the municipal English contest in Grade 8 and was awarded the 2nd prize] was again for an impressive resume for the Excellence Selection Exams [for entering a key high school]. I was careful then in planning my future high school. I wouldn't miss any possible chance in making myself stand out. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

6.8 Scientific Research as an Empowering Drive

According to Li (2005), higher education institutions constitute a major force for the scientific and technological innovation in the country. To the greater majority of today's university newcomers, it is a new start to familiarize the academic ethics and scientific research process and construct the course projects in English in University EAP program individually or through teamwork (Cai, 2012, 2014; Cai & Chen, 2013). However, to many of them, this can be challenging academically. Dandan was exploring her learning difficulties in university academic writing by saying,

... What we wrote before university was highly test-oriented for the *Gaokao*, which had a fixed pattern and format and was fundamentally different from authentic writing. University EAP program teaches how to use formal [academic] language to write, with a focus on logic thinking, critical thinking, and cohesion and coherence. These requirements are difficult because they are new to me. I read such writing before; but when I start to write myself, there is a huge gap. I have never done it before." (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

Generally, among the higher education institutions in Shanghai that introduced University EAP program, in the first two semesters, EAP teachers would guide their students by the side on how to read, write, and report scientifically. Meanwhile, it demands more on the end of university ELLs not only on their proficiencies in academic vocabulary and grammar in use but also on their interdisciplinary knowledge and scientific research methods to scaffold the study tasks of report writing and oral presentation. In this study, all four participants worked on University EAP program with respective learning approaches. On their reflections, these participants investigated three parallel subheadings of “Developing Serious Scientific Attitudes,” “Nurturing Teamwork Spirit and Leadership Awareness,” and “Striving for Articulation in Presenting in Public.”

6.8.1 *Developing Serious Scientific Attitudes*

Serious scientific attitudes are crucial for beginning scientists in the university study and research (Cai, 2014, 2015; Li, 2005). These attitudes not only refer to the dedication and commitment to serious scientific research and experiment but also to internationally acknowledged academic integrity, ethics, norms, and critical awareness of avoiding plagiarism in the scientific work individually or with the team. All four participants recalled the means through which they developed serious scientific attitudes in the past year’s University EAP program. Though their perspectives varied due to different research topics, time length, teacher’s requirements, and team composition, their voices recognized an appreciation of the value of serious scientific attitudes through working on various study tasks and research projects.

Meimei referred to one of the research projects that her team had accomplished in the past school year. The topic was *How to Survive in This University*. She was saying that,

... we were once required to write a topic on the crucial factors of surviving in this school. It was “*How to Survive in This School*”. It would go easy, as you just figured out persevering, behaving, and the like. But if you hoped to write creatively, you had to approach this topic from differing perspectives. Brainstorming takes time.

... Now we do not have to be buried in test-oriented training; this is different from what we did in high school, or to work on piles of test papers, easy test items. [But] I was always struggling with assignments such as paragraph writing. The EAP teacher would always provide us a couple examples, whether or not they are from the textbook or from her own. If you simply follow suit, such assignment would not be difficult, if you just want to finish this writing task, I mean. However, if you wish to create something new, I do not mean newness in the structure of the writing, but in the content or the depth and breadth of it, you may invest time on it. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

According to Meimei, if one wished to simplify a piece of writing for quick submission, he and his team could submit an easy piece of homework by listing the routine factors, such as persevering and behaving in school, to meet the baseline set

by the teacher. However, this was not what she expected. Instead, she aspired to present a piece of quality writing with the depth and breadth of the content which would read scientifically. She recalled this research experience by saying,

... It was new and hard to us. The most challenging part lies in how to cooperate between group members [on researching this topic]. We were assigned with different sub-tasks within the team, but it was rather hard to stew our brainstorming ... to develop creative, constructive ideas from individuals, to design quality questionnaire, and to construct the research paper. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

Hence, with other team members, Meimei approached this research topic from different perspectives and brainstormed within the team for inspirational ideas and thoughts regarding the topic, which, said she, was a piece of “real scientific work” (*ibid.*).

Like Meimei, Dandan, Xiaobo, and Xiaogang reflected how they grew cognizant of serious scientific attitudes through a series of study tasks in University EAP program. Particularly, Xiaogang explored how his team approached a research project in his EAP class and detailed their research process. Awareness of serious scientific attitudes was ascending through his account of this academic journey,

... It was a formal research, including doing the proposal, catalog, research topic and statistics. We were required to do a scientific research and present our findings. The length of the research project was around 12,000 words. The teacher provided the research theme; it was us that decided the [specific direction of the] topic for the study. We spent quite some time on our topic and the pertinent literature. The teacher arranged a specific period for the whole class to review the research topics to find out the research feasibility that each team raised

All four peers in my team were males. Our topic was *The Entrepreneurship of College Students*. ... We designed everything by ourselves. ... We researched students in this university town and used SPSS for data analysis. We prepared questionnaires both offline and online for the participants. Meanwhile, interviewing was used on the university student entrepreneurs around. We even used some of our social experience to scaffold our arguments.

... We recorded the difficulties we encountered. We also had difficulties in the first research project, as some respondents were reluctant to talk over the topic. The valid response rate was sometimes low. Since we retrieved over 300 questionnaires, it was huge work to analyze the data. The schedule was very tight then. We subdivided the work and designed everything by ourselves before all was integrated by the team leader who also supervised the schedule. It [the research schedule] was very tight then, but we made it. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

Xiaogang’s academic harvest from doing the research project is twofold: on one hand, he learned from this hands-on research what a piece of scientific work looks like and how it is implemented with indispensable, canonical procedures; on the other hand, from working on this research project himself and with his team, he developed an initial taste of serious scientific attitudes by learning to cope with expected and unexpected research difficulties for positive solutions. He, as well as other participants, started to grow critically aware of the weight of teamwork spirit and leadership awareness through the scientific work.

6.8.2 *Nurturing Teamwork Spirit and Leadership Awareness*

Teamwork spirit and leadership awareness are not dead topics in the textbook, but are required scientific abilities among today's university youth when they navigate disciplinary studies and scientific work independently or with the team (Cai, 2012; Li, 2005). Though chances are it is employment experts that offer professional guidance regarding the business world's teamwork and leadership in the graduating year, all four participants agreed that their University EAP program played a role on nurturing their teamwork spirit and leadership awareness through engaging research and study tasks.

As the team leader and time moderator that navigated two course projects, Xiaogang had his representative interpretation of the teamwork spirit and leadership awareness that was nurtured through high-level challenging tasks. "First, the teacher would teach step by step," Xiaogang recalled how a research was brought to class, "then, the teacher would spend some class time [with us] on the writing of an abstract through reviewing and discussing the open publications and then asked us to practice writing. This is basically the teaching mode through which we learned writing academically" (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015). He elaborated how the team was formed to cooperate for accomplishing the research task as follows,

... We all contributed to the completed work, though the individual efforts may not be seen. First, it was us that decided the [specific] research topic. A good topic is half done. We decided the topic based on the comments from our teacher to re-consider its feasibility. The second was focused research interest. There would be many topics that might intrigue us, but we [the team] had to decide the most workable one since it was due within two months. The third was the selection of team members. Acquaints get along and work well. We welcome reliable peers. All four peers in my team were males. It was important to find those who shared similar academic ambition and time schedule.

... [In my team,] we designed everything [in the research process] by ourselves. ... We [the team] spent quite some time on our topic and the pertinent literature. ... We researched students in this university town and used SPSS for data analysis. We prepared questionnaires both offline and online for the participants. ... We even used some of our own social experience to scaffold our arguments.

Last but not the least was the time consciousness. We had to respect time when the work was divided. In my team, four [of us] worked on the body part, while the fifth was responsible for the flow and organization of the final draft before all the work is ready to submit. As the team leader, I worked the most and served as the coordinator and time moderator. When my members procrastinated, remedial measures must be done to make sure the original schedule would still work before the deadline. Other members shared the delayed work and speeded up. For instance, when questionnaires were not all handed out, I would ask the whole team to help disseminate them.

... We cooperated well and the final score was fairly desirable. The final draft read well with refined writing style and tone. This was the second project we did. Now we are working on the third. (*ibid.*)

What is revealed from Xiaogang's interpretation of nurturing the teamwork spirit and leadership awareness is recognized, respected, and practiced through doing research projects required in University EAP program. The team reconsiders not only the language, grammar, and structure of their research task but also the application of information retrieval literacy and the knowledge of statistics to discuss and analyze the research findings. It is evident that these important research abilities integrated organically into University EAP program are academically indispensable in the cultivation of today's university youth' cognitive development.

Other than Xiaogang that perceived the importance of teamwork spirit and leadership in research work, other participants like Dandan and Meimei also served as the team leader in their course projects and shared similar stories grounded on their respective research experience. They agreed that through authentic scientific activities one learned to cooperate and take the team to swim through, which encouraged the team morality and leadership spirit, and made the meaningful intersections between disciplinary studies at university. The influence of doing team-based scientific projects was "far-reaching and rewarding in the rest of our lives" (Xiaogang, Interview Three, October 18th, 2015).

6.8.3 Striving for Articulation in Presenting in Public

For University EAP, presentation, or oral report of research work, constitutes not only an integral part of the ELLs' higher level oral English proficiency but also a prelude for academic exchange within the academia and professional communication at the workplace (Cai, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015; Cai & Liao, 2014; Yang, 2010; Zhang, 2001). All four participants in this study participated in presentation activities either individually or through the team report. They investigated earnestly how this new oral activity mattered in their University EAP learning.

In Xiaogang's view, presentation was a "very helpful two-way communicative process" since "when you speak, other people listen and digest your meaning; when others speak, it is your turn to listen and digest their meaning" (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015). Xiaobo interpreted presentation literally as "to talk about something in public, and you have to present orally" (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015). As a crucial academic ability required in today's globalized society, it is important to share and exchange ideas and to disseminate information and knowledge what one researches. However, Xiaobo referred to this oral practice as painful. Based on his presentation experience, he explored the superficial and deep-seated contributing factors that made him nervous when it was his turn doing so,

... [In presentation,] most of us remain at the initial stage of rote memorizing [our notes] despite several rounds of practices. This is not real presentation other than reading the notes by heart. I know this is rather challenging to us ELLs, even at university level. Recitation wouldn't help one's real oral ability. I was trying, but I knew I couldn't make it. I often

chose to recite my notes. I did play PPT to the audience, but basically I presented by rote memorizing.

Too few occasions in practicing [oral presentation]. I grew up in a sheer Chinese language environment, nobody around speaks English in my growing up. There are simply too few occasions in using English. In my class, the greater majority chose to present by rote memorizing. There might be very few that could do presentation. We are not confident in this language and turn to rely on rote and notes. I wish we could start off anew with the most basic practice on presenting.

... When in Grade 10 in high school, there was a similar oral class. It lasted for only one semester before it was cancelled for the test-wise purposes because there was no such oral test required in the *Gaokao*. In university, when we are required to do presentation, I feel we were wasting time. Rote memorizing is not real presentation. Anyway, I have no idea how to change this, though I knew this has to be changed. We don't have such a language environment to enhance oral ability.

... There is also difficulty level [in oral presentation]. ... We could go with easier topics for shorter dialogues and discussions, in which we express what we have on mind. Then, more challenging topics and oral tasks are provided to prepare us step by step for presenting a research study. ... Well, If only we could stay abroad for a year, or more! That's the survival purpose. (*ibid.*)

Xiaobo's anxiety about articulation in oral presentation practice was not uncommon among today's university youth. Through critical self-analysis, Xiaobo realized his problems in being afraid of presenting in public. He endeavored for solution, such as preparing guide notes and powerpoints to scaffold his performance; he recited by doing his best, though he self-doubted the authenticity of his anticipated rehearsals.

To many university newcomers, the study task of oral presentation is unfamiliar and challenging in the beginning since few had practiced it in high school (Cai, 2015). Xiaogang used discouraging remarks such as "difficult," "a waste of time," "useless," "boring," "didn't like it at all," and "core course teachers wouldn't care" to reflect his sadness in learning to present in class (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015). He was saying,

... to me, presentation is a big challenge [in the beginning] and harvest [now]. I have never done this in school before university. ... You know, oral competence was not tested in the *Gaokao*, so this was not taught or practiced in high school. Frankly, I was pushed and forced to do so. I had no choice but to practice it. In the beginning, every group member had at least two minutes for presenting before the whole class. I was so fearful. (*ibid.*)

Though these participants have finished several group activities and presented their research findings, it was Xiaobo and Xiaogang that encountered enormous learning difficulties in the study task of oral presentation because there was no easy work since they lacked previous knowledge, systematic training, and constant practice of oral ability. Xiaobo, in particular, stayed conservative because many of his peers remained at the initial stage of rote memorizing, or reading the prepared notes, which made him feel it was not the ability that he desired.

Largely, this negative mindset is attributed to one of the major pitfalls in the nation's general English program, in which ELLs' listening and speaking abilities

are marginalized in the high school English curriculum (Cai, 2010, 2014). Paraphrasing Xiaogang who addressed that when these basic language skills were not required in the *Gaokao*, few teachers would pay due attention to cultivating these important skills in teaching planning. A pandemic ethos hence become popular among today's university youth, who feel worrisome of the painful individual or group-based presentation when required to take turns presenting. Xiaogang described himself as "rather [sic] worried" since he could not handle it well, anxious of his competence in the five-minute presentation in class, though he had been "endeavoring so upon entering university" (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015). Despite that Xiaobo and Xiaogang acknowledged the potential values of oral presentation and public speech in their academic and career trajectories, they worried the challenges it brought to university ELLs like them since practicing flattened recitations may help little regarding one's authentic oral competence.

The past school year's consistent efforts on practicing oral presentation witnessed slow but solid progress in Xiaogang, as he was now able to make articulate presentation and public speeches before public with ease. Xiaogang came to realize the positive impact of academic presentation on his improved communication skills, which empowered him with more confidence in engaging in University EAP as well as other disciplines. Xiaogang reflected his hard-earned breakthrough and rewarding harvest by saying,

... I once complained it [oral presentation] because I thought everything at the beginning was unfamiliar and challenging. I didn't like presentation then. I felt it was difficult, a waste of time, useless, and boring. Our core course teachers wouldn't care. It was just for University EAP program. It was not for the final. It required peer cooperation. I didn't like it at all.

But later on, I started to realize its academic value. It is a must for many core courses. From this praxis, at least I become familiar with the entire research process, I know what do first, next and further, I know how to cooperate with my peers to accomplish a research project. I know the importance of personal and group commitment, time investment and team spirit.

Linguistically, I grow to become aware of the diction in writing academically. I start to learn from peer writing and to acknowledge academic norms in scientific writing. I have become cognitively aware of these academic aspects which I seldom cared about in high school. When I encounter a good writing, I would learn it by heart and then try to write my work like that.

...This [oral presentation] is a crucial ability that is required in today's society. It is important to demonstrate orally what you hope to present to others. This is a desired result and we acquired it through University EAP program. ... I can speak out to express myself. I feel this is the most exciting and amazing part of the program. I am able to share my thoughts with others at a more advanced cognitive level. This makes me feel confident and more motivated.

... While in the traditional English program, they didn't have the chance for doing so. There used to be inputs from teachers. The only possible output for us was exams. Now at university, presentation is a great channel to demonstrate my oral competence. ... Now I am able to make public speeches before public. This is a rewarding breakthrough. ... I am thankful for these opportunities to enhance my oral competence. (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015)

What is revealed from Xiaogang's summative reflection on his gained language competence from oral presentation is more than taking presentation as a must-skill for core courses or taking it as a channel to demonstrate his oral proficiency in English. He showed that when one is provided with opportunities to practice and demonstrate his/her potentials and capacities, which are not otherwise respected or appreciated in the banking model of language education, he/she is further empowered to see his academic progress through perseverance and endeavor. His contentment and integrative motivation ascends accordingly for higher learning goals and self-fulfillment.

6.9 Visualizing a Possible Self and Promising Future

This participant generation, known as Gen Y, or the Internet generation, differs from other generations for their personal, financial, academic, and social qualities and dispositions (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). All four participants gave thought-provoking insights into the self-exposure and analysis as independent individuals, their past and present schooling experience, and their meaningful connections to the broader society where they lived. They had a clear consciousness of and discussed straightforward the growing pains that this generation was confronting. Though they each shared a unique personality and disposition, they were optimistic and positive of a possible self and promising future.

6.9.1 *Generational Characteristics of the Learner Cohort*

Born in the 1990 s, this participant cohort, along with the greater majority of their international and Chinese peers, possesses a distinctive generational disposition as Gen Y. They are the only-child generation of the country who grew up with the popularity of the Internet, smart phones, more high technology products, improved living conditions, and supportive families. They represent generational commonalities such as being smart, diligent, resourceful, and hard-working (Li, 2005; Zhou, 2006). Many of them are technology savvies living a twofold life: online and offline, and dexterous in using the Internet and other resources to connect and communicate with the outside world for information and solution. This is best revealed in Xiaobo's using Iphone App in high school and at university to facilitate his vocabulary acquisition at different academic difficulty levels. Dandan displayed such social ability in finding helpful resources to facilitate her disciplinary studies at university by saying,

... So far [in the second school year of university] we do not have any bilingual or English-medium courses or forums other than University EAP program. It is said we may have some in the third school year; I am not sure. I am not afraid of such [English-medium] courses because I had them in middle school. I chatted with some seniors and they said the

difficulty level was affordable (sic). ... We do not have many core courses in this semester, but there will be more in the third school year. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

What is revealed in Dandan's words is that she not only cared about her academic study, knew what she wants and expects but also stayed resourceful, positive, and active in socializing with seniors from her department for more useful information to better serve her potential academic paths.

However, in the meantime, these participants are undergoing high academic and social pressure in this diverse, globalized world (Broido, 2004; CeLTA, 2014). They care not only about the bigger issues such as world peace and regional collaboration but also smaller ones such as their ego-identity construction and personal development based on what they saw, heard, learned, and experienced within the broader societal scenarios.

The discussion of the ego-identity construction through University EAP program was originally a by-product to be recognized and self-analyzed. These people came to realize it was through the university life and other meaning-making social activities that the critical awareness of their culturally rooted ego-identity as a holistic individual against the behaviorist banking model of education ascended. They reconsidered the generational crises reflected in the bustling of this information era and the academic predicament they faced, which was represented in the interview with Meimei when she was saying that

... I feel we now face a thorny issue, that is, we are over-exposed to a world of opportunities and possibilities. The advancement of the Internet and the popularity of information network have plunged us into a whirl of restlessness, making us miserably distracted by various possibilities. We dare not stay focused on one thing, otherwise some more would go. We try not to miss anything by staying half-hearted with eyes on elsewhere.

... I am worried of my generation. Nobody would say "I plan to focus on this one thing within this week or month"; instead, it is "I would do this today, tomorrow, or within the next few hours". It is common we do things in a rather superficial way. Nobody would sit down for a while to share his outlook of life. Conversations are shallow and superficial. Some may worry; more may not as they seldom think. Thinking is a painful process as it is involved with critical self-analysis. When one's thinking moves into a deeper level, due to the limitation of his cognition, he might encounter a dead end, things he could not interpret himself. He would experience ineffable pain internally. This is the moment he detects the evil side of humans due to lacking in interpersonal communication with others. Many of us are confronted with this predicament now.

... University EAP program empowers and enables me to use a critical eye on university life and study. I see the demarcation between high school and university. I have more independent thinking on my disciplinary study, life and future. If I did not think by myself and for myself, nothing would change fundamentally even though I proceeded to higher learning. I mature. I grow cognitively. ... As a University EAP learner, I have to cool down to reflect my learning experience, the overall learning history, and the philosophical and ideological changes that help re-shape my own learner identity. (Meimei, Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Meanwhile, after a whole year's campus life at university, these participants seemed to concern more on the role of the outside distractions played on them and on their peers. Upon realizing that her learning time was gnawed by her collegial

positions, Meimei was planning on “hard decisions” of resigning to “refocus on my disciplinary studies” (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015) by saying,

... I have decided to resign from some social positions. These are hard decisions. I have to refocus on my disciplinary studies. The squeezed learning time has become a big learning difficulty.

Meimei referred to a thorny issue that her generation was facing as follows,

... now we all face with a thorny issue, that is, we are over-exposed to a world with multiple opportunities and possibilities. The advancement of the Internet and the popularity of information network push us to plunge into a whirl of restlessness. We become miserably distracted by all kinds of opportunities and possibilities. We dare not stay focused on one thing, otherwise some more good chances would go. We try not to miss anything by staying half-hearted with eyes on elsewhere. (*ibid.*)

Other than those who welcomed globalization and information age, Meimei expressed deep concerns of being “over-exposed” to a world of dazzling opportunities and possibilities with the advancement of the Internet and popularity of the information network (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015). In her eyes, such busyness of the modern life has profoundly affected the mindset of the generation of her age since they dared not “stay focused on one thing. Otherwise some better opportunities would pass them by.” This “whirl of restlessness” was distracting, luring them to “try not to miss anything by staying half-hearted on academics with eyes on elsewhere” (*ibid.*). These thoughts echoed in Xiaobo’s similar worries, as “we are a hurried generation” (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015).

Similarly, other participants such as Dandan, Xiaobo, and Xiaogang, also realized the similar problems that many of their peers were confronting. Dandan and Xiaobo mentioned some of their classmates or acquaintances who were working part-time at nearby private English tutorial centers for pocket money, worrying little about the course work, the class pace, or passing required examinations. Xiaogang explored a common university phenomenon of “academic polarization [sic]” which was attributed to the “gap between high achievers and underachievers” (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015), and widened with peer pressure, peer influence, and academic competence at university. He was saying,

... There has been the gap between the higher and lower academic level between us, I mean, high-achievers and underachievers. Then, the middle, or average achievers would draw close to either side faster at university. This is fairly common. ... I would say lacking in external motivation, such as oversight and supervision from teachers and the decreased peer pressure. You know, at university, people have different goals. Some may hope for a job with a salary of RMB 2,000, some may expect a salary of RMB 3,000, or more. To the former, there is no need to endeavor. And, the majority would not learn, those who endeavor to learn always belong to the minority.

Peer pressure worked, but only worked in the first few months upon entering university. Then quickly, many would be assimilated, in particular, the average achievers. They would follow suit with their dorm-mates. Average achievers have few learning goals or ambitions. With little intrinsic motivation and self-discipline, it is easy to be assimilated. This is how academic polarization happens among us in today’s universities. It is like a central point with two iron balls on two ends with two magnets. When in high school, when there were

balanced magnets on two ends, the two iron balls would remain balanced and stay. But at university, such balance is vulnerable and easy to break. Once broken, the iron ball would move rapidly to the closest magnet. (*ibid.*)

What Xiaogang interpreted reflects how peer influence worked to affect students' learning motivation when EAP learning at university level is not driven by the examination purposes. When dorm-mates are randomly assigned on the first day of university, the middle achievers would draw close to the either side fast in the first few months of university life and study. Quickly, many would be assimilated as people would follow suit with the majority in the dorm. According to Xiaogang, this assimilation is attributed to "lacking in external motivation, such as oversight and supervision from teachers and the decreased peer pressure" (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015).

At university, when students become unshackled from the academic pressure of the *Gaokao* and from passing routine examinations such as the mid-term examination and the final, many university youth start to dawdle. This situation makes it possible for the middle to be assimilated. Meanwhile, those with little integrative or instrumental motivation and self-discipline possess lower learning needs and future plans, which further accelerate the process of academic assimilation. Rhetorically, it is like a scale with two iron balls on both ends with two magnets. In high school when there are balanced magnets on both ends, the iron balls would stay balanced; at university, with the absence of positive external motivation, such balance would quickly become vulnerable and easy to break. Once broken, the iron ball would move rapidly to the closest magnet, causing what Xiaogang referred to as the academic polarization in University English learning and other disciplinary studies.

The purpose of understanding the distinctive generational characteristics of today's Chinese university youth and the critical dispositions that they believe indispensable in acquiring academic English has made it valuable to delve into what this learner cohort say and think about their own generation in this diverse and globalized era. What is revealed from the interviews on their generational dispositions demonstrate that this is an independent, caring, confident, and responsible generation with a global and local conscience, a vision of peace, love and intelligence, a sense of empowerment and consciousness, a pride of their diverse identities and readiness to dialogue, communicate, critique, and engage in this globalized world (Nava, 2001; Spring, 2007; Seymour, 2004).

6.9.2 Options of Career Planning for a Promising Future

Despite being new sophomores, several of these participants have passed CET 4 and developed options of career planning for a possibly promising future. Inspiringly, their vision for the future is grounded not only on what they have seen, heard, and acquired during the past year's university life and study but also on their

distinctive dispositions, colorful extracurricular activities, and lived experience on and off campus and in this exciting city of Shanghai.

Dandan

The first year's University EAP learning, along with her past language study experience, guided Dandan toward an academic path of pursuing graduate study on hotel management upon university graduation at home or abroad. In the meantime, she embraced an ultimate goal of becoming a simultaneous interpreter in her career trajectory. She was saying so decisively,

... as for the goals in English learning, I want to become a simultaneous interpreter; this is my ultimate goal. I planned to attend an advanced interpretation tutorial program this semester, but time (the school schedule) did not allow. I have to wait till time permits. I like English. I have talents in it. I prefer a challenging career with a good pay. I hope to find some training program but there is little sufficient and reliable information available. I have passed CET 4, and I am planning an overseas study experience on hotel management upon graduating. If I fail in applying for an overseas graduate school, I will choose a graduate school home. (Interview Three, October 12th, 2015)

Not being an English major at university, Dandan was planning on an advanced interpretation tutorial program. She has collected all possible information and knowledge on translation and interpretation studies as a potential career path that could be exciting and well paid. She set her time management for minimum reading in English daily as what she had done in high school. In her eyes, the new path that University EAP program offered for academic English learning at the advanced level, namely learning through using it, was helpful and worthy of her future career paths.

Xiaobo

Compared with Dandan, Xiaobo was more of a sophisticated pragmatist with the carefully reckoned short-term and long-term goals. In the short run, he was saying,

... as for English learning, it was for a better score in exams. Now I would not worry about CET 4 and CET 6. I don't worry about passing. TOEFL or IETLS means the same to me. I don't worry about passing. It is the problem whether I could earn a higher score. The higher, the better. That's how scores matter to a Chinese student like me. My current and only goal so far is to pass the IELTS test. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Meanwhile, Xiaobo was planning to finish all required course studies, pass the IELTS test, and get the degree on time for smooth graduation. As for the long-term planning, he was not hasty on graduate study as he believed what he needed most was "more practical work experience" (Interview Two, October 9th, 2015). He was saying,

... I would say... I would get a job in a renowned company first and work for a couple of years, then I would think about applying for a graduate school. This may make my resume look good. I would prefer a foreign company, so my English has to be good. This is because, first, the salary is good. The corporate culture is more dynamic, open, tolerant and fair. I don't like state-owned enterprises. I don't like the culture there. It is more conventional and bureaucratic. Though, it is known to all that you will have to work harder and

longer, getting grey hair earlier in a foreign company. Well, I just expect an equal and fair working environment.

I hope to accumulate some working experience before I would think about graduate study. Now my goal is to finish all the required course studies, pass the IELTS test and get the degree on time. I don't mean to study abroad upon graduation. I am a pragmatist, and feel what I need most is more practical working experience. (*ibid.*)

What is revealed from his career considerations is that Xiaobo has developed an explicit blueprint for his future paths. He preferred employment at a renowned foreign company in Shanghai upon university graduation for a couple of years' accumulation of work experience before seriously considering graduate study, which would eventually make him shine among all potential candidates. To him, a fat salary was an important motive. Furthermore, he preferred more dynamic, open, tolerant, and fair corporate culture other than the conventional and bureaucratic state-owned enterprises. He was aware that this meant work "harder and longer, getting grey hair earlier in life" at a competitive foreign company (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015). Nevertheless, he insisted on an equal and fair working environment where he could best fit.

Despite his keen aspirations, Xiaobo remained sober on his core competence, which, in his perspective, referred to whether he could be hired in such a foreign company upon graduation and whether he could survive in the first few years in a world of severe competition at the Shanghai Job Fair. He was saying,

... The competence refers to the fact whether I could be hired in a foreign company upon graduation, and whether I could survive in the first few years. I would have to compete against all graduates then. I would have to be competitive in English, grow familiar in using office software such WORD, PPT and EXCEL. Further, I have to do well in annual reports and presentation. Now, I am good at neither. I have been struggling with all sorts of written assignments. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Xiaobo seemed resolved to learn office software such WORD, PPT, EXCEL, and important business skills such as annual reports and oral presentation. Occasionally, though, he revealed a slight sense of worries on his oral capacity and writing ability as he kept saying he "grew up with test-taking skills" (*ibid.*).

Xiaogang

Different from Dandan and Xiaobo in terms of career planning, Xiaogang has been adamant in his early ambition of studying at a U.S. university since Grade Seven in middle school. He was saying that,

... I have had a preliminary planning for my life then. ... My plan was to study in the U.S. You know, I searched online, and landed myself at this American university. It ranks Top 100. It was super. There have been a lot of news reports about this country. Second, at that time, Obama was newly ascended as the U.S. president. I see commonalities and differences between these two countries [China and the U.S.]. So, I searched the U.S. universities. (Interview One, October 1st, 2015)

At university, Xiaogang started to wonder the "marginal effect of studying abroad" because he hoped to "earn it back" in spite of his parents' promise of

supporting him financially (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015). When asked about his potential research interest if he would apply for a U.S. graduate school upon university graduation, he was responding,

... I hope to study on the history of economics. I would care about the academic atmosphere of a foreign university and what it could offer in this field. ... After I entered this school [university], I read a couple of books on this field and started to realize I want to do more in this field. I like to explore and research in the fields of humanities and arts. I started to realize I was more like an arts student other than a science student when I was in high school. I didn't like those tough math or physics perplexities, though I could analyze for answers. ... I am thinking now whether this decision was too early. I also hope to enrich my life. I have been to so many places domestically. (*ibid.*)

As a precocious young man, book lover, and observant traveler, Xiaogang developed his insight into the overseas study and envisioned his research interest in the history of economics. It was this time at university that he realized his distinctive disposition as “more of an arts student other than a science student” (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015).

Besides, Xiaogang had his stance on University EAP learning and its potential connections to the future career planning. He had several talks with his like-minded peers at university regarding this aspect. He sounded confident and decisive on the alternative of his future paths by saying,

... I conversed with many of my peers regarding the importance of English learning, our conclusion is that if one hopes to remain in tier-one cities like Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, or study and work abroad, a good command of English is indispensable. ... The peers that I conversed were the ones that have high ambitions and aspire to use English as a working language when employed. We all feel that if we hope to be more competitive, we must master this language; thus, we would be empowered to stand firm on our own feet in such highly competitive world. (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015)

Meimei

As the only participant that felt the topic of future goals was “hard and thorny,” Meimei was struggling to “avoid such topics [regarding the future] these days... hard to face and say” (Interview One, October 11th, 2015). She claimed herself as a passionate drama lover and aspired to study modern drama in London or to continue her major study at a higher education institution in London. Like Dandan, Meimei neatly identified what she expected and what she has learned from University EAP program. She made meaning-making connections between academic English proficiency, her disciplinary studies, and future career planning by saying,

... Academic English is required in all core courses. This is what I found at the start of this semester. I am recently reviewing my imported textbooks that were used in the past semesters, and realize passages in these textbooks present us good examples in writing academically. ... They [the present EAP study and the future career trajectory] are connected. Before, what I understood about University EAP was nothing but [learning] English language; now I focus more on its functionalism for academic purposes which is required in all disciplines. ... All my core courses in my discipline are offered in English by foreign or

Chinese professors. I expect the maximum connections. What I am concerned now is whether I could apply what I have learned in these imported textbooks to the local enterprises. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Meimei disagreed with the popular social ethos that one gets to do what he feels like in life, arguing that it was unwise in turning away the opportunities of trying. She favored “try[ing] different things to find out my interest and passion first... to experience life to have more choices” because it is important to “give it a shot before I get to know what I really like to do” (Interview One, October 11th, 2015).

This chapter, along with the preceding chapters, sets the meaning-making foreground regarding the Revelations, Desire, and Legacy in the Science of EAP in Part III of the study.

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Part III
Revelations, Desire, and Legacy
in the Science of EAP

Chapter 7

Crystalization of Themes



Throughout the interview sessions of listening to the participants on their past, present, and transformative academic English learning experience in and outside the school settings and their reflections on the influence of schooling for meaning, seven findings were established. These findings, which were elicited from the participant voices, crystalize in the following parallel subheadings, encompassing, and addressing the purpose of this interview study.

7.1 EAP Learners and Their Exposure to a World with Multiple Opportunities and Possibilities Through English: Revealing Dispositions

During the interviews, these university youth recalled their academic English learning experience in primary, middle, and high school at home city, and depicted a panorama of their university study and life in this new city of Shanghai. Among them, three (Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaogang) were not Shanghai locals; this meant entering university in Shanghai unfolded a new turn of life. Like many of their peers, entering university outside their home city would indicate a piece of independent life that started anew, and they had to entail full responsibilities for this new change of life. The selected passages from Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaobo captured this finding. For instance, Dandan depicted her understanding of a brand-new university life and the meaning of her learning of academic English at different stages of education. Quote:

... I feel university is a brand-new start in life. I would not repeat high school learning, as I feel it is not on the right track. I know today's high school students are doing the same for exam purposes, but this does not mean what they are doing is right. We are not improving our overall English proficiency, instead, we are honing test-taking skills. From the quality education perspective, what we are doing is wrong; but from the test-wise perspective, cramming education is desirable. The primary and secondary English programs are for

exam purposes, caring little about students' real ability in foreign language study. Testing is necessary, because it can reflect or improve little one's language ability. In class we were taught how to gain high test results in exams. Grammar and vocabulary are basic things, because they guarantee correct reading comprehension and cloze. In Middle and West China, oral English is not tested, making its teaching and practices very weak. So is the practical English ability among students, along with how to construct well-organized scientific writing. Listening encounters the same problem. In my past listening tests, we were only offered a short dialogue or passage with multiple choices A, B, and C. In many cases, one can guess the answers right. It has nothing to do with improving one's real listening ability. Further, foreign cultures are little introduced in class. We know little about the countries and cultures in which English is spoken. For me, though my grades in English looked good, and I did not feel much pressure or learning difficulty in this school subject, I feel there was something wrong in my past English learning.

Now I study by myself most time in university. Before university ... when I was an 11th grader, I was taught how to self-study, now I put it in use. In middle school, we had little time ourselves as the daily schedule was mainly decided by school. My high school advocated autonomous learning. Now I often watch TED or American dramas or movies without subtitles if possible for entertainment as well as for study purposes. While watching, I listen attentively to learn pronunciation, vocabulary, authentic expressions, life habits and cultures. I hope to learn English and spend time on it everyday ever since high school. My purpose in English learning is to improve my [comprehensive] language proficiency other than for higher test results. Now I wish for more reliable information on translation and interpretation as a career path. I've set the goal for minimum reading in English daily, like what I did in high school. (Interview Three, October 12th, 2015)

Dandan's reflection on university life and the meaning of her language study at different stages of education echoes in many of her Chinese peers who study at university. Meimei, as an undaunted soul, referred to this similar topic by saying:

... University life is richer than that in high school, and I have to spend more time on socialization, making learning time and independent thinking limited. ... It is very common among us. I was bothered by this in the past semester. I assumed I was the only one that felt overwhelmed about it. Then, very occasionally, I realized I was not the only case. Many of my peers encountered this very predicament. But without effective communication, it remains unsolved. The excuse would be, 'I am busy, I have no time.' This is true because [at university] there is no fixed partner on a single day. Deskmates change in different classes. This is very different from the high school days. Back then, one could chat with his fixed deskmate over a topic during breaks between classes. Now, there is no fixed partner, and nobody would sit down for a while to share longer and deeper conversations, like his outlook of life. Conversations are shallow, very superficial.

Some may worry as time passes; some may not, as they seldom think deep. I have to say thinking is a painful process as it is involved with critical self-analysis. When one's thinking moves into its deeper level, due to the limitation of cognition, he may encounter a dead end, things he could not interpret himself. He would experience ineffable pain internally.

... now we all face with a thorny issue, that is, we are over-exposed to a world with multiple opportunities and possibilities. The advancement of the Internet and the popularity of information network push us to plunge into a whirl of restlessness. We become miserably distracted by all kinds of opportunities and possibilities. We dare not stay focused on one thing, otherwise some more good chances would go. We try not to miss anything by

staying half-hearted with eyes on elsewhere. This is what I find among my peers. I feel worried about this generation. ... It is awful to stay focused. People around me seldom do it, they have no time to do it. I plan to retreat from those extracurricular activities, but my roommates teased that I am crazy. I simply could not remain focused on my study, compared with my days in high school. ... Nobody would say I plan on this or that within this month or this week; instead, it is I would do this today, tomorrow, or within the next few hours. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Other than her honest revelation of the unexpected side of university life and the gap between academic English learning in high school and at university, Meimei explored the popular mindset of her generation on cognitive maturity, interpersonal communication, and relationship interwoven in the fast-paced modern life interspersed with dazzling opportunities and possibilities. These earnest voices echo in Xiaobo's brief remarks that:

... I would not take in other people's words easily. This is likely to be misled. It is dangerous to believe in others without a second thought. Independent thinking is important nowadays. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Upon hearing their straightforward reflections, a strong sense of respect was developed on these participants because of their intimacy, courage, and trust in this study. These words manifest the generational complexities of today's Chinese university youth, such as their independent thinking and critical awareness, and willingness to take life responsibilities. This generation, like previous generations, entails similar times-related concerns, worries, puzzles, pains, and struggles for optimistic solutions. More importantly, their voices verify what the Pew Research (2010) and the CeLTA (2014) identified regarding millennial youths' collective generational qualities such as short attention spans and multitasking abilities, which are common and prevalent among today's Chinese university youth.

7.2 EAP Learners' Critical Awareness Development Through English: Critiquing the Power of Institution

Based on the critical self-reflection of their past, present, and transformative academic English learning experience, all four participants grew more aware of the hidden power of the *institution* that was permeating and influential on their language study at university level. Each, in their own manner, addressed the effect of the banking model on English teaching, learning and assessment, cramming education and test orientedness in and outside the school settings. Dandan's and Xiaogang's remarks were typical because they not only revealed the core of the educational perplexity, criticized its implicit detriments, but also sought actively for reasonable solutions. Dandan expressed as such:

...The national policy orientation on the high school English program is obvious. If one hopes to go to college, he has to gain good grades in the *Gaokao*. Hence, all high schools have to maneuver the exam-oriented and exercise-stuffed teaching methods to guarantee the

graduation rate in early June every summer. Then all is left to your good fortune which university you would go, or you would be declined.

... the root of the [learning] environment predicament is the *institution* and the conventional ideology on English as a foreign language, as well as other foreign languages. In many places of the country, especially in non-eastern and non-coastal regions, many of our folks regard English as nothing but a mere school subject for exam purposes. Their goal is solely to rank top in exams. A glance at the content of test papers can reveal what you need is plentiful repeated test-based exercises and rote memorization. We used to invite our middle school foreign teacher to work on our English test papers. She was only ranked middle among students in my grade, though she was a native-speaker and degree holder with a BA in English Language and Literature. I doubt the quality [and reliability] of the test paper. In our *institution*, what we are tested is disconnected with English in real-life use.

...I could not change the *institution*, but I could make changes for myself. My goal for English learning was not for the *Gaokao*. I had my peers and their parents that came and asked how I studied English. They always wished I would tell them I had done grammar and vocabulary workbooks and model test papers. I never did that. Nobody would take in my words when I said English learning was not for exams; instead, they believed so. Grades and ranking matter to them. I could not change people around, I only transform myself. (Interview Three, October 12th, 2015)

When Xiaobo was referring to his understanding of the role of the institution and the banking model of English teaching and learning in school, he was applying the following rhetoric,

... This [the term “banking-model”] is a good rhetoric. We are the bank, while teachers are greedy depositors. This is like high-stake P2P financial products, very risky. But when you make it, the reward is high. Cramming or banking education works when we were young, in particular, when your parents are not able to help you with your study, or help cultivate in you good study habits. Though we were pushed, or sometimes forced by teacher to learn, I would say... because the *Gaokao* is always there, like the sword of Damocles, cramming or banking approach would work when we were little. It is like business trust. Teachers entrust fact-based knowledge to you, the bank. They hope their investment would appreciate in value, and eventually reach its peak in the *Gaokao*. This is what happened in primary, middle and high schools. But now in university, teachers entrust different things. This time, it is the learning strategies and methods. ... [In this case,] [t]he inner motivation and learning needs work and elicit better learning outcomes. This is otherwise not learned in class time. This is self-cultivated through years of hard work. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Similarly, based on his language study experience at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of school education as an overachiever, Xiaogang expressed his insight and criticism of the influence of the banking model of education on the growth of language learners. Xiaogang summarized:

... I feel the ultimate goal of our Chinese education does not aim to cultivate us to become independent individuals. Instead, it views us as components that can be led and shaped by teachers. An independent individual must have his own thoughts and goals in life. He has to endeavor and suffer for success. Actually, we Chinese university students don't have these qualities. We don't have lofty goals. Even if we might have them when young, they would be gradually quenched or suppressed in our growing up.... [we started to] be quenched or suppressed in middle school. Some of us may retrieve themselves when at university, but

many of them couldn't. This is because they don't care about this, as they would always be carried forward by the torrent of the broader society.

... [in and outside the school settings,] the influences from middle and high school teachers are omnipresent. ... I never thought that we should demand teachers to be strict or loose with us. It is teachers that manipulate us. We were puppets. ... It was like a puppet show. Manipulators [teachers and school administrators] decided everything. Puppets would only behave based on what their masters want them to do. I realized this when I was in middle school. But within that specific scenario, we had no choice but to obey. I did [think about the changes], indeed. But why bother to change? When all is decided by the playwright and stage director, actors would work easily. They don't have to bother to think. However, if you go against their will or you violate the prescribed rules, the penalty would be severe.

... I would say it [my past schooling] kept me on the right track of the formal school education. Though it is not the perfect choice, it is indeed the only and best choice that the majority families could afford; anyway, we are in the *Institution* and nobody could escape, unless you choose to go abroad or home education. We Chinese people could hardly afford failure. If you choose to leave, you can never return, since you wouldn't be welcomed within this *Institution*. That's why we couldn't afford failures in the *Gaokao*, and many other high-stakes exams. That's why exam-oriented education goes rampant, because it fulfills people's fear of failure. (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015)

As a privileged overachiever in school, Xiaogang seemed more discontent and criticized the school education that he once received and that labeled him as *excellence*. In his sharply worded critique of the *institution* and the school mechanism within that quenched students' goals and suppressed them from being independent individuals since middle school, Xiaogang was intrepid in challenging the authoritarianism of the *institution* in which he was once part of it (Freire, 1970, 2001). In the meantime, however, he demonstrated a strong sense of humanistic solicitude on the struggles of his Chinese peers with a youth's unique melancholy, empathy, and compassion. He saw the problem, critically aware of its impact on his generation, struggling in groping for the solution. In this sense, he was more like an awakening oppressed young man, trying to analyze his position within the privileged hierarchy of the oppressive society which dislocates him from the existing cycles of social reproduction, and revitalizing the relationship between the theory and practice as an act of politics and struggle for social justice (Torres, 1998).

7.3 EAP Learners and Their Self-Transformation Through English: Using University EAP Practice as a Self-Empowering Tool

All four participants entered the school-based University EAP program due to their higher test results in the placement test upon entering university. Before they volunteered to participate in this study, they, as freshmen, have accomplished a whole school year's University EAP learning. This general antecedent made them active and earnest in making meaningful comparisons between this past year's University EAP learning and their learning of general English at the primary and

secondary education levels. Feeling overwhelmed and powerless before the banking type of language study and assessment within the ironclad *institution*, they expressed an updated understanding based on their lived University EAP learning experience and its organic connectiveness to their cognitive maturity, identity construction, critical thinking, and the future career trajectory. Other than feeling their University EAP program helpful, they came to realize that University EAP practice could serve as a self-empowering tool for self-transformation that they never experienced in the past schooldays. Dandan was referring to this aspect by saying:

... I feel lucky as a University EAP learner. I don't know whether other universities in Shanghai offer such program, but I like it. I see the gap between me and other more competitive peers, and I am making solid progress. I have middle and high school friends who attend university in Shanghai like me, and their schools don't offer University EAP program. Their university's General English program is like what we have done in high school English classes. I won't say the teaching content of University EAP is unaffordable, or EAP learners are superior to others. University EAP, to me, is to make English more academic and scientific, and use it for research and other purposes. It raises its learners' awareness of practical use of the language itself in the international learning community, and empowers us to acquire it like a real ESL learner. Personally, the program has uplifted my overall English proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking; in particular, it arms me with how to do a scientific research and report. This will help a lot in senior thesis writing. But anyway, people vary. I have peers in Class A that have little interest in this program. I have a strong [learning] need for it, but they do not. Perhaps we possess different goals for academic English learning. I aspire to converse with native speakers, enjoy open publications in English, and write like a native speaker.

... There is a huge gap between University EAP program and University General English [non-EAP] program. The former informs you to use English as a tool for specific purposes, while the latter is confined to teaching vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension [for general purposes]. My peers in the latter program feel bored, but they have little appreciation of the former program, and probably they are unaware of, and reluctant to find what we do. For instance, we have done two research projects in Semester 1 and Semester 2. If one had not been involved in them from end to end, he would not realize the complete process of doing a scientific research project, such as deciding a research topic, locating pertinent literature, designing, disseminating and collecting questionnaires, analyzing data, and reporting research findings and recommendations, nor the importance for cooperation and coordination within and between the study groups. Further, the whole research process scaffolds my awareness of using academic vocabulary and framework to construct my paper. I use to pick up a word for writing at random, this won't happen again. Generally, University EAP offers a new path for English learning at the higher level. It is learning through using it. This is indeed helpful and worthy of my future academic journey. (Interview Three, October 12th, October)

Though from a different but parallel University EAP class, upon reflecting her University EAP learning and practice, Meimei was saying similarly that:

... What I feel most from the past year's University EAP learning is it serves as a leading-in and guides me to learn autonomously from the topic grounded on the textbook unit, to various enrichment resources provided by my EAP teachers, and further to my own research interest and learning needs. Individuals vary. I feel we are liberated from the traditional confined classroom learning. We are led to Internet-assisted learning. Internet represents the whole world. When this door opens, the road ahead before us each becomes different. How far one can go varies. ... I am not forced, spoon-fed, coaxed, or hoaxed to

learn; I want it because I now have stronger learning needs. Just imagine, if we followed traditional English teaching, if teachers did not share enrichment materials, if they narrowly lectured on textbooks, we would never ever move beyond the confinement of classroom and teacher authority.

... I feel lucky in University EAP program. It empowers and enables me to use a critical eye on university life and study. I see the demarcation between high school and university. I have more independent thinking on my disciplinary study, life, and future. If I did not think by myself and for myself, nothing would change fundamentally even though I proceeded to higher learning. I mature. I grow cognitively. ... University EAP integrated grammar and vocabulary, basic language study skills, ways of thinking, and reading, writing, listening and speaking abilities for academic purposes at higher learning. Non-native speakers of English like us at university must acquire these advanced skills and language proficiency for academic achievements, future careers, work places, and research fields. We must equip ourselves with internationally acknowledged academic norms and formalities. We need them badly in this century. We need much more than English itself as a subject study. We need it to communicate with foreign students, exchange students, visiting professors and researchers, and more importantly, the outside world.

Furthermore, I must mention the cultivation of critical thinking among us. Now, I feel I have become more scientific and neutral through the past year's study. I feel I have grown to be a semi-professional in scientific reading and writing. I do not reject reading longer academic papers; instead, I like the feel working on longer papers with a critical eye. I think more about me as an individual and the connection between others and this world. This university EAP program has transformed me through the way of thinking, critical thinking. This is, in nature, a fundamental self-transformation. I appreciate what University EAP realizes in me in this aspect. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Xiaogang's insight on the gap between General English in high school and University EAP program and the influence of his University EAP practice on his cognitive development and career consideration sounded tantamount to those of Dandan's and Meimei's. He was self-analyzing that:

... [In middle school and high school,] I buried myself with workbooks and model test papers to improve the accuracy rate. ... My understanding of English learning at university was outdated. I assumed my English was perfect when I entered university, but now I realized this was an illusion. What I realize now is that exam results couldn't best reflect one's comprehensive competence. My fixed definition of over-achievers was *wrong*. The major reason why I felt I was competitive in English learning in high school was because I was good at working on test questions in model test papers. But when I jump out of the exam-oriented teaching and learning circle, what I had endeavored was all pale. University EAP program is more advanced and higher than any exam-oriented education. It is not memory test. ... [It] guides me to real academic scenarios to hone my English competency other than confining me within a world of simulation.

... [It] is painful to realize your fixed conception of knowledge and excellence was wrong. This would gradually wear down your fixed ideology and conventional thoughts, and even your morality before the new one takes shape. ... You may find you are good for nothing in this period with the pain penetrating. ... I lived it through by focusing on my study with perseverance. I knew what I expected and, without hard work I wouldn't harvest. ... What University EAP program provides us is not only a new paradigm and perspective of academic English learning, it also lead to the transformation of one's cognitive level and way of thinking. ... We were in the exam-oriented teaching for so long, and University EAP program is so radical and unprecedented. It pours down on us with new

ways of teaching and learning, and how we would re-evaluate our past learning experience compared with this new approach.

... I feel there is a positive tension in University EAP that distributes what we learn in real life, making it visible and tangible. I am no longer evaluated simplistically through the scores in the final. ... [This is because] to me, knowledge is the thing that is used to improve our standard of living. If the knowledge we receive fails to be on par with the living quality we intend to pursue and raise, such knowledge is unwanted and useless. In language learning, vocabulary is important, so is grammar. We accumulated vocabulary and worked on grammar in middle and high school, but we failed in integrating them into a helpful tool to address the communicational purposes. ... This is not effective knowledge or effective learning, though it happened in the secondary education. ... [E]xam results are important to students; but in the 21st century, we need more than that. We need opportunities in and outside classroom to demonstrate our capacities in speaking and writing and intercultural communication. We need to prove how versatile we are other than showing off how well we could do in exams. You know, it [University EAP program] helps me realize the kind of academic English learning at university level that I strive for, and helps me envision a different future. It informs me a new way of thinking and encourages me to express myself through academic presentations. These are what I had never learned, heard, or experienced in middle or high school. The influence can be far-reaching.... I feel more needs to be done in curriculum design and development. ... What we hope to see more is the intersection and integration with other disciplinary studies. It is a long-term multi-endeavor between students, our University EAP teachers, and the school administration. (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015)

The stories of these university youth's self-transformation journey through their University EAP practice are enriched in the details of doing scientific research and report, cooperating and coordinating with the team, and using the language for authentic communication purposes. Each of such details is presented more remarkably than the one before as a self-empowering tool to consolidate their language study, and to facilitate their conscious transformation as an awakening holistic individual. Evidently, they have become disillusioned with the fixed success story with higher test results in the banking model of language education. What is revealed is that University EAP learning experience could serve as the practice of hope and freedom by rejecting the banking concept in its entirety, and respecting women and men as "conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world" (Freire, 1970, 2001, p. 79).

7.4 Learning Difficulties Confronted by Chinese University Youth Using Foreign EAP Textbooks

In University EAP program, all four participants had the chance in using textbooks by *Pearson*. Based on what Dandan understood for the English textbooks she had for classroom use purposes, she shared her opinion of using a foreign English textbook by saying,

... It is the first time that I use foreign textbooks for University English program. They are not difficult; but to me the goals for each unit are not clear. I am sometimes confused about

the purpose for each unit, and which ability it intends to help improve. There is a topic for each unit; but I don't think it is clear-cut, though we have covered all in the semester. The difficulty level of these textbooks is like that of my high school English textbooks; the only difference is the former is more academically oriented. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

In the beginning, Dandan was excited about using foreign textbooks for newness; before long she detected learning difficulties in comprehending the purpose of textbook developers in each unit. Interestingly, when referring to the foreign University EAP textbook in use, Meimei expressed similar concerns by saying that:

... I feel Book 1 is mainly about your thinking mode, how you could comprehend an article, and later on how you would construct independently a research paper. ... I am afraid the majority of us realized more or less the gap. Firstly, we felt it was new, interesting and relaxing, seemingly, as the teacher would guide us, step by step, in exploring and learning. It was fun in class, if you mull things over. We did not have much homework, compared with what we had before [in middle and high school]. ... I was always struggling with assignments such as paragraph writing. ... You may invest time on it. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

Essentially, this unfamiliarity and cognitive difficulty might be caused by the reasons that the layout of a foreign textbook may be unfamiliar to Chinese ELLs, since they have been long exposed to the traditional layout of English textbooks produced by Chinese textbook developers; besides, their Chinese EAP teachers might as well offer insufficient navigation on textbook units in the orientation period. Dandan returned to this textbook topic by exploring that:

... As for textbooks in use from the primary to university level, I feel there is a fault line at university. There is continuum reflected in the aspect of the difficulty level in vocabulary, grammar and time and tense, from primary school English textbooks to those of middle school and of high school. In university, EAP teachers did not lecture on word usage and language [grammar] points, instead, they focus on English for academic and research purposes. This is what we have never experienced before. In non-EAP classrooms, teachers continue lecturing on vocabulary and grammar; this could be of help, but in compared with ours [University EAP program], such help is limited. This fault line at university is vital, as it unfolds before us a better learning approach, namely, learning by using [doing] it.

Many of my peers from the non-EAP program wish for joining us, because their General English program remains as a continuation of what they were fed up with in middle and high school. I feel lucky, though University EAP program indeed is still an English program, we learn brand-new English. ... We learn, other than a language itself, an academic attitude and habit towards scientific research, for instance the overall process of a research project, how to write an academic report, and the like. [Interview Three, October 12th, 2015]

Through critical reflection on her University EAP practice and her peers' comments on the use of traditional Chinese-English textbooks at the tertiary level, Dandan realized that the temporal learning difficulties on foreign English textbooks could be eventually overcome. According to her, the cultivated capacity of one's self-adjustment of his learning adaptability to meet the changed learning scenario, his active mindset to embrace newer academic challenges, and his willingness to cooperate with the instructor for the accomplishment of study tasks could work to its very best.

7.5 Worries of Gaining a Low GPA in University EAP Assessment

Traditionally, in formal schooling at different educational levels, school achievements assessment is important rubrics for assessing students' learning outcomes (Hughes, 1989; Brindley, 2001). The investigation of its washback effect on teaching and learning is also influential (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Huang, 2005; Liu & Gu, 2013; Zheng & Chen, 2013). Regarding the topic of the University EAP assessment, Meimei responded to the inquiry on her interpretation of the term assessment in her University EAP program. She expressed explicitly her worries of it and its fairness by saying:

... Well, I do [care about my GPA now]. There is impending pressure on GPA. I have the lowest GPA in EAP. ... [A]ll EAP students and teachers have to face this hard fact that our GPA is low. ... The outcome of the final is, the GPA of our Class A is low because the final exam paper for us is rather difficult. Our GPA is generally low. ... This is, eh, not fair, compared with the easier final exam paper used for those in General English program. This needs to be changed. (Interview Two, October 12th, 2015)

Xiaogang shared similar concerns about his GPA in the University EAP assessment. He was saying that:

... I surely care about my GPA, since it would be reviewed when I apply for a graduate school abroad. Meanwhile, when people around care [about it], I would be pushed to care about that, too. This is peer pressure. At the final exam weeks, you would see how much we cared about the exam results. It is common that people burn the candle at both ends. We would stay up and cram for a better exam result. (Interview Two, October 11th, 2015)

The worries and concerns about the test results seem reasonable and understandable given the situation that these ELLs grew up within the broader social scenario of a banking model of school education and a fixed ideology of learning for school success. Interestingly in the later interviews, Meimei's and Xiaogang's changed insights seem to have amended their initial fixed consideration of the test results from a more optimistic perspective. Meimei was saying that:

... I worry my GPA in English, but I care more about other things other than test scores. First, a major change in me at university is that I care more about my inner voices. I know what I want academically; I don't want to be belittled by GPA or test scores. Second, my EAP teachers guide us how to be a critical thinker and present us a different University English outlook. My teachers care more about students' cognitive abilities and student feedback on this course, such as what we have learned through critical thinking and reading, and how this related to the progress from other disciplinary studies. I feel this is where their sense of fulfillment comes from. As a university student, I feel the advancement of the cognitive level means much more than the improvement in exam scores. The cognitive way of thinking can profoundly affect one's view of life and future. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

Xiaogang was also responding to this topic in a similar manner by saying:

... Once I felt rather upset and irritated about it, because I had invested much more time and energy in it [University EAP learning] before I received a comparatively low GPA. At first,

it was hard to accept this, but as time goes by, I feel calmer in myself because I did learn substantially. Further, I have clear goals already. I don't need quick success or instant academic benefits. What I aspire is slow but solid progress. I have peers that need a better GPA for a better job or scholarship. I have had such achievements already, I don't care. (Interview Three, October 18th, 2015)

In a normal sense, university GPA matters because it measures a student's academic achievement and counts if he hopes to be accepted by a renowned graduate school or finds a good employment. There is no exception among the university youths interviewed in this study. Nevertheless, with their cognitive maturity and critical awareness development, they grow disillusioned of the single story of learning for success in test orientedness, and better arm themselves with more explicit academic paths and career planning for a different and promising future.

7.6 Respecting and Responding to University Youth's Learning Needs

In today's Chinese society, students always undertake years of required English study before they enter workplaces. Dandan, Meimei, Xiaobo, and Xiaogang shared serious thoughts on the meaning of University EAP learning in their lived experience in and outside the school. As an eager university ELL, Meimei's voice was most straightforward, proactive, and representative in the aspect of addressing students' learning needs at the tertiary level of education. She strongly recommended a school-based needs analysis to respect and respond to students' authentic English learning needs at university. She was saying that:

... I am empowered in University EAP learning. I aspire to learn more despite the limitation of time. This is common among university students like me in this school. I have been thinking, based on the past year's learning experience, since EAP courses are informative and resourceful, University EAP program could be extended to all four school years; or, EAP teachers should re-plan and pace their classes, as we need more time to digest the richness of the content in each class. I can tell which is the better solution than the other. It may be hard to make the compromise. ... Surveys must be done among non-English majors like us to investigate the reasonable amount of time that can be invested on English learning before the teaching plans are made. I know it is hard, but this is essential. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2015)

What Meimei discussed addresses the centrality of needs analysis in regulating the course design and teaching (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Hyland, 2006). In particular, she offered an important pedagogical tenet for the present and future University EAP program that the learner needs ought to be tactically merged with the institutional requirements for the mutual fulfillment of their goals (Benesch, 2001). This echoes in Hyland (2006) who claimed that University EAP teachers and their university ELLs are able to co-construct the learning goals to bear the teacher's "values, beliefs and philosophies" of teaching and learning (p. 74).

7.7 Teacher Influence on Students' Academic Success in University EAP

The influence of a caring, supportive language teacher could be positive and strong in inspiring and motivating her students, no matter whatever educational level they are in. Though as adult learners, these participants reiterated the far-reaching influences exerted by their University EAP teachers on their academic success at the tertiary level and on their life paths no matter how new or challenging the teaching materials or study tasks would be. Dandan was responding to this aspect by saying:

... My University EAP teachers are of great help in the aspects of academic vocabulary, dictions, cohesion and coherence in texts, logical and critical thinking, constructing scientific research and scientific paper, and the development of EQ [Emotional Quotient]. One case was that when we were working on business ethics, my teacher lectured on the connection between management and leadership. He discussed with us the importance of giving priority over things you love to do, wish to do, and can do. In my opinion, University EAP teachers and high school English teachers are all professionals. The former are higher degree holders [doctorate holders, associate professors, and professors], while the latter are more responsive, demanding, and dedicated to students. The former guide us on the right track, such as autonomous learning and effective time management, and the latter care more about our school records and each tiny part of our study and life.

In many cases, University EAP teachers broaden my horizon and instill in me a different mode of thinking, such as what's happening internationally to English, and the prospect of English in the globalized world, while high school English teachers care only about book knowledge and exam grades. Personally, I prefer University EAP teachers. This is because no teacher would take me throughout my life, what I need is a mentor to guide me the road ahead, unfold me a broader horizon and an unknown future, and teach me how to fish, other than holding my hand like a toddler. I need more study skills for autonomous learning sooner or later in life. (Interview Three, October 12, 2015)

Meimei expressed similar opinions on her University EAP teachers and how they continued to propel her passion and motivation for language study in a specific way. She was saying that:

... [my] EAP teachers have exerted huge influences on me. They are highly professional; this is evident. ... I feel I am empowered by my EAP teachers and this EAP learning platform at university. Our EAP teachers paid more emphasis on helping us realize the gap between University EAP and traditional General English teaching. They would lecture based on a certain academic topic, and share learning resources. ... [They] would share many useful resources, such as google scholar or some academic texts or websites, for instance, how to write a literature review on a Harvard website. These teachers were good at sharing. ... [They helped built] a *Wechat* [a social interactive media like Facebook] online learning community, in which some of my peers often share TED videos or CNN or BBC news reports. They would sometimes discuss [with us], too.

When we were exposed to these learning materials and realize some research interest, we would autonomously go for it. Such learning is not limited to searching online with key words for papers. Effectively using a search engine is a learning practice. Then when you retrieve a piece of literature, you have to figure out whether it is academic and valuable, then you would go and read it. In this process, you may encounter new vocabularies, you

would look them up in the dictionary and learn them. Meanwhile, you comprehend the paper from end to end. (Interview Three, October 16th, 2016)

These findings encapsulate the revelations, desire, and legacy in the science of EAP from the student perspectives, constituting the foreshadow that informs what is and what may be in the field of University EAP to be discussed in the next chapter.

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Chapter 8

What is and What may be in the Field of University EAP



Based on the thick description, interpretation, and analysis of the interview data, the following parallel subheadings address the challenges for future studies, recommendations for University EAP teachers and for a localized critical University EAP pedagogy.

8.1 Challenges for Future Studies

This study focuses on the generational characteristics of today's Chinese university youth and the critical dispositions that they believe indispensable in acquiring English as an academic language in this globalized era. Grounded in this research focus, twelve even age, voluntary University EAP learners, namely six males and six females, were recruited for this interview study from the selected university in Shanghai that offered University EAP program. Among them, four were eventually selected for the thick data analyses. These four participants, through Seidman's (2006) in-depth phenomenological interviewing, shared their past, present, and transformative academic English learning experience in and outside the school settings in China today.

Though only four EAP learners (Dandan, Meimei, Xiaobo, and Xiaogang) were selected for data analyses, they were all unique and representative in sharing good stories to let the research themes emerge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McCracken, 1988), which inspired and propelled the researcher to explore the truth underneath. Based on what has been researched and found, it is recommended that more larger scale qualitative phenomenological interview studies be implemented with

- the continued focus and investigation on University EAP teaching experience and pedagogical reflection of Chinese EAP teachers at tertiary level, with a broader spectrum of the novice and experienced EAP teachers involved in both

the state-run higher education institutions and the private counterparts that offer University EAP program to their undergraduate and graduate students; and

- the extension of the present study to include more EAP learners in higher education institutions nationwide that offer University EAP program in the hope of obtaining more and broader student voices to address the changed learning scenarios for University ELT in this globalized century.

This would include and share more voices from university youth and faculties that provide the school administration, decision-makers, other related stakeholders, and the international EAP and ELT community additional and richer insight into the development of the localized University EAP program and pedagogy that may better serve, empower, and inspire Chinese university ELLs as well as ELLs from other cultures. Meanwhile, with the advancement of the learning of academic English as the regional and international phenomenon in this globalized century, existing and emerging educational imbalance needs to be further identified and investigated. This includes the discrepancies in terms of teaching resources and teacher qualities in the country's public and private schools, the after-school English enrichment program as part of the shadow education, the parental involvement due to the regional, geographical, and ideological gaps on language education and language study, and the changed learner needs among today's Chinese ELLs.

Furthermore, in the spirit of replicating this interview study with more voluntary Chinese EAP learners and higher education institutions, it is recommended that University EAP teachers be included as the parallel object for future study. This study aims at hearing and spreading the voices of today's Chinese university youth regarding their past, present, and transformative language study experience in and outside the school settings. As more has been learned about and explored, the critical dispositions that they believe indispensable for the acquisition of University EAP are taking shape. It is equally paramount to understand University EAP teachers' perspectives and mindsets on teaching University EAP in a changed and liberating way that is fundamentally different from the traditional ELT practice. There was pioneering research on Chinese University EAP teachers' perspectives, thoughts, and pedagogical practice in this area (Cai, 2012), though it was far from complete or inclusive. Much more remains to be discovered, theorized, and put further back to real classroom practice to benefit today's Chinese and international university youth.

8.2 Implications for University EAP Teachers

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that when students attain the tertiary level of education, they still possess the learning needs of English as an academic language not only to fulfill their study purposes but also to meet future work purposes in this globalized society. However, with cognitive maturity, they grow no longer satisfied with the confinement of the old, fact-based knowledge from the

traditional banking model of ELT on vocabulary, grammar, and model test papers in middle school and high school. Instead, these youth need advanced language study to help deconstruct their old knowledge of English language, and reconstruct it with new knowledge that they have not yet learned or experienced to facilitate their disciplinary studies and future workplaces. Such new knowledge includes academic integrity, critical thinking, critical reading, academic writing, task-based research projects, oral presentation and interpersonal communication skills, and new study resources, tools, and skills. In this way, they stay anxious to discard “mute English” narrowly for the examination purposes and replace it with “live English” to express their thoughts, communicate with others, and use it to meet the requirements of their specific disciplinary departments and to accomplish their ultimate academic goals.

Therefore, today’s university youth demonstrates their learning expectation upon entering higher education institutions; they need professional expertise to improve their comprehensive English proficiency and fulfill their academic ambition. Grounded on the participants’ comments on the ideal qualities of University EAP faculties, it is recommended that the following implications should address a broader population of University EAP teachers that work in this area:

1. University EAP teachers must stop test-oriented, banking model of teaching and assessment in their EAP classes. Instead, by listening to and communicating with their ELLs to understand their learner needs and learning motivations, they need to:
 - realize that what motivates today’s university youth in academic English learning at the tertiary level is no longer a higher test result. Instead, it is how they are respected and treated fairly as a promising beginning scientist;
 - guide their ELLs to use University EAP as a self-empowering tool to read the words and the world (Freire, 2005);
 - apply internationally acknowledged academic integrity to navigate their ELLs’ independent writing, teamwork, research project, and other academic activities;
 - investigate and analyze their ELLs’ learner needs by conducting needs analysis studies, in particular at the very beginning of their ELLs’ language study at university; and,
 - use an orientation class as an inviting prologue to help their ELLs envision their particular, transformative, and academic paths through discussing the basics of University EAP learning.
2. University EAP teachers must recognize the challenges and opportunities that the diversity of today’s Chinese youth poses and brings to the university classroom, and address them through University EAP practice. They need to:
 - acknowledge their unique life background along with their University EAP teaching experience, which may affect their attitudes towards today’s university ELLs;

- acknowledge and respect their ELLs' life background as well as their unique past academic English learning experience, which may affect their present and future learner needs and learning motivation;
 - understand that their positive teacher influence constitutes an important contributing factor in facilitating their ELLs' advanced language study;
 - realize that creating a safe, comfortable, cooperative, and supportive learning environment is crucial in motivating ELLs to learn better and more effectively;
 - alleviate freshmen's fear and stress in the first few months of their University EAP learning by creating a smooth communication channel or a teacher–student support mechanism before, during, and after each class;
 - detect possible, existent, and emerging learning difficulties of their ELLs at different stages of University EAP learning, grant them time, patience, and necessary assistance in solving these problems independently;
 - understand that their ELLs come to class with different academic and life expectations and goals; their cognitive abilities vary, and their social and cultural backgrounds matter in their University EAP learning;
 - acknowledge that cultivating critical thinking, scientific attitudes, and self-empowerment and transformation awareness through advanced language study is tantamount to language study itself;
 - invite meaning-making communication and dialogues with their ELLs to understand their generational complexities which are reflected in their academic English learning experience;
 - engage their ELLs in the curriculum making and pedagogical practice, listen to them to understand what they aspire to learn from teachers and with teachers, and assess their academic progress formatively;
 - develop their ELLs to be critical thinkers and independent learners who stay skeptical but humble and respectful on their academic paths, and persevere in researching and pursuing answers by and for themselves, and
 - create an anti-banking pedagogical space where love, hope, and courage reside and permeate within and beyond University EAP program (Freire, 1970/2001, 2005).
3. University EAP teachers must identify critically the hegemonic role of both local and foreign University EAP textbooks. Though using foreign University EAP textbooks demonstrates a popular trend in today's University EAP program throughout the country, EAP teachers must be critical, flexible, and reflective in determining what is culturally appropriate, engaging, and beneficial to their ELLs. This implies that they need to:
- stay vigilant to the qualities and the hidden and overt ideological issues reflected in EAP textbooks, text materials, and supplemental materials for classroom use;
 - inform their ELLs with new study resources (i.e., E-books and online notes), tools (i.e., collegiate dictionary, subject-area dictionaries and glossaries, websites, and documentation guides) and skills (i.e., communicating and

- networking) to scaffold their advanced language study, and particularly, to cultivate their learner autonomy and lifelong learning spirit;
- educate their ELLs with the ability and skills to inquire, critique, reflect, and dialogue through using English as a medium to join the broader international community;
 - engage their ELLs in the process of teaching planning and instruction practice in an active manner;
 - educate and empower their ELLs by encouraging them to engage in and take action on their societal life for changes.
4. University EAP teachers must understand that language study is not only a cognitive human activity, but also is a social and cultural event. According to the sociocultural constructivist theory of learning, the social context of learning plays a role in the development of individual knowledge (Vygotsky, 1981). This means University EAP teachers must realize that the essence of language study surpasses acquiring its linguistic structures; it respects the connectedness between learning itself and a learner's social and cultural worlds. This acknowledgment propels University EAP teachers to:
- liberate their ELLs from the banking model of language study and to employ socially and culturally relevant materials and activities to ignite their learning motivation;
 - challenge their ELLs to think, inquire, dialogue, and respond critically, in a respectful manner;
 - include concrete and perplexing real-life examples, activities, and topics for classroom discussion and brainstorming, encouraging independent thinking and team cooperation;
 - welcome different voices from their ELLs, let their thoughts and opinions brew, ferment, conflict, and shape anew to best represent themselves as unique holistic individuals;
 - advocate autonomous learning among their ELLs and instill in them the value of holistic learning and lifelong learning; and
 - facilitate their ELLs to identify the gap between General English learning and University EAP learning, which serves to help them recognize the role of English, in particular, academic English, in their future study, work, and life paths.

8.3 Toward a Localized Critical University EAP Pedagogy

The interview data of this study elucidates the pedagogical practice of English language education at the primary and secondary level that deprive today's Chinese university youth of the opportunities of engaging in meaning-making language learning process. The ELT that many of today's University EAP learners received in

primary, middle and high school was practiced on the basis of test-oriented, banking model of English teaching, learning, and assessment, which was embodied through intensive workload on vocabulary, grammar, and model test papers. According to these participants, such banking practice failed in providing them with appropriate academic English learning experience indispensable to develop their language proficiency or to acquire communicative skills and other critical language competence. Traditional banking model of ELT, such as grammar-oriented and teacher-centered practice, views students negatively as “receiving objects”, while teachers as “depositor, prescriber, domesticator” out of a “mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness” (Freire, 1970/2001, p. 77). It deprives them of the opportunities of participating actively in the process of authentic learning.

Additionally, English remains as a foreign language and a required school subject for today’s Chinese ELLs, as they do not have the chance in using it for communication purposes other than for examination purposes. Next, there are limited numbers of English teachers from leading English-speaking countries, such as the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and Canada, that are available in teaching English at the country’s primary, middle and high schools. Besides, the majority of Chinese English teachers lack in the overseas study or work experience; to them, English remains foreign, and their mission is narrowed to prepare their ELLs with test-taking skills to win testing. Since learning is understood as a sociocultural process which is realized through interactions with others, and involves moving beyond the current level of competence (Saville-Troike, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978, 1981), effective English learning best occurs within the scaffolding cultural and social contexts, other than being confined in limited classroom hours.

In this new era of internationalization of higher education, the increasing demand of academic English in the world universities has been fully addressed (de Chazal, 2014; Hyland, 2006). Accordingly, University EAP program must take into careful consideration the localized social and cultural contexts in which language study happens and serves the learning needs and goals of today’s university youth. Based on the researcher’s early years of University EAP teaching experience, borrowed teaching philosophies, curriculum materials, and pedagogical practices for the purpose of immediate and convenient use without critical and thorough examination or evaluation regarding their appropriateness to today’s university ELLs may not be a good choice. It may discourage the learner motivation due to their unfamiliarity to the textbook layout and the difficulty level of the unit content, and further quench their passion for language study and impede their school success and future career planning.

Canagarajah (2005) stressed the role of critical pedagogy as a social and educational process through a “way of ‘doing’ learning and teaching” (p. 932). Arming herself with this theoretical underpinning, the researcher envisions how a localized critical University EAP pedagogy would affect the “personal and social change than it is with ‘how to teach language’ more effectively or in ways that simply encourage critical thinking on the part of teacher and students” (Crookes & Lehner, 1998, p. 327). This transformative language pedagogy is of particularity, practicality, and possibility that can live and thrive outside the black box of the banking model of

English language education (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). It can not only enable today's university youth with communicative competence in English for the academic and work purposes, but also empower them simultaneously to cultivate a critical awareness of the world and to act on it to make changes and improvements. This, argued Crookes and Lehner (1998), results from the personal and social choices that reflect a desire to “understand both the word (i.e., language) and the world and to act upon these choices” (p. 327).

Next, this localized critical University EAP pedagogy foregrounds the interplay between University EAP teachers and their ELLs, discarding the deficit tradition of deferring to the former as the sole authority in and outside the classroom with “mediated actions” (Wertsch, 1998). This requires teachers to reflect how they interact with the latter, and how they treat one another while negotiating individual, institutional, and societal expectations. Additionally, this localized critical University EAP pedagogy focuses not only on the source and quality of text materials and pedagogical contexts, but also on sharing the authority and responsibility between University EAP teachers and students and on empowering them to act positively in the process of language education.

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Afterword as Concluding Remarks

This study began as a long and patient academic journey to explore qualitatively the lived experience of today's Chinese university youth in learning English as an academic language, in particular, the critical dispositions that they believe indispensable in the acquisition of University EAP. The researcher understood that each study, whether quantitative or qualitative, has its strength and limitation. The strength of the in-depth phenomenological interview study is the researcher's personal contact with the recruited university youth as participants and the I-Thou relationship established accordingly throughout the entire interview process (Schutz, 1967). It was through the interview experience that the researcher had the chance to understand the past, present, and transformative academic English learning experience of her participants regarding their schooling of English as a required core subject. Through this in-depth phenomenological interview study, she realized, from a critical perspective, how their individual lived experiences confronted and compromised with the powerful *institutional*, organizational, and other sociopolitical forces that were penetrating in the social context where they were born and raised (Seidman, 2006).

This research study provided the researcher with deeper insight into the issues, structures, processes, and policies that have permeated in the life stories of these participants (Seidman, 2006). By listening to what they narrated about their stories, reflections, and perceptions of their past, present, and transformative language study in and outside the school settings, the researcher was greatly impelled to reexamine her lived experience as a University EAP teacher. It is high time that she reevaluated what is important to her as a language instructor at the tertiary level and what this research experience has meant to her as a conscientious individual that dared to teach and work with more university youth for envisioning fearlessly a better future.

Dumbuya (2000) concluded in his research that the in-depth phenomenological interview study highlights the "reality that a transformation takes place in people as they migrate to a culture and environment different from their own" (p. 174). Similarly, all four participants in this study experienced and appreciated such self-empowerment and transformation when they embarked on University EAP

program which fundamentally differs from the traditional banking model of GELT in primary and secondary education. Some of these transformations seem fairly conspicuous, such as how Dandan, Meimei, and Xiaogang reflected on the changes that happened to them after the first school year's University EAP learning. Meanwhile, other changes appear comparatively subtle, like the way that Xiaobo was referring to his understanding of the role of University EAP learning on him and his future career paths. Whether these transformations are conspicuous or subtle, the fact is that a definite and tangible transformation within each individual EAP learner's lifestyle and world outlook is taking shape, ready, and essential for them to continue reading the word as well as the world (Freire, 2005). Despite that these ELLs had suffered from the darkness of the banking model of language study in their early years of schooling, they have grown up as matured individuals with empowered capacities, updated critical awareness, and consistent perseverance to confront, challenge, and uncover the unfairness of the flattened education that they had weathered through. They now are able to envision and embrace fearlessly a liberated and brighter future with full courage, confidence, and determination.

No society, claimed Freire (2005), could assert itself without developing its culture, science, research, technology, and teaching. Those who live in such a fast-paced, globalized era, must trust and value language education because it is the means that enables and empowers them to find a better self and experience a different world. If that is the case, the diversity among language learners concerning their ethnographical, family, and educational backgrounds must be respected, valued, and thoroughly understood. These are multiple diversities that enrich the learner-centered and research-informed EAP practice for the purpose of better serving today's ELLs as empowered individuals for both the global and local connectivity. In this sense, the broader sociopolitical environment and the specific school environment for authentic learning should be tantamount to the fine quality of teaching materials and the learner-oriented University EAP pedagogy of particularity, practicality, and possibility of language education. This specific critical language pedagogy is socioculturally relevant and responsive to its beneficiaries, demonstrating courage, knowledge, and love in educating for changes.

University EAP teachers, as conscientious, responsible, and brave individuals, along with international TESOL colleagues, must entail the lofty mission of creating an advanced language pedagogy within a safe and democratic language environment to serve today's university youth. Freire (2005) was insightful when claiming that the problems of language always involve "ideological questions and, along with them, questions of power" (p. 143). Phillipson (1992) was warning the power issue reinforced by ELT professionals worldwide within the larger, more expansive concept of *linguistic imperialism*. He was proactive in warning that it was language pedagogical practices and language specialists that have contributed to the "hegemony" of English, ELT professionals are one of the "forces ... which have propelled English forward" (p. 6). This indicates, as Steinberg (cited in Freire, 2005) wrote in the Afterword that we must discard the fixed ideology of regarding language teachers as indoctrinators, and envision our roles as cultural workers,

committed to social justice, equity, and humility, to “influence students and open portals of knowledge” (p. 176).

In this sense, the EAP teachers from the chosen university in Shanghai for this research study, and this university itself, serve as a pioneer role model in the country in informing their university ELLs with the critical awareness development, research-informed EAP practices, and a reciprocal language teaching and learning environment. This environment is well situated in anti-banking, holistic, and humanistic philosophy toward engaging university youth for a transformed self and a responsible life in a sustainable global and local culture. These exploratory pedagogical practices coincide with the researcher’s envisioning of a critical and localized University EAP pedagogy. This critical pedagogy aims to not only inform today’s university ELLs with language knowledge, academic literacies, and study skills, but also to move beyond these tangible limits toward a much broader scope of the global conscience, the vision of peace, love, and intelligence, the sense of empowerment and consciousness, the pride of their diverse identities, and readiness to dialogue, communicate, critique, and engage in a globalized world (Nava, 2001; Spring, 2007; Seymour, 2004).

In conclusion, the researcher must emphasize that for her, as the researcher and interviewer of this study, the methodology of in-depth, phenomenological interview as a strong and self-empowering qualitative research tool has instilled in her the importance of respecting her participants and of enjoying the newer understanding of the generational complexities that she has gained from them through each interview process. Whole-heartedly, over again she feels thankful and privileged in learning and vicariously living their English learning stories and now sharing them to a broader international education community. *Story matters—many stories matter*. When we are open, responsive, and respectful to the many authentic stories of today’s ELLs, we are dedicated to a better tomorrow of our world through the most powerful transformation tool that we have in hand, education.

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