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# An Investigation of Post-Secondary Chinese Students' Perceived Challenges Learning ESL at a Canadian University

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An Investigation of Post-Secondary Chinese Students' Perceived Challenges

Learning ESL at a Canadian University

By

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AN INVESTIGATION OF POST-SECONDARY CHINESE STUDENTS' PERCEIVED

CHALLENGES LEARNING ESL AT A CANADIAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

With an ever-increasing number of Chinese students coming to Canada for better education opportunities, Canadian universities are providing various ESL programs to facilitate their academic study in a new country. However, Chinese ESL learners are still facing challenges in the learning process. This study focuses on answering two main questions: (1) What are the major challenges that post-secondary Chinese students face when enrolled in an ESL program in Canada? and (2) How do their previous educational experiences in China affect their ESL learning in Canada?

Six participants from a university in Ontario were invited to talk about their learning experience in the ESL program offered by the university and to give suggestions for the improvement of the program. This research aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of the challenges that are faced by the research participants. It also intends to offer suggestions that may help institutions and their teachers provide a better learning experience for ESL learners not only from China, but all international students who need English language development prior to their program of study at post-secondary Canadian institutions.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my parents, my grandparents, and the professors who have been

inspiring me during the whole research process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

**1.1     The Influences of Globalization and Internationalization**

As one of the results of globalization, China's economy has been growing rapidly.

China became the second largest economy in 2005 (Allen, J. Qian, & M, Qian, 2005).

Due to its movement toward a capitalist economy, the implementation of the one-child

policy, and the growing trend of two working parents (McNeal & Yeh, 2003), "the level

of affluence of families has continued to grow strongly and a significant business,

professional and bureaucratic elite has emerged with resources capable of financing full-

fee Western education for their children" (Mazzarol, Soutar, Smart, & Choo, 2001, p. 7).

Meanwhile, with the process of internationalization, education has already

become "an internationally traded commodity" (Altbach, as cited in Nie, 2005, p. 2).

Chinese students usually believe that "world university rankings can be considered as an

indicator of academic reputation" (Gong & Huybers, 2015). As a country with some top

ranked universities, Canada has a superior reputation in education among Chinese

students. Therefore, it has become one of the best choices for international students to

further their education. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2013), in

2010, there were 217,882 international students studying in various educational

institutions in Canada. In 2013, this number surged to 293,503, and students from China

constituted a large part of this group. This is a win-win situation, as the Canadian

government is benefiting economically, and simultaneously, the needs of Chinese

students who are interested in receiving quality education can be fulfilled. To help these

students acquire the English proficiency that scaffolds their academic learning in school,

most Canadian universities have made huge efforts in establishing numerous English language centres or institutions to provide English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

## 1.2    The Rationale of the Research

As a former ESL teacher in China, the researcher has always been interested in ESL teaching and learning. Therefore, when he came to Canada for his graduate studies, he paid close attention to ESL programs in this country where English is one of the official languages. One source that helped him learn about ESL programs in Canada was the students who were taking an ESL program at the target university. Their textbooks were organized effectively so that students could progressively adapt to the teacher's pedagogy developed from research and presented by passionate teachers in the program. The researcher was impressed by the fact that along with language acquisition, the primary focus were communication skills and application of the content that students learned.  It seemed that the program was perfect, but some Chinese students who were taking the ESL program complained about the barriers they met during their studies. This contradictory concern aroused the researcher's interest and led to this research.

## 1.3    Research Questions

Through this research, I intend to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges that post-secondary Chinese students face when enrolled in an ESL program in Canada?
- How do their previous experiences as students in China affect their ESL learning in Canada?

- What suggestions do participants have for improving the existing ESL program?

**1.4    The Aims of the Research**

It is important to address the research questions because challenges that students are facing do exist and they become a persistent barrier in their learning process. "Unless these students receive appropriate intervention, they will continue to struggle, and the gap between their achievement and that of their peers will widen over time" (Eric Development Team, 2001, p. 1). Additionally, an acknowledgement and deep understanding of these difficulties can potentially help teachers recognize and respond to the challenges that Chinese students are facing in ESL programs, thereby improving learning outcomes.

**1.5    Outline of Chapters**

The first chapter focuses primarily on the background introduction of the phenomenon in this study and the rationale of the researcher. It also presents the aims of the research and what questions the researcher is trying to answer.

The second chapter concentrates on existing literature. First, it shows the reader the trend that nowadays more and more students are going abroad for better education, and there are requirements for their English proficiency to guarantee their smooth transition to academic learning. Then, it points out the fact that international students often meet with challenges on campus. Based on that, the researcher identifies what difficulties Chinese students are facing and addresses the literature relating to perceived challenges of Chinese ESL learners. Finally, suggestions are presented for ESL teachers.

In the third chapter, the researcher explains the choice of methodology for this study by illustrating how the research is done step by step, including the choice of research method, the way the participants were recruited, and the procedure for data collection and analysis.

The fourth chapter provides findings from the raw data collected from interviews, resulting in several themes: background information of the ESL program that the participants were taking, background information of the participants, some challenges that they have met in the program, their thoughts about the program, and some suggestions to improve the program.

In the fifth chapter, the researcher categorizes the challenges that Chinese ESL students have met. The chapter also compares findings from previous literature and from this study. In addition, this chapter draws a conclusion of this study, answers the research questions, and points out its limitations and implications. The thesis ends with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

**2.1** **International Students and Required English Proficiency**

The twentieth century was considered the century of migration (Iyer, 2011), and this trend is even more obvious in the 21st century. International students, as one of the major groups in the migration, are serving as cultural carriers and resources (Mestenhauser, 1983; Paige, 1990). According to Canadian Bureau for International Education (n.d.), there were over 290,000 international students in Canada in 2013. These students take their education seriously, and are eager to succeed in their courses and obtain degrees (Fox, Cheng, Berman, Song, & Myles, 2006). English is undoubtedly one of the most important skills for those who go to English-speaking countries. Without this skill, students are very likely to meet barriers in their study because "they do not have access to effective bilingual or ESL instruction" (Eric Development Team, 2001, p. 1). Moreover, these international students also need this skill to "master the ways of speaking, reading and writing that are appropriate to the new community" (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1988, p. 12).

**2.2** **International Students' Challenges in Their Campus Lives**

Due to the large population of international students and the importance of their English skills, the difficulties that students are facing in their academic learning and cultural adaptation caused by the lack of English proficiency have been discussed by many researchers.

Chacon (1998) conducted a survey about international students' academic life at the University of Alberta. The result showed that 74.4% of international students found

they had a problem in English writing and speaking, and struggled to understand their instructors in academic classes.

In 2010, Berman and Cheng supported Chacon's findings with their research, showing that non-native English speaking students met more challenges in academic study compared with their native English speaking peers. Moreover, they moved one step further by presenting a more detailed result that states even with language difficulties, non-native English speaking undergraduate students were able to reach similar academic results to English-speaking students, while non-native speaking graduate students' GPAs were relatively lower than those of native students.

Besides the challenges that lie within acquiring academic knowledge, international students usually find they have limited resources to facilitate their English learning in their lives. They tend to ask help from their friends who come from the same countries and speak the same mother tongue, which may impede the second language acculturation (Fox, Cheng, Berman, Song, & Myles, 2006). In terms of acculturation, some researchers considered it a term to describe the relationship between academic achievement and cultural adaptation (Berry, 1997; Buddinton, 2002; Cheng & Fox, 2008).

## 2.3    Chinese Students' Perceived Challenges on Campus

Chinese students, who accounted for the largest percentage (32.42%) in Canadian international students in 2013 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, n.d.), have drawn much attention from researchers.

Many Chinese international students' lack of English language proficiency is becoming one of the major challenges that affect their adaptation to their new learning

environment (Zhang & Zhou, 2010). According to Wen and Clément (2003), "[I]t is widely recognized that while Chinese students are very good at grammar-based written examinations, they are poor speakers, often designated as 'reticent learners' who lack the willingness to communicate" (p. 18). Another barrier for Chinese students inhibiting their academic success is that they cannot understand the instructors. In the research conducted by Huang (2004), about 53.8% of the subjects report having issues understanding English lectures because of the rapidness of the professors' speech; about 44.9% of the students experience difficulties of comprehension because the professors do not pronounce words clearly enough.

As well as English language problems, Huang and Klinger (2006) also point out some other difficulties of Chinese international students (e.g., financial difficulties, adapting to the classroom learning environment, acculturation problems, and emotional difficulties).

## 2.4    Chinese Students' Perceived Challenges in Their ESL Program

In view of the difficulties that international students have been facing on campus and in their lives, the majority of universities in English-speaking countries provide formal ESL programs based on perceived need (Fox et al., 2006).

However, it is still a huge challenge for post-secondary Chinese students to adapt to ESL programs in Canada, because their learning habits have been affected by their previous education in China for at least 12 years. Their Chinese educational experience is very different from that in Western countries. In terms of adaptation to pedagogy, language, and culture, Chinese international students have very different "prior knowledge," which refers to "not only information or skills previously acquired in formal

instruction but also the totality of the experiences that have shaped the learner's identity and cognitive functioning" (Cummins et al., 2005, p. 38), compared with that of North American students.

Regarding "prior knowledge," scholars hold divergent opinions towards Chinese students' learning habits. Chinese students are always considered by some scholars as passive, amenable, and rote learners due to the influence of Eastern/Confucian heritage culture, as in Eastern/Confucian heritage culture, teachers are always considered as incontrovertible. In ancient times, students were supposed to take down what their teachers instructed in class and to memorize the notes as true knowledge (Atkinson, 1997; Ramanthan & Kaplan, 1996; Stapleton, 2002). Other researchers, however, question the close relationship between ethnic cultural values and Chinese ESL learners' learning habits. They argue that students' learning strategies should be situation-specific (Aoki, 2002; Gan, 2009; Holliday, 2003; Horwitz, 1999; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Stephens, 1997).

From a pedagogical perspective, teachers of English in China spend less time on developing students' spoken language skills than Western ESL teachers (Chen, 1996, p. 16). With respect to language, most Chinese students speak Mandarin at school, and Mandarin has a totally different tonal system than English, so Chinese ESL learners have more difficulties in their learning process compared with their peers from other countries (Wong, 1977). From the perspective of culture, as mentioned above, some researchers (Murphy, Bradley, & Samuelowicz, as cited in Watkins & Biggs, 1996) suggested that Chinese students often prefer to use a rote method in their study because of the influence of Confucian heritage.

Previous findings (Aida, 1994; E. Horwitz, M. Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Mak, 2011; Yan & E. Horwitz, 2008) also indicate Chinese ESL students are anxious and unwilling to speak in class; one of the studies reveals that "lower self-evaluation is an important factor leading to speaking-in-class anxiety" (Mak, 2011). Since practicing plays a significant role in improving oral English, anxiety and unwillingness to speak in class may reduce students' practice opportunities and consequently cause loss of confidence.

## 2.5     Suggestions for ESL Teachers

Current research suggests that ESL teachers should "assist students to develop prerequisite skills, such as communication, research, and cooperative learning to facilitate their success in school" (Guo, 2007, p. 58). Furthermore, research has revealed the disadvantages of traditional education, which focuses primarily on language itself and writing skills, often excluding social context (Kress, 2000). ESL pedagogy should combine both language and context, meaning the teacher should teach the students English under some certain circumstances (e.g., they teach students how to open an account at a bank, or how to explain their symptoms to a doctor, etc.) (Leung & Franson, 2001).

As for students' second language anxiety, Liu and Jackson (2008) suggest that ESL teachers should "discuss with their students in the very first lesson(s) the significance of speech communication in class and share with them the feeling of anxiety experienced by many people." Furthermore, teachers should "help increase students' self-perceived competence in English to improve their learning of the language" (Liu & Jackson, 2008, p. 82).

Many researchers suggest that students' learning outcomes are affected not only by their teachers' pedagogy, but also by their prior knowledge which includes their first language (L1), their cultures and their personal experiences (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Therefore, the researchers draw that international students' prior knowledge can exert important and positive effect in their knowledge acquisition, including language learning. In 1991, Hammerly estimated that if used judiciously, mother tongue "can be twice as efficient (i.e. reach the same level of second language proficiency in half the time), without any loss in effectiveness, as instruction that ignores the students' native language". Butzkamm (2003) validated Hammerly's estimation by asserting that "Using the mother tongue, we (1) learnt to think, (2) learnt to communicate, and (3) acquired an intuitive understanding of grammar" (p. 29). Cummins, Chow, and Schecter (2006) emphasize that the students' L1 and L2 are strongly related.

Fortunately, the importance of ESL students' prior knowledge has started to obtain recognition by many educators, researchers, and school boards in Canada. Colleen Early (2005) presents some strategies for teaching ESL students, including using the student's first language. She suggests that it should be encouraged that students continue to speak their mother tongue and the teachers should cultivate the students' ability to transfer from one language to another.

## 2.6 Limitation of Previous Research

There is an increasing body of research relating to the phenomenon that an increasing number of Chinese students' going abroad to further their education. However, the literature is still sparse compared to the complexity of this phenomenon (Jiao, 2006). The vast majority of research focuses on Chinese ESL students' learning in the United

States. Despite the limited research involving Canada, several researchers (Chen, 1996; Chow, 1997; Jiao, 2006; Minichiello, 2001; Nie, 2005; Su, 1995; Zhang & Zhou, 2010) have identified the various challenges Chinese students experience when they adjust to a new environment, such as language proficiency, cultural differences, mental wellbeing, previous background, and communication with local students. These researchers have conducted many studies about this particular group of ESL learners. However, few of them specifically focus on the difficulties that Chinese students are facing in ESL learning in a Canadian context.

## 2.7 Summary

With more and more international students coming to Canada, Canadian universities are providing a variety of ESL programs to help improve students' English proficiency. However, it is impossible to neglect the challenges and difficulties that these students have with respect to the learning process (e.g., difficulty understanding the lectures). As the majority of international students in Canada, Chinese students have some featured challenges. For example, Chinese students are ingrained with certain specific learning habits in China, such as the rote method of straightforward repetition. When they come to Canada, they find such methods do not work well with Canadian teachers' teaching styles. Based on the challenges that ESL students have met, previous researchers have given some suggestions to ESL teachers. Some of them stress the important role of students' L1 and their previous required knowledge in their ESL learning. Others suggest some specific procedures to facilitate teachers to help students overcome the anxiety of speaking in class.

It can be clearly seen that there has been some remarkable research done on the phenomenon that an increasing number of Chinese students are taking ESL programs in English-speaking countries, especially Canada. Students' challenges in their study and their lives are revealed, and teaching pedagogy is discussed in these studies. These researchers are dedicated in internationalization with their constructive suggestions. The results of their studies have helped facilitate Chinese students' ESL learning and improve ESL programs.

From the researcher's perspectives, the existing literatures not only lit the passion but also provided the rationale of conducting this research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Qualitative Research

In this research, the researcher intended to investigate the problem for Chinese

ESL learners and to acquire an understanding of the central phenomenon. In order to gain

more detailed information about this phenomenon, the researcher recruited a small

number of participants (*n*=6) in order to have more time to analyze the data and interpret

the meaning from the findings. The research design is qualitative and more specifically, a

multi case study design.

## 3.2 Participants

Participants of this study are Chinese students from the Centre for English

Language Development at a medium-sized university in Ontario. The decision for

choosing research participants from this university was based on a ranking list of

Canadian universities found in Maclean's (2013), a Canadian magazine. It said the

percentage of graduate students from outside of Canada in this university was relatively

high compared with most other Canadian universities. Therefore, the researcher assumed

that there would be a larger pool of potential participants for this research. Two methods

were employed to recruit participants: email and a recruitment poster. The researcher

asked for help from the Chinese Student and Scholar Association of the university (CSSA)

after getting the approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) of the university on

January 23, 2015. The researcher sent e-mail invitations to students to participate in this

research project. Because CSSA did not know which students were taking the ESL

program, e-mails were sent to all the Chinese students on their mailing list. By doing so,

potential participants' privacy could be protected, as it was not easy for CSSA to target specifically who might be involved in the research. Also, posters were displayed at the Centre for English Language Development. The researcher's e-mail address was included in both the e-mail letter of invitation and the advertising poster so that Chinese ESL students who were interested in participating could easily contact the researcher.

The researcher chose as participants the first six students who contacted him with their willingness to be involved in this study. They were not chosen based on certain features such as their background, hometown in China, or English level, so bias could be mostly avoided. As participants of this group were in an ESL program to prepare for their undergraduate or graduate study, the focus was on post-secondary ESL students.

### 3.3    Data Collection

The data collection method for this research was semi-structured interviews. Considering the participants were still taking an ESL program, answering questions in English proved to be very limiting (they had difficulty expressing their ideas in English). Therefore, the interviews were conducted in Chinese, which was the first language of the participants. Time for the interviews was based on participants' schedule and the places of the interviews were decided by the participants for their convenience. The interviews were designed to be one-time and in-depth meetings so that participants who preferred to take part in the interviews on campus would not need to travel back and forth between their residences and the university but the researcher could still get enough information. The participants were interviewed individually, as most of the Chinese students were relatively more introverted in public compared with their Western peers. The questions were semi-structured and more exploratory to provide a certain degree of freedom and

encourage spontaneity (Alzheimer Europe, 2009). Therefore, the interviewer designed some questions aimed to collect general information from the participant, to lead the discussion into a deeper level, and to put the participants at ease, such as "What level of ESL program are you taking?" "Are you going to take undergraduate or graduate program after this ESL course?" "What will be your program of study?" "What do you think is the biggest challenge in your ESL learning?" "Could you give me some examples?" "Do you have any suggestion on your program to make it better?" Although most of the other questions were not designed before the interview, the aim of these research questions was clear during the process of the interview: to acquire information about the participant's challenges in ESL learning at different levels, to gain examples of their difficulty, and to ask for constructive advice from the students. While asking questions during the interviews, the researcher was simultaneously asking himself questions drawn from Gays, Mills, and Airasian (2011) such as "Why do participants act as they do?" "What else do I want to know about that participant's attitude?" "What new ideas have emerged during each interview?" (p. 466) in order to guide the questioning. The interview was audio recorded with the permission of the participant in order to keep an accurate account of the conversation, and the data was saved in the researcher's personal computer to ensure confidentiality.

Based on the raw data, the researcher first translated the conversations of the interviews into English. For accuracy and intent, the translation was checked by a professional translator. While reading the translation, the researcher took down some notes, wrote dates on all the notes, labeled them, made backup copies, and read through

the notes to make sure they were complete and accurate (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011) before analyzing the data.

**3.4     Data Analysis**

At the stage of data analysis, the researcher followed three steps: Reading/memoing, describing what is going on in the setting, and classifying research data. The process focuses on (1) becoming familiar with the data and identifying potential themes (i.e., reading/memoing); (2) examining the data in depth to provide detailed descriptions of the setting, participants, and activity (i.e., describing); and (3) categorizing and coding pieces of data and grouping them into themes (i.e., classifying). (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011, p.467)

In compliance with Tri-Council regulations, the real names of the participants were not identified, so pseudo-names were used in the thesis to protect the participants' identities.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

**4.1 Background Information of the English Language Improvement Program**

The English Language Improvement Program (ELIP) is offered by the Centre for English Language Development of the university, which aims to help students improve their English for their future academic learning. Students who receive conditional admission to an academic program without qualified English proficiency, meaning with a lower International English Language Testing System (IELTS) band or a lower Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score than required, must register for this program before taking any academic courses. Qualified IELTS band at this institution is usually above 6.5 while acceptable TOEFL score is marked as higher than 83, but actual acceptable scores might vary based on the requirements for different majors.

According to the six participants, there are five levels in ELIP: foundation, basic, Level 1 (or ELIP 1), Level 2 (or ELIP 2), and Level 3 (or ELIP 3). In each level, there are several classes and in each class, there is a teacher who provides an integrated course that combines emphasis on vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Upon finishing Level 3, students are considered to be able to meet the requirement of English proficiency and are allowed to move on to their academic courses. Students need to take the placement test before the ELIP. Then they are put into different levels based on their scores. There are also rare exceptions where students have been interviewed in China before coming to Canada. Their placement is decided by their performance in the interview.

## 4.2    Background Information of the Participants

Six participants (two males, four females) were interviewed for this study. They were asked to talk about their experiences learning in the ELIP at a university in southwest Ontario, and provide constructive suggestions.

The six Chinese ELS students were all enrolled in ELIP 2 or ELIP 3 when the interview took place. Among them, five (named as Helen, Sara, Tina, Louis, Eve in this study) were graduate students; one (named as Wilson) was an undergraduate student. Three students were from the Engineering Department, two were from the Business Department, and one was from the Faculty of Education.

Helen majored in mechanical engineering. She began to take the ELIP at Level 3 from January 2015, and she had been enrolled in it for three months when she participated in the interview.

Sara's major was human resource management. She began with ELIP 2, and had almost finished ELIP 3 when the interview took place.

Tina majored in accounting. She began ELIP at Level 2. When she had the interview, she was just about to finish ELIP 2.

Louis shared the same major with Sara. He was directly placed into Level 3 because of his good performance in the placement test. When he took part in the interview, he had almost finished this level.

Eve's major was education. She started at ELIP 2 and had almost finished ELIP 3 when she was interviewed.

Wilson was an undergraduate student who majored in automotive engineering. His ESL learning program started from Level 1. He was enrolled in ELIP 3 when he took part in the interview.

**Table 1 Background information of the participants**

| Participants | Gender | ELIP Start Level | ELIP Current Level | Undergraduate / Graduate Student | Major |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Helen | F | 3 | 3 | Graduate | Mechanical Engineering |
| Sara | F | 2 | 3 | Graduate | Human Resource Management |
| Tina | F | 2 | 2 | Graduate | Accounting |
| Louis | M | 3 | 3 | Graduate | Mechanical Engineering |
| Eve | F | 2 | 3 | Graduate | Education |
| Wilson | M | 1 | 3 | Undergraduate | Automobile Engineering |

## 4.3 The Students in the Participants' Classes

There were approximately 20 students in each ELIP class. All of the participants indicated that most (approximately 85%) of the students in their classes were Chinese, and other students were from Middle Eastern or South Asian countries (i.e., India, or Sri Lanka, etc.).

## 4.4 Participants' Challenges in the ELIP

Each participant had studied English for about 10 years in China before they came to Canada. During their ESL learning process in Canada, they more or less experienced some challenges.

### 4.4.1  Adaptation to different pedagogies

Five participants mentioned that adjusting to a new pedagogy was the biggest challenge they had met in the ELIP.  Helen, Wilson, Tina, and Louis thought the differences in the ways of teaching English in Canada and in China were the primary causes of their difficulties.

First of all, Helen, Wilson, and Louis said they had never taken a course delivered only in English before they came to Canada. They were shocked in the first class. The teachers spoke so fast for them that most of the time they could only understand the general idea of what their teachers said. Fortunately, after at least one week and at most three months, they found their listening had improved. According to the participants, the majority of their classmates also shared the same challenge.

Secondly, Wilson pointed out that completing assignments was also done different in Canada. He described his experience as following:

Most of the assignments are expected to be done on computers here, while we usually do our homework on paper in China. We need to write essays with Microsoft Word, and make presentations with PowerPoint in the ELIP. I was not familiar with these applications before, so doing homework in a different way was a challenge for me in the first few weeks.

Thirdly, ESL teaching in China and Canada focused on different aspects. Helen said the English class in China focused more on grammar, while in Canada, teachers spent more time on improving students' listening and speaking skills. Speaking of grammar, she preferred the way it was taught in China as teachers tended to give students more repeated practices to reinforce the impression of what they learned about each

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grammar rule. Sara and Tina shared their opinion that in China, English teaching was exam-oriented, but teachers in Canada paid more attention to the application of knowledge. Tina gave an example:

Canadian teachers often teach us how to find an idea to support our statement in writing class, but Chinese teachers usually pay more attention to grammar and vocabulary. When I was learning English in China, I'd been trying to memorize as many grammar rules as possible, but I found I still couldn't use them appropriately in my writing. Teachers here helped me a lot on that.

Sara shared another example based on her different learning experiences in China and Canada:

I learned some template sentences in the writing class in China. However, the teacher here doesn't allow us to use them. In China, sometimes we learned tricks about exams, like in reading, how we could find the answers as soon as possible without reading the whole article. But here, the teacher always requires full understanding of the article. So I don't think what I learned in China is quite useful here.

Last but not least, Louis recommended a kind of class in Chinese schools to the Centre for English Language Development. It is called "independent study class" in China, which Canadian schools do not have. It is a period after academic classes everyday. Students are required to stay in their classroom to finish some of their homework before going home. Teachers are usually sitting in front of the whole class. If any student has questions, she/he can go to the teacher and ask the teacher personally. Louis said he liked this way of communicating with the teacher.

Eve was the only participant who claimed to have experienced no challenges when exposed to the Canadian ESL teaching and learning environment. She had received a Bachelor degree in another English-speaking country but she got placed in ELIP 2 in the placement test. She found the ELIP quite similar to the ESL program that she had taken in that country. Thus, she did not feel adjusting to the pedagogy here was stressful.

### 4.4.2    Poor writing skills

Four participants (Wilson, Helen, Sara, Louis) mentioned that they had met with challenges because of their poor writing skills. In their opinion, vocabulary and grammar are two of the most significant elements in English writing. Two students' examples reflected their difficulty.

Helen talked about her challenge, "My vocabulary is limited, and I don't have a good method to memorize new words. I think my method is not efficient enough. However, I didn't figure out a good method in this program".

Wilson explained more about his situation:

My writing is poor. When I write in English, I can never come up with the appropriate words or grammar to express my ideas. We don't have a class for vocabulary or grammar specifically. When we don't know a word, the teacher explains it. That's the only way we learn vocabulary. As for grammar, we sometimes wonder why native English speakers use a different way to explain themselves in some specific situations. But the teacher just thinks that the phenomenon is natural, and there's no need to explain why.

### 4.4.3   Lack of practice

Tina, Helen, and Louis thought that practice played a key role in reviewing what they had learned. Nevertheless, in their learning process, they did not consider the practice in or after class was enough.

They also expressed the same opinion that oral English practice was what they needed most. Because there were usually few oral English tests on the exams in China, English teachers tended to pay little attention to oral skills, and in general, Chinese ESL students' English speaking was relatively poorer than reading, listening, and writing. The participants thought they would have abundant opportunities to practice their spoken English in Canada. To their disappointment, due to the large proportion of Chinese students in the class, they spoke Chinese to each other in most situations.

Louis told the researcher that without teachers' supervision, Chinese students always communicated in Chinese during group activities in class. He said,

There are three Middle Eastern students in our class, and the rest of the students are all Chinese. We are divided into four groups. To encourage students to speak English in the discussion, the teacher usually tries to make sure there's at least one Middle Eastern student in each group. However, there is always one group with all Chinese students, and students in that group always tend to speak Chinese in the discussion.

Helen said Chinese students liked to stay together and chat in their first language after class. This behaviour made students from other countries feel isolated. She gave an example:

The students from other countries want to fit in by using WeChat, a popular

messaging app among Chinese people. However, Chinese students always chat in

Chinese, and those students feel marginalized, they say they want to leave the

group on that app.

Helen and Louis tried to seek other ways to practice their spoken English in their

lives, but they did not succeed. Helen was living in a homestay with a senior Canadian

landlady. She tried to make conversations, but she admitted that due to cultural

differences and a generation gap, she could not find any common interest to talk about

with the landlady. Louis mentioned he participated in the English corner once held by the

English Conversation Group at the library. However, it turned out that he did not like it

much. He said, "I felt very uncomfortable. The atmosphere was weird because nobody

was willing to talk. So I never went again."

Unlike Helen and Louis, Tina found her way to improve her oral English. She

became good friends with her Nigerian roommate. They often chatted with each other.

She was surprised to see her speaking skills make great progress.

### 4.4.4   Exams

Some participants expressed that students in the ELIP had difficulty passing its

exams. Based on the interview, most participants could only generally describe what the

rubrics meant. They did not have detailed information about how their teachers marked

their exam papers. According to the participants' introduction of the rubrics of the exam

in the program, the final mark of the ELIP was decided by mid-term and final exams as

well as scores of everyday participation, such as doing presentations, answering questions,

etc. The teacher graded students mainly on aspects of grammar and sentence structure.

Wilson thought the content of their textbook was not related much to the exam.
He said:

The textbook is not helpful for the exam. The teacher uses the textbook in class,

but our exam is not that related to the content in the book. It is more difficult than

what we've learned from the book, to be specific.

Sara thought teachers had different standards when marking students' exam

papers. She provided an example:

There were two students from our ELIP 2 class. One was the top student; the

other one was just lucky to pass the exam (and move on to level 3). They got

placed in different classes in ELIP 3. Astonishingly, the top student told me he

failed many tests in ELIP 3. On the contrary, the other student got some 90s out of

100. It seems that each teacher has his/her own standards. I don't think that's fair.

### 4.4.5   Class placement

Sara, Louis, and Eve pointed out the problem of unreasonable class placement in
the ELIP, which caused difficulties for teachers on effective lesson planning and for
students to adjust with the discrepancy of their English proficiency.

Sara said that students' English proficiency was widely disparate in her class.
Louis echoed the fact with his example:

In our class, there is severe polarization in students' English level. Their English

is either very good or very poor. Our overall score would decide if a student could

pass the program. The overall score is made up by the scores of our presentations,

quizzes, midterm exam, and final exam. Each score account for different

percentage in the overall score. The best student in our class only needs to get 44

out of 100 in her final exam to pass the program, while there's another one who

needs to get 106 in his final in order to pass this level, which is impossible as the

full mark is only 100. You can tell the difference in their English level.

He thought it was a difficult task for the teacher to teach such a class and

individualize the course based on every student's situation.

Eve insisted that she was qualified to be placed in ELIP 3 instead of ELIP 2,

because she thought ELIP 2 was too easy for her. She said,

I didn't do any homework, didn't pay attention to the teacher in class, and didn't

review what I learned after school, but I still got more than 80 out of 100 in every

test. I think it was a waste of time. I could definitely have gone to ELIP 3 when I

first came here. And my spoken English is better than my listening, reading, and

writing. However, there was no test about oral English in the placement test.

### 4.4.6   Irresponsible teacher

It is worth noticing that some participants who experienced negative learning

experiences mentioned a few irresponsible teachers, although these teachers are the

exceptions.

Sara and Tina said their teachers did not give detailed comments on their writing

assignments but only grades. Therefore, it was impossible to know how to improve their

writing skills. Sara complained that her teacher sometimes did not mark her homework.

Instead, she asked students to mark each other.

Wilson told his unhappy story with his teacher in ELIP 3:

Sometimes students didn't know one grammar point. Our teacher said, "you're

already in ELIP 3. This should be simple for you, and you're supposed to know

this." He didn't explain it for us. Instead, he told us to look up the grammar book by ourselves… Every time we asked him questions, he would always say, "you're supposed to know this." And when we went to him for some advice about how to improve our listening and speaking, he just told us to practice more. Once, we were asked to make a presentation to introduce a famous person. I did the Wright Brothers. But the teacher said the Wright Brothers were two people not one person, so he didn't let me pass. That was very frustrating…

### 4.4.7   The difference between students' needs

Due to the dissimilarity of students' English levels, it is natural that they have different needs. When there is conflict between their needs, and the course is not specifically designed to fulfill the needs, students are faced with challenges.

Eve shared her thoughts:

I think ELIP 2 and 3 are too similar. A lot of content is the same. For example, I had learned the APA Format in ELIP 2. In class of ELIP 3, the teacher needed to consider the students who directly went into this level who had never learned the format. So she taught that again. But for us who had taken ELIP 2, it was a waste of time.

Louis held an opposite opinion. He was placed in Level 3 in the placement test. He said,

Most students in our class have been in ELIP 2, so sometimes the teacher skipped some content, because she thought most students had learned that in ELIP 2, but that was not fair for us who directly got enrolled in ELIP 3. For example, I think grammar is very important for writing. Students from ELIP 2, they had the classes

about grammar. And when it comes to ELIP 3, teachers tend to think most students have learned that, so they would skip the grammar part.

### 4.4.8 Other challenges during participants' ESL learning

Some participants in this study also indicated some other challenges they had that affected their ESL learning.

Helen said that being homesick had influenced her studies at the beginning of the program. "We now only have classes for 4 hours each day, so we have much spare time, and it is natural to be homesick when we have nothing to do." Although she lived with a Canadian lady at a homestay, they did not have much to talk about. Besides, unlike most Chinese students, the place where she lived was not close to the campus, so she was far from her circle of Chinese friends. Sometimes, loneliness distracted her from her studies.

Difficulties in daily conversations with local people sometimes made Helen less confident to speak English. For example, when she went to the bank to open an account after she arrived in Canada, she found it arduous to communicate with the teller, because she did not know enough banking terms.

When being asked about other students' challenges, Helen pointed out that some of the male students in her class were addicted to computer games. She guessed maybe they felt lonely and had nothing to do after class, so they occupied their spare time in the virtual world. Coincidently, Wilson was one of the students that Helen talked about. Wilson spent almost all of his spare time on playing video games with friends. He said it was because everybody around him was playing, and he just wanted to fit in.

Eve's issue was about housing. Her landlord was renovating it when she moved in. Therefore, it was too noisy for her to focus on her study in her room.

To help international students understand Canadian culture, and relieve their homesickness, the university held some activities such as having a dinner with local families on Christmas Eve and Thanksgiving Day. These events were announced by emails from the International Student Centre (ISC) at the university. The researcher asked if the students involved in this study had participated in any of them. Only Louis knew about the activity, but he had other plans to travel with his friends during the holidays. The other five participants did not hear about the events. They said they would have liked to take part in the activities if they had known about them. Unfortunately, the participants did not read the emails.

## 4.5    Is the ELIP helpful?

When asked about whether the ELIP was helpful, the participants explained their thoughts.

Helen and Louis believed the ELIP was a good transitional opportunity for the students, because most of the Chinese students had never been exposed to a course that was taught only in English. If they took an academic class, it would have been hard for them to understand the professor at least in the first month. Tina shared a similar opinion with some detailed examples:

> For listening, our teacher told us about a website where we could find a lot of resources to improve our skills… For grammar, I think I can better understand grammar with the Canadian teacher's help… One thing that I like about the program is that the teachers taught us how to cite in the APA Format in our essay. It's very helpful for our future academic writing.

Eve held a different thought because she did not make any progress in her English. She insisted that it had something to do with her pervious learning experience in another English-speaking country:

> I went to university as an undergraduate student in another English-speaking
> country. Most of my friends were local people. I spoke English with them
> everyday, so my oral English was fluent. A few days ago, one of them video
> chatted with me, he said my English regressed. Because most of my classmates
> are Chinese now, and we usually hang out together and speak Chinese after class.
> I haven't gotten a chance to know any local people. The only situation where I
> speak English is in class.

She also did not think the program was helpful for her future academic learning. Unlike Tina, she had learned about APA Format before. Consequently, she believed having classes about citation in the ELIP was unnecessary for her.

Wilson and Sara indicated that this program was helpful yet not very helpful. Wilson said he got to know about the forms of assignments in Canada by taking the program, such as presentations, debates, and so on, which were different from what they did in China. This helped him prepare for academic homework in the future. Sara said her oral English had made great progress. She provided an example:

> Our teacher usually likes to discuss with the students and ask about our opinions,
> so we have lots of opportunities to talk in class. For example, once, she asked us
> to make sentences with the words we had just learned. She thought one student's
> sentence was interesting, then she started a discussion about the sentence with us.

However, Wilson and Sara both pointed out that the ELIP did not help them to understand their major field better. They did not learn any terms or expressions about their majors in English. They believed the program would be much more helpful by adding this content. However, they both admitted that this would be difficult as the students in the class were in different majors.

## 4.6    Suggestions from the Participants

At the end of the interview, the researcher asked each participant to give some constructive suggestions for the ELIP.

### 4.6.1    Writing class should focus more on vocabulary and grammar.

As most of them felt they lacked writing skills, and they needed to write essays, papers, or even a master's thesis, they hoped teachers could teach them more writing techniques and provide more detailed advice on their assignments. To be specific, they suggested that there should be vocabulary and grammar class. Participants talked about what an ideal vocabulary or grammar class should be like:

I hope the teacher can teach us some terms about our future academic class. I know maybe it would be difficult as our majors are different, but if there were one or two vocabulary classes per week, it would benefit all of us. Besides, I hope the teacher could share some good methods on learning vocabulary with us. (Helen)

Helen also gave the following feedback to her teacher: "For the grammar class, if the teacher could correct my grammar mistakes every time I make them, and give me more detailed comments on my writing assignments, I believe I would improve faster".

Another participant stated, "I think the teacher should give us more chances to practice the words we learned, because if we only see those new words once in class, the next time we see them, we still don't know them" (Tina).

### 4.6.2   Teachers should encourage students to speak more.

The participants believed that they had little opportunity to practice their English skills because the time in class was limited. Besides, based on the situation that most students were from China, they tended to discuss with each other in their first language in class. Therefore, the participants indicated in the interviews that it should be the teacher's responsibility to encourage students in the ELIP to practice more in English. Helen thought it would be a good idea for the teacher to make some regulations, such as students must speak English in class. She suggested that if the teacher found a student speaking Chinese, she/he could give the student a little punishment, for example, the teacher could ask the student to lead a discussion for the whole class.

### 4.6.3   Teachers should teach students some survival English.

Helen and Wilson both gave the suggestion that overseas survival English should be a necessary part of the ELIP program. However, Helen thought there should be a class for it, while Wilson claimed it was unnecessary to open a class. Instead, the teacher could give students some handouts so they could learn on their own.

### 4.6.4   The Centre for English Language Development should organize some activities to make students' lives colourful.

Some participants hoped there could be some activities besides the classes. The activities could not only facilitate students' ESL learning, but also relieve their homesickness.

Helen thought a trip to a nearby place of interest would be a great idea. She suggested the teacher should be on the trip with students, because without the teacher, students might still speak their mother tongue.

Wilson said it would make students feel less lonely if there were some social events that involved local and international students. However, Sara held a different point. She did not think local and international students would keep contacting each other after the event, because they were often more likely to hang out with their old friends. She gave a creative example that the centre could consider,

> I read an article before. It says some Mexican universities hire senior people to practice Spanish with international students on Skype or FaceTime. It is usually difficult for international students to find a local person to practice their second language with them, and most elderly people have a lot of spare time but feel lonely. I think this is a win-win solution.

### 4.6.5    Class placement should be more reasonable.

Since most participants thought English for Specific Purposes (ESP) was essential in the ELIP program, even though students in one class majored in different fields, the participants suggested that it might be possible to put students with the same major into one class. Louis had the following to say,

> We can put science students together, and put arts students together, because the requirements of language are different for these two groups. In addition, there are three months in one semester of the ELIP. I think we can learn some basic English in the first month, and in the next two months, the teacher can teach us some vocabulary about our major and academic writing, like how to write a report.

### 4.6.6   There should be some changes made at the centre.

Wilson told the gap between what the students had learned and the exam. He suggested changes should be made to fill the gap.

He also complained that teachers had too much power on deciding students' fate. They were the only people who determined whether a student could pass or not and whether this student could finish a level or repeat it. He hoped that there could be some other parties that decided the student's English level.

Eve talked about her vision of an individualized course:

At the beginning of the course, the teacher should evaluate student's English proficiency and find out each student's special need. Then the teacher should adjust the teaching plan to students' actual needs in order to make the course more individualized rather than teaching the same thing every semester.

Louis emphasized that there should be more communication between the teacher and students. Sometimes the teacher did not give the student detailed advice she/he needed because the teacher did not understand the student's situation enough.

In terms of the problem of playing computer games, Helen suggested that the university should care about the international students more: "Although we're already adults, fitting in at another country is still difficult for us."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Through the interviews of this research, the participants shared their ESL learning

stories and impressions of the ELIP program. The challenges they had been through were

revealed in their answers to the questions from the researcher.

Given the small sample size, a correlation can not be made between specific

challenges and gender, English proficiency, and choice of degrees, or majors. The

challenges mentioned by the participants can be categorized into two types: those caused

by different pedagogies or characteristics of students' ESL learning habits, and those due

to the issues of the program.

**5.1    The First Type of Challenge**

**5.1.1    Challenges caused by different teaching styles**

The first type of challenges is mainly influenced by the differences between

teaching styles in Canada and China as five participants out of six described their

difficulties adapting to Western pedagogy, which could be related to the research of Chen

(1996) and Wong (1997). Because students have never taken courses taught merely in

English before they came to Canada, they all needed some time to adjust to the new

learning environment. Furthermore, the students needed to overcome difficulties caused

by differences in ESL education focuses and the new ways in which assignments are

expected to be completed.

Because Chinese teachers concentrate more on listening and reading skills,

memorizing vocabularies, and doing grammar practices, Chinese ESL learners are not

good at English speaking and writing, as well as application of vocabularies and

grammar. As a result, they find it difficult to finish Canadian teachers' speaking and writing assignments. The above findings somewhat match the description of Chinese ESL learners given by Wen and Clément (2003), and Huang (2004). They believe that Chinese students can get great results in grammar-based written examinations, despite the fact they are poor at English listening and speaking.

It is interesting to notice, however, that there is something different found in this research. As most participants mentioned, they had difficulties similar to those identified by previous research, such as communicating in English and understanding their lecturers. Nevertheless, according to the participants' stories, they did not indicate they were good at the grammar-based written examinations as described by Wen and Clément (2003). The participants said in China, they were told to memorize the grammar rules they learned and do repeated practices about those rules, but Canadian English teachers tended to focus more on the application of them. The participants said that Chinese ESL learners were skillful at grammar-based written examinations in China, most of which were multiple choice questions. However, they still had difficulties applying grammar rules when they started their ESL learning in Canada.

From the above discussion, it can be clearly seen that the challenges caused by different teaching styles and those by students' learning habits are strongly connected. To be more specific, it is Chinese students' learning habits, which are developed from their previous learning experiences (i.e., the teaching style they have experienced) that make the teaching style in Canada different to them.

### 5.1.2 Challenges caused by learning habits

The challenges participants mentioned in the interviews are also affected by Chinese ESL learners' learning habits. The participants said Chinese ESL students often stayed together and spoke their mother tongue after class. This does reinforce the statement of Fox et al. (2006) that international students tend to seek answers about ESL learning from others who come from the same country and speak the same first language.

Features of Chinese ESL student learning, which are basically nurtured by Chinese teachers' pedagogy, have created barriers against their English learning success in English-speaking countries. The participants in this study more or less mentioned they had been usually asked to memorize vocabularies and grammar rules in China, which reflected the rote method. Chinese students prefer this method, as discussed in Watkins and Biggs' (1996) study.

This part of discussion shows that Chinese students' prior knowledge contributes to their unique learning habits. These past experiences contrast greatly with Canadian pedagogy. Ultimately, the differences lead to the challenges that students meet. Thus, the challenges in students' learning process in a new country are strongly related to their previous learning experiences. Eve's case provides a good example. As the only participant who had learning experiences in an English-speaking country before coming to Canada, Eve met the fewest challenges among the six students.

### 5.2 The Second Type of Challenges

The second type of challenges occur when there are problems in the program, such as questionable exam content, the method of determining student placement in ESL classes, and teacher commitment, and so on. These problems cause either frustrating

experiences that make students lose confidence, or a class with different needs that is almost an impossible mission for the teacher. Unfortunately, little research has been dedicated to the issues of ESL institutions.

However, it is worth mentioning that some challenges were actually caused by misunderstanding based on cultural differences. For example, the issue of the irresponsible teacher that Sara complained about may not be a problem. Peer editing is one of the commonly used methods in language classes in Western countries. However, teachers seldom use this method in China. Without understanding it, the student would naturally think the teacher is not responsible.

## 5.3    Suggestions for ESL Teachers

Based on the challenges that previous researchers have found, they also provide some suggestions for ESL teachers. In this study, the researcher asked the participants to give suggestions for their teachers from their own perspectives. By comparing the participants' description with the suggestion from Guo (2007) that ESL teachers should "assist students to develop prerequisite skills [in order] to facilitate their success in school" (p. 58), it could be drawn that the teachers in the ELIP have partially achieved this aim. Teachers in the program did teach students some prerequisite skills like writing in APA Format.

However, students still hoped to learn some English about their majors so that they could start their academic courses more smoothly. Regarding the suggestion from Cummins et al. (2005), Early (2005), Guo (2003), Reid (1987), and the organization of Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (n.d.), (that ESL teachers should be aware of the importance of students' prior knowledge, especially their L1) the participants in this

study made no mention of their prior knowledge from their teachers nor described the use of their L1 in class. Thus, it can be presumed that more efforts should be made to understand the international students' mother tongues and their previous ESL learning experiences when enrolled in the ELIP. To meet this goal, teachers should try to understand more about the pedagogy of students' country and introduce Western teaching methods to students in case misunderstanding occurs.

As mentioned earlier, Chinese students tend to stay together and speak Chinese. The researcher suggests that the university should not try to stop the trend, as staying with people from their mother land is an effective way to make international students feel comfortable when they come to Canada. However, the university could create some more opportunities for them to practice their oral English. For example, most people are interested in food, and there are various foods in different countries. The university could organize an event where international students and local students bring authentic dishes from their countries. The more relaxed atmosphere would be conducive for conversations, and students would be willing to know more about each other's culture.

It is natural to have students with different needs in one class. The teacher should recognize the differences and try to individualize her/his teaching plan. For example, two participants (Eve and Louis) mentioned they had different needs for learning APA Format. In this situation, the researcher would suggest the teacher firstly ask students who have learned about APA Format to make a reference list. While these students are working on their lists, the teacher could teach other students about citing in APA Format. Finally, when the reference lists are finished, the teacher could use them as examples,

check with the whole class to see if there are any problems in the lists, and correct the mistakes that they find out together.

## 5.4    Conclusion

To prepare for their academic study, a great number of Chinese students are enrolled in the ESL program in Canada. The participants of this study stressed some challenges they had experienced in the program of an Ontario university. Although their description of the challenges varied, it was clear that the challenges were primarily caused by the differences of teaching styles between China and Canada, students' unique learning habits, and problems within the program.

Granted, most of the above challenges had negatively affected Chinese ESL students' learning experience, but challenges in their lives in general should never be neglected. Students' lack of survival English caused them inconvenience when they started their lives in Canada, and their homesickness and loneliness often distracted them from study. Addiction to computer games is not an uncommon issue among young people. When it comes to ESL learning, this issue is one of the distracting factors. The university should encourage students to participate in events or activities they like so that they would not spend too much time in the virtual world.

The participants also made some suggestions about how to improve the current ESL teaching program. They believed that practicing oral English with local people was one of the significant keys to improvement. To their disappointment, there were not enough chances to let them do so, although the university had tried to involve them in some English related activities.

**5.5     Limitations**

Due to the limited number of research participants, the research only drew Chinese ESL learners from a few majors, and they have been through merely three ELIP levels out of five.

The study was carried out at a university in Ontario. The results do not reflect the perceived challenges of Chinese ESL learners in the province, or the whole country.

**5.6     Implications**

The findings of this study can help Canadian ESL teachers better understand the difficulties that Chinese students usually meet in the program and realize the importance of students' prior knowledge. Most importantly, this research has also emphasized the existence of some issues in the ESL program. ESL teachers and institutions can refer to the participants' suggestions to create a more positive learning environment for their students.

**5.7     Recommendation for Future Research**

Due to the limitation that this study only focuses on Chinese ESL students in ELIP 1, 2, and 3, further research could cover the students in the remaining two levels (4 and 5). Also, if a larger sample can be involved, maybe the future research could tell if Chinese ESL students' challenges in their learning process are influenced by their background, such as gender, degree, and major. Furthermore, if the perspectives of the teachers or the supervisor at the Centre for English Language Development could be involved in future research, a more vivid picture of Chinese ESL students' perceived challenges could be drawn.

As mentioned above, more research needs to be done regarding issues relating to ESL institutions, such as questionable exam content, the method of determining student placement in ESL classes, and teacher commitment. Further research could also be done with the participants after they start the academic course so that a future picture could be drawn about whether they still meet the same or similar challenges for their major class.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

**INVITATION (for interview)**

(To be sent by email to all Chinese international students who the Chinese Student & Scholar Association of the University of Windsor can reach OR to be posted at the Centre for English Language Development)

Dear potential participant,

Hi, everyone! My name is Yizhuo Liu. I am a master student from the faculty of education. I'm conducting a research study titled **"An Investigation of Post-Secondary Chinese Students' Perceived Challenges as ESL Learners at a Canadian University"**. This study aims to find out the major challenges that post-secondary Chinese students face when enrolled in an ESL program for the future reference to improve ESL curriculum.

I am looking forward for volunteers who are involved in an ESL program in the Centre for English Language Development to participate in this study. There will be a face-to-face and one-to-one interview on each participant.

If you are interested in learning about the study please contact me by email: xxxxx. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Yizhuo Liu

**Appendix B**

<div align="center">

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**(For interview)**

</div>

Title of Study: **An Investigation of Post-Secondary Chinese Students' Perceived Challenges as ESL Learners at a Canadian University**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Yizhuo Liu, a Master's student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Yizhuo Liu at xxxxx. You can also reach the supervisor of this research at xxxxx.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to find out the major challenges that post-secondary Chinese students face when enrolled in an ESL program for a future reference to improve ESL curriculum.

PROCEDURES

The one-to-one interview will be conducted face-to-face between the researcher and participant. . Participants will be asked to talk about their ESL learning experience at the Canadian University.   The interview will take about 30 – 40 minutes, and it will be audio recorded.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is no foreseeable risk or discomforts associated with the interview.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The direct benefit to the participants would be that they might have a general conclusion about the barriers they are having in their ESL learning process. Besides, they may realize what kind of ESL program could better scaffold their English language learning and get them prepared for the future academic study after serious thinking about the questions in the interview.

The benefit to the scientific/scholarly community or society would be that ESL programs could be optimized and learning outcome of Chinese students in these programs could be improved with a specific identification of challenges that students are facing in a Canadian context.

CONFEDENTIALITY

The interview is designed to be confidential. All the data will be kept safely. If quotes of your words are necessary in the report, a pseudonym will be used to ensure confidentiality.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation is voluntary.  You can withdraw at any point of the interview. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to during the interview, and still remain in the study.

You can withdraw at any point of the research. During the interview, if you feel uncomfortable or unwilling to continue the interview, you can withdraw by leaving. After the interview, you can withdraw by asking the researcher to delete the data. However, once the data analysis has started, it would be impossible for you to withdraw from the research.

AUDIO TAPING

The interview will be audio taped. By signing your name you understand and agree on the content below. Please read through carefully.

"I consent to the audiotaping of the interview.

I understand these are voluntary procedures and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting to stop audiotaping.  I also understand that my name will not be revealed to anyone and that taping will be kept confidential. Audio recordings are filed by number only and stored in a computer with a login password and only the investigator of this research has the access to the data.

The destruction of the audio recordings will be completed after transcription and verification.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and that the audio recordings will be for professional use only."


FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

The findings of this study will be available to the participants on the University of Windsor REB website (http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb). An electronic copy of this report can also be sent at the request of the participant.

Date when results are available: March 30, 2015.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:  Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e mail:  ethics@uwindsor.ca




These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

_____        _____

Signature of Investigator                                     Date

_____        _____

Signature of Participant                                       Date

**Appendix C**

## LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

### (For interview)

Title of Study: **An Investigation of Post-Secondary Chinese Students' Perceived Challenges as ESL Learners at a Canadian University**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Yizhuo Liu, a master student from the faculty of education at the University of Windsor. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Yizhuo Liu at xxxxx. You can also reach the supervisor of this research at xxxxx.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to find out the major challenges that post-secondary Chinese students face when enrolled in an ESL program for the future reference to improve ESL curriculum.

PROCEDURES

There will be one round of face-to-face and one-to-one interview required on each participant. Participants will be asked to talk about their ESL learning experience around some questions. The interview will be audio recorded.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is no foreseeable risk or discomforts associated with the interview.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The direct benefit to the participants would be that they might have a general conclusion about the barriers they are having in their ESL learning process. Besides, they may realize what kind of ESL program could better scaffold their English language learning and get them prepared for the future academic study after serious thinking about the questions in the interview.

The benefit to the scientific/scholarly community or society would be that ESL programs could be optimized and learning outcome of Chinese students in these programs could be improved with a specific identification of challenges that students are facing in a Canadian context.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The interview is designed to be confidential. All the data will be kept safely. If quotes of your words are necessary in the report, a pseudonym will be used to ensure confidentiality.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may choose whether to be involved in this study. If you volunteer to participate in the interview, you can withdraw at any point of it. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to talk about during the interview, and still remain in the study.

You can withdraw at any point of the research. During the interview, if they feel uncomfortable or unwilling to continue the interview, they can withdraw by leaving. After the interview, you can withdraw by asking the researcher to delete the data. However, once the data analysis has started, it would be impossible for you to withdraw from the research.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

The findings of this study will be available to the participants on the University of Windsor REB website (http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb). An electronic copy of this report can also be sent at the request of the participant.

Date when results are available: March 30, 2014.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:  Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e mail:  ethics@uwindsor.ca

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.


_____                    _____

Signature of Investigator                                                          Date

_____                    _____

Signature of Participant                                                          Date

VITA AUCTORIS

| | |
|---|---|
| NAME: | Yizhuo Liu |
| PLACE OF BIRTH: | Datong, Shanxi, China |
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