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A Case Study of EFL Learners' Identity and Investment in a Private Educational Company in China

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Education

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Abstract

In response to the scant literature on Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) students' identity and investment in language learning within private settings, this study employed exploratory case study to report findings regarding Chinese EFL learners' identity and investment at a private educational company in mainland China. This study used the model of investment as the theoretical underpinning. Data presented in this paper were collected through three adult students' learning materials in three different English learning programs and interviews with both students and three teachers who taught the students respectively. Findings reveal how students constructed identities as related to English learning and investment in English learning, as well as factors that would have influenced their investment such as class size and instructional purposes of programs. This study offers recommendations for teachers and program developers regarding English curriculum, pedagogy, and learning in informal, private learning contexts.

Keywords

English as foreign language (EFL); identity; investment; private educational company

Summary of Lay Audiences

This study explored how Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) learners constructed identities as related to English learning, how they made investment in their language learning, as well as the factors that would have influenced their investment in English learning at a private educational company. There are three student participants and three teacher participants. The interview questions in teachers' interviews focused on their interactions with the students in the classrooms and the pedagogy they adopted in the programs. The student participants' interviews were about how students constructed dynamic identities in English learning programs and what factors shaped their investment in English learning. The findings reveal students' lack of confidence in productive skills (especially oral English) in English learning despite of their strong desire to be fluent English speakers. Moreover, the findings reveal different learning experiences within programs of different sizes and programs with different instructional purposes. The findings also reveal that the efforts which teachers made in classes were greatly affected by the class size.

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Chapter 1

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

China, as a country with a large population of English learners, is facing a huge demand for English education. Since China has successfully held Olympic Games in 2008 and World Exposition in 2010, the Chinese government has encouraged people to improve their English skills so that they could meet the need for further economic enhancement (Arkoudis & Davison, 2008). In 2013, about one third of mainland Chinese residents (roughly equal to the size of entire US population) were studying English (Gamlam, 2016). Right now, even though the English section of the Chinese University Entrance Examination has been reduced from 150 points to 100 points, which means Chinese students could spend less time on studying English, the English education industry has still experienced rapid growth in recent years, especially in private education sectors.

Facing with large population of English learners and demand for English education, Chinese private educational companies are experiencing rapid growth. New Oriental, the biggest English-teaching company in China is listed in New York Stock Exchange and has a capitalization of 4.4 billion dollars (Shadbolt, 2014). According to Shadbolt, these educational companies aimed to provide private educational services to students. These services including language test preparation, primary and secondary school education, and overseas study consultation.

Language learning involves people in participation, social interaction, relationship, and context which reflect how people make sense of themselves and others (Moje & Luke, 2017). The process of English learning among Chinese learners inevitably involves identity construction and negotiation. Being an ambiguous notion

(Qu, 2005), “identity” should be given a clear definition in research on Chinese English learners’ identity and investment in language learning. Research of identity has been a popular line of research in the field of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) (Teng, 2019). Moje and Luke contended that viewing identity as fluid or multiple did not necessarily explain how identity is conceived because identity could be “produced, generated, developed, or narrated over time” (p. 418). Grounded on Norton’s (2000) identity theory, in this study I adopted Norton’s definition of identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). This definition reflects that identity is not only about one’s race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic class but also about how language learners “positioned themselves and others” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47) through day-to-day social interactions, time, and spaces.

The construct of “investment” was developed by Norton (2013) to “complement constructs of motivation” in language learning and teaching (p. 6). Motivation is “a character trait of the individual language learner” (Norton & Gao, 2008, p. 110). A language learner can have high motivation in learning language but make little investment in it. Norton (2013) defined investment as the efforts made by learners to “acquire a wider range of symbolic resources (language, education, friendship) and material resources (capital goods, real estate, money), which will in turn increase their cultural capital and social power” (p. 25). Identity and investment are intertwined because “learners’ sense of themselves and their desires for the future are reassessed” (p. 6) when the value of their linguistic and cultural capitals increase. Investment can be used to understand learners’ classroom resistance. The resistance of learners signals their “ambivalent desire to learn and practice” the target language (Norton & Gao, 2008, p. 110).

My extensive literature review shows that there is a scarcity of literature on EFL learners’ identity and investment in private educational settings. For years, research

into Chinese English language learners' identity and investment has been targeted on students who are in the public-school system (e.g., English major students in Chinese universities) (Gao, Jia, & Zhou, 2015; Teng, 2019; Wei, 2016). Little attention has been paid to private education of English (e.g., after-school tutoring, online learning, and test preparation). Given the aforementioned drastic growth of private English education in China, investigating students' investment in their English language learning and the factors that would influence their investment in learning in a private educational company would have the potential to illuminate English curriculum, pedagogy, and learning in informal, private learning contexts.

1.2 Coming to the Questions

In response to the scant literature on Chinese EFL students' identity and investment in language learning within private settings, the present study employed exploratory case study (Yin, 1994) as research methodology. This research aims to investigate how students constructed identities as related to English learning, how they made investment in their language learning, as well as the factors that would have influenced their investment in leaning in a private educational company. My study asks the following questions regarding the identity and investment of Chinese EFL students in language learning within private settings:

- 1) How do students perceive themselves as English learners in English learning classes at the private company?
- 2) How do students invest in their English learning and what factors shape their investment in English learning classes at the private company?
- 3) In particular, how do students invest their identities in their English learning and what factors shape their identity investment in English learning classes at the private company?

1.3 Theoretical Lense and Research Methodology

My study uses the model of investment proposed by Darwin and Norton (2015) as the theoretical underpinning. Darwin and Norton (2015) addressed that investment is “at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology” (p. 46). The concepts in the model have guided me to explore how Chinese EFL learners invested in English learning and how various factors influenced their investment in a deeper way. The notion of investment recognizes that learners have multiple and dynamic identities. Norton (2013) contended that “an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own identity” (p. 103). Learners are constantly negotiating who they are and how they relate to the social world when they make investment in language learning. Ideology here is not limited to language ideology but a broader set of normative assumptions (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Darwin and Norton (2017) stated that ideologies shape learners’ identities and position them in different ways. The notion of ideology enabled investigation of how power enabled or prohibited learners the entry into specific spaces where communicative practices occur. The notion of capital enables a holistic understanding regarding “how learners lose or gain powers” in English learning (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 42). When language learners traverse across transnational contexts and across different online and offline sites, they transform the capital which they already possess “into something that is regarded as valuable in new contexts” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45).

This study uses a design of exploratory case study (Yin, 1994) to investigate Chinese EFL learners’ identity and investment in English learning in a private educational company. I collected students’ learning materials and interviewed both teachers and students to achieve the triangulation of data resources. Three adult students who participated in three different programs in a private educational company and three teachers who respectively taught student participants were recruited in this study. The educational company is located in an inland city in China and provides learners with various English learning programs (e.g., standardized test

preparation programs, secondary school education, and adult general English programs).

I collected student participants' learning materials in multiple forms (writing assignments, homework, class notes, audio records of oral speaking exercises, and pictures taken by students themselves participating program-related activities). The learning materials were uploaded to Western University's OneDrive platform by students. To ensure the confidentiality of student participants, students uploaded their learning materials to OneDrive through an encrypted link to which only I and the participants have the access. Collecting students' learning materials helped me become familiar with student participants' learning experiences in private educational classrooms.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with both student and teacher participants, which means most of the interviews were guided by a list of questions. The interview questions in teachers' interviews focused on their interactions with the students in the classrooms and the pedagogy they adopted in the programs. The student participants' interviews were about how students constructed dynamic identities in English learning programs and what factors shaped their investment in English learning.

After transcribing audios of interviews with students and teachers, I used NVivo 12 to assist with data organization and data analysis. I created a code list and then generated patterns for "chunks of data" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 193). Themes in the coding process were derived both inductively and deductively.

1.4 Study Overview

The present study is organized into six chapters. In Chapter 1 I briefly introduce the research background, research questions, the theoretical lenses, research methodology, and the structure of the study.

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical lenses of the model of investment, which guided my analysis on the Chinese mainland EFL learners' identity and investment in English learning within private settings.

In Chapter 3 I present relevant literature on identity, investment, and different factors which could enable or constrain EFL learners' identity construction and investment in English learning.

Chapter 4 introduces the methodology that I employed in this study. It details the research design, the participant selection, and the recruitment process and outlines the process of data collection and data analysis as well as addressing ethical considerations.

Chapter 5 presents the findings from students' learning materials and the interviews with teachers and students. Through the theoretical lenses of identity and investment, I present five themes: identity and positioning of EFL learners, learners' investment in English learning in EFL classrooms, the pedagogies of teachers in EFL classrooms, students' agency in EFL classrooms, and students' suggestions for teachers and program developers.

In Chapter 6 I provide conclusive remarks about the findings in response to my research questions. I also propose recommendations for teachers and program developer regarding English curriculum, pedagogy, and learning in informal, private learning context.

Chapter 2

2. Theoretical Lense

My master thesis uses the model of investment proposed by Darvin and Norton (2015) as the theoretical underpinning. In this chapter, I introduce this model as my theoretical underpinning. This model guided my analysis on the Chinese mainland EFL learners' identity and investment in English learning. In this chapter, I first introduce the emergence and development of the model of investment. Then I elaborate on the key constructs (e.g., ideology, capital, identity, and investment) that helped me examine EFL learners' perceptions of how they made investment in English learning at a private educational company.

2.1 The Model of Investment

Norton (1995) published research regarding language learners' identity and investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Darvin and Norton addressed the construct of *investment* as a sociological complement to the psychological construct of *motivation*, (Norton, 2000, Norton Peirce, 1995). The concept of investment signals the socially and historically constructed relationship between language learners and target languages. In contrast, motivation is "a character trait of the individual language learner" (Norton & Gao, 2008, p. 110). However, Norton (2013) argued that high levels of motivation cannot necessarily result in good language learning. Therefore, Norton (2013) contented that the construct of investment provided a shifted perspective that focuses on language learners' variable desires to engage in social interaction and community practices. Norton further argued that investment is best understood with reference to the economic metaphor of "capital" proposed by Bourdieu (1986). If learners invest in language learning, they do it with an understanding that the investment "will help them acquire a wider range of symbolic

and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power” (Darvin & Norton, 2017, p. 2).

Darvin and Norton (2015) argued that the concept of investment was used to signal the imbalanced power relations between the language learners and the target language community. Norton (2013) defined “power” as the socially constructed relationship between individuals, institutions, and communities through which the symbolic and material resources are distributed. Language learners can be highly motivated in language learning but make little investment in it because of certain constraints in classroom practices. For example, Darvin and Norton contended that a language learner could be highly motivated in language learning but may refuse the opportunities to speak if a given classroom is sexist or racist.

Darvin and Norton (2015) argued how learners invest in their language learning depends on the dynamic negotiations of power in different fields. People who have wider range of symbolic and material resources in society will have access for power. At the same time, the people who cannot control over symbolic and material resources will lose the power and in turn influence their investment in language learning. Darvin and Norton (2015) also proposed the model of investment to respond to the changes in global order and the emergence of technology. Over the past two decades, the world has gone through many upheavals; for example, increasing global mobility and the emerging technologies allow learners to move across transnational spaces and to learn English in many new ways. Darvin and Norton (2018) contended that the model of investment responded to the “mobile and fluid” ways of meaning-making when “language learners move in and out of online and offline sites” (p. 3).

Darvin and Norton (2015) addressed “investment at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology” (p. 46) (see *Figure 1*). The notion of investment recognizes that learners have multiple and dynamic identities. Norton (2013) contended that the investment which language learners make in language learning is also the investment they make in their own identities. Learners are constantly negotiating who they are

and how they relate to the social world when they make investment in language learning. The notion of ideology allows researchers to examine closely about how power operates in practices of English learning classrooms and to analyze the relations between communicative practices and systemic patterns of control. Darwin and Norton (2017) stated that ideologies shape learners' identities and position them in different ways. When learners move fluidly across spaces, "they are not only granted or refused the right to speak, but also the right of entry" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 43). The notion of ideology enables navigation of how power enables or prohibits learners the entry into specific spaces where communicative practices occur. The notion of capital enables a holistic understanding regarding "how learners lose or gain powers" in English learning (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 42). When language learners traverse across transnational contexts and across different online and offline sites, they transform the capital which they already possess "into something that is regarded as valuable in new contexts" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45), for example, transforming material resources, linguistics skills, and social networks that learners already have. Nevertheless, Darwin and Norton proposed that this process is always accompanied by struggles because what learners possess "in one place may be radically devalued in another" (p. 45). In the following I elaborate on these three constructs and the their intertwined relationship with the concept of investment..



Figure 1. Adaption of Darwin and Norton's (2015) Model of Investment.

2.2 Ideology

There are two different views toward literacy- the autonomous model of literacy and the ideological model of literacy (Street, 2003). The autonomous model considers literacy as learning and possessing universal and neutral skills. It is based on the assumption that “literacy in itself - autonomously - will have effects on other social and cognitive practices” (Street, p. 1). The autonomous model focuses on the effects of literacy learning on enhanced cognitive skills and improved economic prospects regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their ‘illiteracy’ in the first place” (p. 1). In contrast, according to Street, the ideological model of literacy starts with a different premise that literacy is a socially situated practice. The ideological model challenges power relations around literacy and proposes that literacy is rooted in socially constructed worldviews, assumptions, and practices. For example, the ideological model of literacy encourages students to challenge what people have taken for granted. Students are encouraged by literacy educators to question possible forms of discrimination embedded in the texts that they read, view, or access.

In my view, Darwin and Norton’s (2015) model of investment aligns with the ideological model of literacy. They perceived language as “an ideologically defined social practice” (p. 43). Language itself is saturated with social and ideological meanings rather than simply a vehicle of communication (Arkoudis & Davison, 2008). Darwin and Norton perceived language ideology as a series of socially and historically constructed ideas about language and communication. Language is ideological because people always have opinions or stereotypes about certain languages. Language ideology shapes the valuing of languages, the establishment of language policies, and even ethnolinguistic identities. For example, Indian English might sound “funny” (Pillar, 2015, p. 1). Pillar stated that whether people agree upon this opinion or not depends on who they are and what their experiences with Indian

English are. Media portrayal of Indian English being funny might reinforce people's stereotypical perception of this particular variety of English.

Ideology decides which group to dominate and which group to be marginalized (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Street, 2003). The ideology here is not limited to language ideology but a broader set of normative assumptions (Darvin & Norton, 2015). According to Darvin and Norton, ideology should be understood as a complex and layered space where dominance and hegemony processes. In this space, ideology simultaneously privileges and marginalizes ideas, people, or relations. The ideology is "normally sustained by social cultural norms and institutional powers" (Jiang, Yang, & Yu, 2020, p. 7). Operated by political and institutional environments, certain sets of ideas are transformed into dominant ways of thinking. And these dominant ways of thinking are reproduced through hegemonic practices. For example, Darvin and Norton (2015) introduced the story of Henrietta to illustrate how ideology influenced her learning experiences in a course about the use of digital resources for HIV/AIDS education and enhanced language development. Henrietta lived in a rural area in Uganda where people's per-capita income was less than \$1 a day. Henrietta positioned herself as someone who is not knowledgeable enough. According to Darvin and Norton, this kind of view reproduced certain ideologies such as the global is privileged over the local, and the global North is seen as more knowledgeable than the global South. The ideologies that privileged urban over rural or middle over lower class would limit Henrietta's access to valuable resources such as digital devices or books in learning.

Ideology can influence English learners' learning process as well as explain certain language learning practices. Ideology is not a static worldview or assumption that is only about acceptance or resistance (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Ideology is fluid and it can be made or unmade by real world events. For example, the English section of the Chinese University Entrance Examination has been reduced from 150 points to 100 points, while the Chinese section has been increased from 150 points to 180

points. The measures came amid calls to place a greater focus on Chinese curriculum and lessen the emphasis on English curriculum (Luo, 2013). The measures have brought a fundamental shift in the way China views the English (Zhao, 2013). English learning for Gaokao was perceived as rote grammar-centered learning for the sole purpose of passing the exam. The amendment to the examination has freed both teachers and students from the extreme pressure to pass the examination. Zhao contended that through this reform Chinese students could focus on developing their abilities on critical thinking in English and reading books.

The privatization of English education has been documented as one of the manifestations of neoliberalism. English education has been commodified with the spread of standardized tests such as IELTS or TOFEL. Those standardized tests embodied neoliberal principles. Driven by profits, some private institutions set boosting test scores as the main educational goal to the teachers (Li & De Costa, 2017). The two scholars contended this neoliberal demand has brought struggles for both teachers and students regarding the purpose of English learning and how they define “successful” language learning. For teachers, students’ test scores would be considered as the key measurement to their teaching efficiency (Li & De Costa, 2017). For students, they may be treated as “customers” rather than students since students have paid for getting satisfied scores (Bernstein et. al, 2015).

In the digital age, the control of the spread of information would contribute to the preservation of certain ideologies (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Yu (2016) contended that meaning makers might not be aware that their language choices could be affected by “ideological pressure” (p. 704). For example, information will be distributed to people based on their preferences, location, searching history in searching engines (e.g., Google) and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook). As people are socialized into certain communicative practices, these media shape the ways of how people behave and communicate with others. Also, these media could promote “particular version of

reality and make possible some kinds of relationship more than others” (Darvin & Norton, 2017, p. 9).

2.3 Capital

The notion of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) was originally drawn from the notion of “capital” (Bourdieu, 1986). For Bourdieu (1986), the capital can be extended to *economic capital*, *cultural capital*, and *social capital* (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Darvin and Norton described *economic capital* as wealth, property, and income, *cultural capital* as knowledge, educational credentials, and appreciation of specific cultural forms, and *social capital* as connections to networks of power. The value of one’s capital can shift across time and space. Capital is fluid and dynamic and most importantly, subject to but not constrained by different dominant ideologies of specific groups or fields (Darvin & Norton, 2015). For example, to what extent the teacher valued the language learners’ linguistic and cultural capital (e.g., prior knowledge, mother tongue, etc.) would impact the degree to which the learners invest in language learning. The linguistic and cultural capital that learners already possessed might be or might not be recognized by teachers depending on what kinds of “taken-for-granted value systems” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45) which teachers used to assess the capital.

Darvin and Norton (2015) claimed that Bourdieu’s (1987) conceptualization of “*symbolic capital*” can offer a more holistic understanding of the role of capital in language investment. According to Bourdieu, symbolic capital is certain types of capital which are recognized as legitimate in specific fields. , “symbolic capital” mainly refers to the symbolic resources (e.g., language, education, relationship, etc.) and the material resources (e.g., capital goods, money, real estate, etc.). When learners enter a new environment, they are not “empty vessels” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45), but are already equipped with capital including linguistic skills, life experiences, and social networks. Therefore, recognizing language learners’ symbolic capital is

significant to help them make language investment. For instance, when Chinese students come to Canada to study, their Chinese academic writing styles may not be valued by the Canadian academia, which could incur struggles for Chinese students. Students would struggle for converting between two different writing styles. In this case, it is important for the teachers to treat students' previous writing experiences as affordances rather than constraints and help them to get used to new writing styles.

2.4 Identity

Language learning cannot be separated from identity construction. Bartlett (2007) contends that doing literacy involves “an ongoing, improvisational process of identity work” (p. 55). In this study the definition of identity is grounded on Norton's (2000) identity theory. Norton defined identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). Norton (2013) contended that language constitutive of and is constituted by language learners' identity. Language is not simply a mode of communication but should be understood with its social meanings. Through language learning, learners negotiate their senses of selves and their relationship with the social world.

From a poststructuralist view, Darwin and Norton (2015) pointed out three features of identity: multiple, dynamic, and a site of struggle. Identity is multiple because learners carry more than linguistic identity. Those multiple identities make people who they are and how they perceive themselves. Identity is also dynamic because it could change over time. As social beings, learners negotiate their senses of selves across different places and at different points of time. Learners' identities are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction and change across time and space.

Identity is also a site of struggle. Darwin and Norton (2015) contended that identity is a struggle of habitus and desire, of competing ideologies and imagined identities. Darwin and Norton defined habitus as the internalized system “by which

people make sense of the world” (p. 45). Habitus provides language learners with an understanding regarding what is reasonable and appropriate and shapes them to act or behave in certain ways to comply with dominant ideologies. Identity is a site of struggle because how language learners act or behave does not always accord with the prevailing ideology.

Identity is a convergence of different social categories (e.g., race, gender, class, and ethnicity) (Darvin & Norton, 2017). According to the two scholars, shaped by colluding and competing ideologies, learners position themselves and are positioned by others in different contexts. Influenced by dominant ideologies, learners might position themselves or be positioned in certain ways according to their gender, race, and class (Darvin & Norton, 2015). How learners are perceived by others is shaped by the dominant assumption regarding “what it means to be man or woman, Black or White, middle class or working class in a specific society” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 46). Use gender as an example, some common-held beliefs represent what a man or woman should be like and this influences how learners position themselves as a man or woman in a certain society. Gender played an important role in how learners would invest in language learning. Traditionally, language learning is a feminine domain and researches show that girls tend to have higher performance in reading test than boys (Lu & Luk, 2014). Lu and Luk argued that the feminization of EFL reading would give male learners a legitimate excuse to distance themselves from reading as well as make female learners have contradictory feelings of desire and stress. Since female learners would be expected by others to have higher performance in English reading, reading can be “viewed as a right for men but as work for women” (Lu & Luk, 2014, p. 1). Therefore, Lu and Luk contended that the gender-differentiated ideology about English reading influences the way learners construct their gender identities and further have impact on their language investment.

The conceptualization of identity is connected with the notions of *imagined community* and *imagined identity* (Norton, 2011; Norton & Mickinney, 2011). These

two concepts could help explain learners' non-participation and resistance in language learning. Imagined community is about a group of people, which is not tangible at the moment but whom learners connect through the power of imagination. Imagined identity refer to how language learners position themselves in their imagined communities. When learners find that their language learning experiences will no longer provide them with access to their imagined communities and imagined identities, learners may refuse to make investment in language learning. Norton (2001) used the example of Katrina to illustrate how a language learner's imagined community and imagined identity would influence learners' investment in language learning. Katrina is an immigrant to Canada who used to be a teacher and dreamed to become a professional teacher to successfully integrate into the new society. However, Katrina's language teacher treated her as a newcomer regardless of her previous experiences as a teacher. The actions of teacher made Katrina feel that the teacher did not believe she would be capable of being a professional teacher in the future. Since the class failed to provide Katrina with the access to her imagined community, Katrina quit the classes.

The notions of imagined community and imagined identity played important roles in understanding how learners assert their identities in language learning. Since "ideology shaped these institutional patterns and practices, and it structured habitus" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47), learners not only are positioned by others, but also positioned themselves and others in specific contexts. Darvin and Norton claimed that learners' desire to be a part of their imagined communities or take on their imagined identities enables them to gain from or resist these positions. Learners invest in language learning because there is something they want for themselves (e.g., achieve financial security, be part of a country or peer group, or seek romance, etc.). Learners exercise agency by choosing what they perceive as beneficial to their existing and imagined identities.

2.5 Conclusion

Darvin and Norton (2015)'s the model of investment has offered researchers (Jiang & Ren, 2020; Jiang, Yang, & Yu, 2020; Teng, 2019) unique lense to view language learners' investment in diverse contexts. In this model, investment is at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Except for discussing the relationship between investment and identity, the concept of ideology offers me a more holistic understanding on how power manifests in Chinese EFL learning classrooms. Also, the concept of capital enables a greater understanding regarding how EFL learners gain or lose power in classrooms. These concepts in the model have guided me to explore how Chinese EFL learners invest in English learning and how various factors influence their investment in a deeper way.

Chapter 3

3. Literature Review

In this chapter, I first reviewed literature on two schools in research of identity and second language learning: the psychological school and the social school. Drawing on the existent literature, I then reviewed the literature on Chinese English learners' identity and investment and offered my own critiques. Finally I reviewed the studies which focused on how English learners, especially Chinese EFL learners construct ' identity and make investment in English learning was influenced under global trend in the era of globalization. In this section I also presented studies which entailed the impact of different ideologies on EFL students' learning process.

3.1 Two Schools in Research of Identity and Second Language Learning

As discussed in Chapter 2, identity and language learning are intertwined. Gao, Jia, and Zhou (2015) contend that research about learner's identity in second language learning can be categorized into two schools—the psychological school and the social school. In the psychological paradigm, identity characteristics are viewed as static and stable. Therefore, scholars in the psychological paradigm approached identity issues with focuses such as learning motivation or language attitude. For example, Gardner and Lambert (1972) address instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation stands for learners' desire to learn new languages for utilitarian purposes such as employment. Integrative motivation refers to learners' desires to be integrated into the target language community. According to Gao, Jia, and Zhou (2015), scholars in the social school believe language activities as well as learners' identities cannot be separated from their social context. For example, Norton (2013) contended through language learning learners negotiated their senses of selves and relationships with the world. According to Norton's identity theory, language learners' identity is fluid and

dynamic rather than static and stable. Benson also argued that identity can be either constructed, fashioned, developed, or modified based on learners' own knowledge (Teng, 2019).

Scholars in the social school have proposed conceptions to facilitate exploration on language learners' identity construction and negotiation. For example, Norton Peirce (1995) introduced the idea of investment. In her research, what had been found was not consistent with the existing motivation theory. Norton found learners can have high motivation for language learning but are often ambivalent to learn and practice the target language. As specified in Chapter 2, Norton Peirce used the notion of "investment" to describe the socially constructed relationship between learners and the target language as well as addressed ambivalent desire of learners to make efforts to learn the target language. The notion of investment, which according to Norton Peirce was drawn from the notion of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), standing for efforts made by learners who expect to have return in the future. Bonny Norton's (2000) notion of *investment* accentuates the multiple, dynamic, and ambivalent characteristics of identity in second language learning.

Cummins (2006) developed the idea of *identity text* to highlight the importance of identity negotiation in the learning process. In Cummins's research, students from Grade 1 and Grade 2 with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds created stories. These stories were initially in English and students translated stories into their home languages in order to present the stories in multiple texts (e.g., written, spoken, visual,). Cummins contended that creating identity texts enabled students' maximum of identity investment in learning as students invested their identities in the work they created.

Besides, Esteban-Guitart (2016) introduced the concept of *funds of identity* to refer to "significant people, institutions, cultural artifacts, geographical spaces and meaningful practices, passions and interests embedded in a learner's self-definition" (p. 81). Esteban-Guitart contended that the most profound and effective learning

inevitably involves the learners' passion and interests that the learners deeply care about. Hedges (2020) perceived the concept of *funds of identity* as the social, historical, and cultural resources adopted by individuals to create their identities. Hedges contended that the funds of identity recognized individuals' social-mediated interactions through which individuals develop interests, learning skills, and then individuals "draw on life experiences that have particular interest and meaning for them to create their identities" (Hedges, p. 4).

Responding to two divergent paradigms of conceptualizing language learners' identities, in this study I position myself in the social school and see identity and language learning as socially constructed. I focused my gaze on identity construction and negotiation in the language learning classrooms. Instead of treating identity and language learning as static, I explored EFL learners' multiple and dynamic identity through their interactions in language learning process.

3.2 Identity, Investment, and Chinese Learners of English

In recent years, researchers have paid their attention to identity construction and investment among Chinese English learners (Norton & Gao, 2008). Since China has successfully held Olympic Games in 2008 and World Exposition in 2010, the Chinese government encouraged people to improve their English skills so that they can meet the need for further economic enhancement (Arkoudis & Davison, 2008). China has witnessed an increasing number of English learners as well as researchers' attention to identity and investment among Chinese learners of English. Norton and Gao (2008) synthesized the studies within China that focused on identity investment and imagined communities. Norton and Gao also noted that the notion of investment (Norton Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2000) connected with what Gao (1995) called the *paradox of intercultural communication* (classroom practices regarding cross-cultural differences) and highlighted the importance of researchers' awareness of intercultural differences when conducting identity research in regions other than North America. Norton and

Gao pointed out that researchers often encountered conflicting identities when dealing with cross-cultural differences because people “unconsciously build walls that segregate cultures, notwithstanding our intention of building bridges between them” (p. 116). According to the Norton and Gao, one of the typical examples of the paradox would be the resistances of students in a Canadian post-secondary ESL program. The students performed resistance because the teacher only highlighted the lack of approaches of China to dealing with AIDs without paying attentions to the struggles in Western countries. The two scholars contended that to avoid manifestation of the paradox teachers need to be self-reflective about their classroom practices and facilitated more equitable dialogues so that students’ plural identities can be developed in comfortable rooms.

Studies have focused on of the intertwined relationship between Chinese English learners’ identity and language learning. Lu and Luk (2014) investigated the role of gender played in the subject of reading among EFL learners. By using narrative inquiry on learners from China and Sweden, the study revealed that gender played a role in students’ decisions about the extent of investment that they made in language learning. According to Lu and Luk, reading and language learning have been female-domain subjects for a long time, which gave male learners excuses to distance themselves from making investment in their learning. Apart from gender identity, Zhao, Fei, and Lin (2013) focused on EFL learners’ cultural identity. They noticed the collective cultural background of Chinese students and the influence of that on students’ writing (e.g., the frequent use of “we” instead of “I”). By incorporating critical pedagogy (engaging students with their own voices and enabling students to understand the differences between the collective and the individual identities) in Advanced English Writing course curriculum, they argued that the absence of expressions of students’ identities could lead to the lack of originality of their writing. In this way, students neither express their authentic voices nor views in writing, which is the core problem of EFL writing. To encourage meaningful expression of students’ identities, the scholars contended that students’ authentic self-identity could emerge

from the collective cultural background. By adopting biographical and life-writing pedagogy, students were able to relate their learning with their life experiences and cultures and then communicate it in English. The authors further suggested that the successful learning of English writing was not through transmission but through empowering learning strategies to cultivate students' multiple identities and voices. Yuan, Li, and Yu (2014) concluded three identity paradoxes which university students encountered: "dedicated learner" versus "disoriented bee", "global citizens" versus "proud Chinese", "team player" versus "independent fighter". According to three scholars, identity paradox refers to "the permanent potential conflict between people's individuality and the collective nature of their social life and the potential incompatibilities between individuals' values and those of their situated environment" (Yuan, Li, & Yu, p. 966). The study reported the contrasting identities developed by Chinese EFL students. For example, the Chinese students developed identity of "dedicated learner" for their strong desire of academic success in university. However, students also developed identity of being "disoriented bee" because of the lack of coherence in program design and implementation. The students reported that the courses were delivered in an unsystematic way since students were overwhelmed by the dual language courses (English and Spanish) and business courses. The study generated implications for higher education under the trend of internationalization: Teachers need to have both global vision and local awareness in order to help students negotiate their identity paradoxes.

Studies have been done to explore how Chinese learners of English invest their identities in English learning. Gao, Cheng, and Kelly (2008) explored a weekly "English Club" in a Hong Kong university and found that students developed "a sense of ownership of English" (p. 25). English means more than a language associating with the target English-speaking countries' culture to those students but an imagined community of "Chinese elites", which is a group of people with high levels of English and with identities different from monolingual Chinese. For those participants,

English is a tool which they could invest in to acquire their desired social status and identities (being “Chinese elites”).

Different from the research done by Gao, Cheng, and Kelly, Wei (2016) contended that Chinese mainland college students still did not consider themselves as legitimate English speakers. Wei examined Chinese college students’ perceptions on English given the increasing English dominance in the world and the national spread of English in mainland China. The survey results demonstrated that the pluralism of the English (the recognition of native varieties such as Australia English and nonnative varieties such as Singapore English) was still recognized by Chinese college students in a limited way because the monolingual bias, particularly the British-American norms, is predominant among the Chinese college students. English was considered by the participants as “a means of communication with English-speaking countries rather than a truly global tool” (Wei, p. 111). Most of the participants did not consider themselves as legitimate English speakers because they think the use of English with Chinese flavor should be corrected, which indicated the Chinese localized English is not considered as a separate variety of English by Chinese students. Therefore, the study suggested respect for varieties of English should be included in class instruction, especially those other than British or American English.

Teng (2019) summarized four factors which influenced Chinese English major students’ identity negotiation: ideology, perception of affordances in learning community, learners’ agency, and the gap between the practiced community and the imagined community. Drawing upon three Chinese EFL university students’ English learning experience, Teng used narrative inquiry to investigate their negotiated identities in their English learning. Teng found students’ identities may shift or even collapse when students participate in their practiced communities (how learners practiced their English in the University) and imagined communities. Teng argued if EFL learners failed to enhance their English learning strategies or failed to become

legitimate members of their English learning communities due to the lack of interpersonal interactions, their investment may be affected.

Considering what factors might influence English learners' investment in language learning, Trent (2008) explored the enablement and constraints to learners' investment in classroom discourses at the University of Hong Kong, a tertiary institution using English as the medium of instruction (EMI). The study found that language learners' investment in classroom discourse was shaped by three factors: oral practice, knowledge and expertise, and freedom and control. Trent noticed that students need to follow a tightly controlled script (e.g., the checklist and evaluation of the presentation) when they delivered the oral presentation. Trent argued that to promote the investment in classroom discourse, students should be given sufficient freedom and control on their oral practices. Therefore the author suggested a way of conducting individual assessed oral presentations in order to promote students' investment. Also, learners should be encouraged to deploy their own knowledge and expertise in oral practices, which is students' knowledge and experiences from diverse communities they participate in. Still in the context of Hong Kong, Sung (2019) explored undergraduate student's identity and investment in English as second language learning across different contexts including inside and outside of university classrooms. Sung investigated the learning experiences of a student by narrative inquiry who was brought up in Hong Kong. The findings had documented the student's different degree of investment in different contexts. The student invested little inside of academic classrooms but invested actively outside of classrooms. The student faced challenges (e.g., difficulties in participating classroom discussions) for negotiating a positive academic identity as a competent student which constrained the student's investment. The study also pointed out that the student's investment heavily relied on his imagined identity as flight attendant rather than on the short-term gains.

In my point of view, studies which investigate identity and investment of Chinese learners of English should specify the regions where students located in. Since

English is used for non-educational purpose in Hong Kong (Qu, 2005), English learners in mainland China have their own particularities with English learning. Despite the massive English learning population in mainland China, English is still not predominantly used in daily life in China. Therefore, sometimes the research findings about different regions in China would have contradicting conclusions (e.g., students from Hong Kong and students from mainland China). For example, Qu (2005) has discussed several basic issues according to Chinese learners of English and their identities. Qu provided questions rather than answers for identity research such as “What agentive role does a language, especially as a foreign language play in the process of identity change?” and “What identities are specifically and uniquely Chinese or non-Chinese” (p. 94). In the critique, Qu suggested that research related to identity should give a clear operational definition because identity is an ambiguous notion. Qu’s statements regarding the differences between mainland Chinese English learners and Chinese English learners within Hong Kong or Macau helped me narrow my research focus down to Chinese mainland EFL learners. It made me curious about how mainland students construct their identities and what are the enablement and constraints to their investment in a place where English is not used in daily life.

3.3 Identity and investment of Chinese EFL Learners in the Era of Globalization

In this section, I draw on the existing studies and synthesize knowledge on the impacts of globalization on students’ identity construction and negotiations. I also reviewed studies which documented the impacts of different ideologies on EFL learners’ identity and investment.

3.3.1 Identity Construction and Negotiation of Chinese EFL learners

There is emerging research (Gao, Jia, & Zhou, 2015; Gu, 2010) on how Chinese learners of English construct their identities under the impact of globalization. According to Gu (2010), for Chinese English learners in college, English learning is not only about acquiring a language but also a process of constructing identities among their community, social-cultural context, and imagined global community. Students have identified their unique characteristics of being Chinese when they constructed their identities within a global community. The study revealed that students have increasing awareness of the importance of the symbolic resources of being Chinese in a global community. Also, students appear to strive to “view English proficiency as a means of self-statement and to create a good national image” (Gu, 2010, p. 150). In the study students had obvious cultural identity as Chinese and draw on it to position themselves in global communities. The students did not treat English and Chinese culture and language as opponents but perform reconciliation between their Chinese identity and global identity. Gao, Jia, and Zhou (2015) discovered the gap between identity research in the Second Language (SL) and the Foreign Language (FL) contexts. Relatively little research on identity construction of EFL students was conducted. Therefore, they conducted a four-year longitudinal study in which they investigated students from five universities in China. The study revealed EFL students’ identity development in the context of globalization. EFL students’ intercultural awareness has increased in a considerable way but anglophone cultures particularly the culture of United States have the greatest impacts on EFL students. The study revealed that students shared common sources of English cultural exposure: American TV series and English songs and movies. Also, students commonly embraced the spirit of “American individualism”, considering that there is more freedom abroad and the individual happiness is the ultimate goal.

Besides, in the context of globalization the use of different technologies enabled more possibilities for Chinese EFL learners to construct multiple and dynamic identities. Jiang, Yang, and Yu (2020) conducted a longitudinal case study to explore how Chinese ethnic minority students make investment in English learning while

participating in a digital multimodal composing (DMC) project. According to these researchers, DMC is a form of English learning activity which included various text types such as webpage, PowerPoint, podcast, and video composing. Ethnic minority students often encountered difficulties in mainstream English classrooms because of their limited access to high-quality English learning resources and their lack of linguistic capital and proficiency (Jiang, Yang, & Yu, 2020). By implementing 6 DMC projects over two semesters in a College English (CE) course, the researchers found that DMC played an empowering role in ethnic minority students' identity investment in English learning. Through DMC projects, ethnic minority students could not only gain access to peer support and collaborative learning community but also learn to capitalize their own ethnic knowledge as essential cultural capitals.

Zhang and Heydon's study (2014) on the lived literacy curriculum in a Sino-Canadian transnational programme found that students' identity options were constrained and expanded in the globalized schooling context. Zhang and Heydon explored nine Grade 11 students' multimodal texts (e.g., painting, songs) which documented students' dynamic identities and their experiences in the cross-border educational context. In their findings, the identity texts of student participants have illustrated students' positive expectations of "becoming global citizens" (Zhang & Heydon, 2014, p. 411). Zhang and Heydon also contended that for students with relatively high English proficiency levels, their identity options were expanded and students capitalized their engagement in learning with their imagined communities. The study also revealed that the school's preference on structured bilingual language training would constrain students' identity options because such training focused on language skills and knowledge instead of celebrating students' out-of-school literacy practices. The students reported that their voices and interests were not taken into consideration of the curriculum designing.

3.3.2 Different ideologies

Many scholars have paid attention to the impact of neoliberalism on second language education. The privatization of English education has been documented as one of the manifestations of neoliberalism (Li & De Costa, 2017). Pillar, Takahashi, and Watanabe (2010) contended that the neoliberal market drove the popularity of English learning. Private English educational schools have mushroomed and the number of English-learning-related materials (e.g., textbooks, dictionaries and study-overseas-program magazines) grown rapidly. According to these scholars, the craze of English learning was related to the premises of English that could enable personal success, national competitiveness, and modernization. Consistent with these three scholars' research findings, Xiong and Yuan (2018) did a critical analysis of the neoliberal discourse in English teaching materials *Go For it!* which were widely used in the context of China. Xiong and Yuan contended that in the teaching materials the "competence in English language had been commodified as crucial cultural capital", which students can use to "sell themselves for better price" (p. 113) in job market. The two scholars further pointed out that the individual efforts had been over-emphasized in the teaching materials while little emphasis had been placed on the interactive approaches. They contended that this neoliberal ideal was in accordance with Confucianism-influenced Chinese culture, which also glorified the personal efforts in education in order to get better social status.

Bernstein et. al (2015) presented the impacts of neoliberalism on second language education from different levels such as language teachers as replaceable workers and language students as consumers. According to Bernstein et. al, with the influence of neoliberalism teachers are no longer professionals who cultivate learners psychologically, socially, and intellectually but contract workers who are responsible for teaching language skills. In the meantime, learners are pushed to learn a language which will make them more competitive. The textbooks which presented routinized language use in particular settings (e.g., traveling, business interaction) have trained learners to become good buyers and shoppers in the market.

Language learners' investment can be constrained when they are confronted with contrasting ideologies (Jiang & Ren, 2020). Jiang and Ren focused on how different or even contrasting ideologies held by teachers and students shaped students' investment in language learning when using DMC in second language education. For example, teachers and students have different views on the nature of language. Teachers viewed language as linguistic system and students perceived language as more associated with meaning-making. Therefore, teachers insisted on using the topics and language points from the assigned textbook. Jiang and Ren contended that teachers' insistence could induce barriers that constrained students' investment. Students reported a lack of ownership and feelings of discouragement on their DMC projects because of the teachers' emphasis of linguistic forms rather than meaning-making. The teachers only focused on the linguistic forms in the DMC projects regardless of the efforts which students made in their works. This limited students' engagement with DMC and constrained their access to a wider range of identities.

Gao (2014) also noticed the impacts of ideology on Chinese English learners' identity. Gao presented four identity prototypes of English learners including *faithful imitator*, *legitimate speaker*, *playful creator*, and *dialogical communicator*. The *faithful imitator* is the learner who strictly imitates the native speakers, especially speakers from UK or USA. The *legitimate speaker* is the learner who thinks language is not owned by the "native culture" (Gao, 2014, p. 62) but has multiple varieties with equal status. Gao stated that the identity of *playful creator* emerged within second language learners under the influence of globalization. *Playful creator* "reconstructs language or discourse by mixing different linguistic codes" (p. 65). Rather than combining selected elements from multiple cultures, the *dialogical communicator* respects the integrity of every culture. Based on Gao's work, Ai and Wang(2016) discussed how these prototypes influenced Ai and Chinese English learners' identity transformation and argued Chinese English learners are greatly influenced by China's

ideology such as being pure listener and obeying teachers' instruction in teacher-centered classrooms.

The findings of listed studies (Ai, 2016; Bernstein et. al, 2015; Gao, 2014; Jiang & Ren, 2020) show that second language learners' identity and investment could be influenced by certain ideologies such as neoliberalism. Although the previous research (Gao, Jia, & Zhou, 2015, Gu, 2010) had noticed the above-mentioned gap between research on identity in SL and FL contexts, there is a scarcity of literature on EFL learners' identity and investment in private educational settings. Empirical research on EFL learners' identity and investment has been targeted on students who are in the public-school system (e.g. English major students in Chinese universities) (Gao, Jia, & Zhou, 2015; Teng, 2019; Wei, 2016). Little attention has been paid to private education of English (e.g. after-school tutoring, online learning, and test preparation) regardless of the prosperous private education industry in mainland China. Therefore, there is a necessity to explore whether Chinese EFL learners' identity and investment would be influenced by other factors and what changes do ideologies such as neoliberalism bring to Chinese EFL learner's identity construction and investment, especially in private educational settings.

3.4 Conclusion

The reviewed literature concerns different factors which could enable or constrain EFL learners' identity construction and identity investment in English learning. The reviewed literature also illuminates ways to encourage these EFL learners' engagement in their language learning process.

Chapter 4

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I introduce the methodology that I employed in this research. This chapter first details the research design, the participant selection, and the recruitment process. Then it outlines the process of data collection and data analysis as well as addressing ethical considerations. I employed a design of exploratory case study (Yin, 1994) to investigate Chinese EFL learners' investment in English learning in a private educational company in China. By using tools of collecting students' learning materials and having interviews with both teachers and students, I am able to document the students' identities and investment in private educational settings.

4.1 Exploratory Case Study

Case study is a good fit to my study for the following reasons. Firstly, case study is a good choice when “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). Yin stated that case study can be used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon which occurs in a real-life context. Understanding Chinese EFL learners cannot be separated from understanding the context they situate in. Moreover, a case study offers examples of real people in real situations, which enables readers a better understanding of certain abstract theories or principles (Cohen et al., 2011). By applying the method of case study, readers are able to understand how abstract theories or principles fit together with the ideas. Also, since case study recognizes that there are more than one variable operating in a single case, case study requires multiple tools for data collection and multiple sources of evidence to document the implications of variables (Cohen et al., 2011). Multiple sources of data are not only the prerequisite of data triangulation, but also a must to conduct in-depth investigation of the complex problems of a study (Zhang, 2012). In this study I collected students learning materials (writing assignments, homework,

class notes, audio records of oral speaking exercises, and pictures taken by students themselves participating program-related activities) and had interviews with both students and teachers for the purpose of data triangulation.

I defined my study as an exploratory case study (Yin, 1994) because there is limited research about EFL students' identity and investment within private educational settings. By applying case study in this research, I was able to collect data from students' learning materials and interviews with both students and teachers. Furthermore, the use of multiple data sources (interviews and learning materials) in the case study approach ensures that my research provides a holistic understanding of the students' identities and investment in EFL classrooms.

4.2 Site Selection

Following ethical approval, I selected one private educational company to conduct my research. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the private educational company were: 1) a private educational company that locates in mainland China; 2) a private educational company that has provided various English training programs (e.g., IELTS or TOFEL preparation programs) for at least 5 years. Based on my professional experience in a private educational company, five years is an appropriate length of time for a private educational company to be established and accumulate rich teaching experiences. I contacted the company administrator through social media application (WeChat) whom I had already known. I was told that there were no ongoing courses in the company because of COVID-19. The company administrator gave me the consent to contact the teachers. Because of the pandemic I decided to investigate the EFL students' identity and investment in the previous programs taught by teacher participants. In this study, three different English training programs were selected: IELTS preparation program (large size, about 15 students), IELTS preparation program (small size, about 6 students), and adult general English program. IELTS preparation programs and adult general English programs were two of the

most popular programs in the company. By exploring two types of programs with different course designs, I am able to have a more holistic understanding of students' identity and investment within private educational settings. To differentiate the two IELTS preparation programs with different class sizes, I used the terms of large size and small size in this thesis.

4.3 Participants

I contacted teachers who worked in the selected educational company. The teachers received the letter of information in both Chinese and English (See Appendix A) via email or social media application (e.g., WeChat) depending on their expressed preferences of communication. The teachers informed me of their interests in participating in this study. Since there were no ongoing courses because of COVID-19, I could only investigate the EFL students' identity and investment in the previous programs which were taught by teacher participants. To recruit student participants, I first had discussions with teachers about which type of English training programs to select for the study and how to recruit the potential student participants. The exclusion and inclusion criteria for student participants were: 1) a student aged from 18 to 25 who grew up in mainland China; 2) a student who participated in the selected English training programs. I invited the teachers to contact several potential students in the selected previous programs and gave my contact information to the students. Interested students contacted me privately through email or phone. The potential student participants received the letter of information in both Chinese and English (See Appendix B) via email or WeChat depending on their expressed preferences. Interested students informed me of their interests in participating in this study through email, phone or WeChat. Since I only need one student participant from one teacher's program to make this MA research manageable, the student who first gave consent to participate in the study was recruited when more than one student showed interests.

The selected private educational company has offered various kinds of English learning programs to students including standardized test preparation programs, secondary school training programs, adult general English programs. In this study two types of programs were selected: IELTS preparation programs (large size and small size) and adult general English programs. These two types of programs followed different course designs. The IELTS preparation programs classified its courses into four subjects according to IELTS subjects: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Two teachers were assigned to deliver the courses in the programs in which one teacher responsible for listening and speaking and the other responsible for reading and writing. Different from the IELTS preparation programs, the adult general English programs had general courses delivered by Chinese teachers and immersion courses delivered by foreign teachers. Although teachers in adult general English programs did not have specific subjects as IELTS preparation programs, teachers still had their own emphases (e.g., listening, reading, speaking, or writing) when they were delivering the courses.

Three teachers at the private educational company participated in the interviews: Ms. Jeney, Ms. Abby, and Ms. Rebecca. I assigned English pseudonyms to teacher participants because all teacher participants preferred to be called in their English names. Ms. Jeney and Ms. Abby were instructing IELTS preparation programs and Ms. Rebecca was instructing the adult general English program. Three teachers were specialized in different subjects: Ms. Jeney and Ms. Rebecca taught listening and speaking while Ms. Abby taught reading and writing. Teacher participants' profiles are provided in Table 1. To ensure that the teachers' identities are not traceable, teacher participants are cited in pseudonyms in this thesis.

Table 1

Teacher Participants' Profile

Pseudonyms	Time Serving	Subject Taught	Education	Interview
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	at the Company		Background	Language
Ms. Jeney	One and a half years	IELTS preparation (large size, about 15 students)	Majored in English Translation	Mandarin
Ms. Abby	Not shared	IELTS preparation (small size, about 6 students)	Not shared	Mandarin
Ms. Rebecca	10 months	Adult general English	Majored in English-Chinese Interpretation	Mandarin

Three students at the private educational company participated in this study: Wang, Vicki, and Penny which are taught respectively by Ms. Jeney, Ms. Abby, and Ms. Rebecca. They granted me the consent to collect their learning materials and to interview them. Wang participated in the IELTS preparation program in large size and Vicki participated in the IELTS preparation program in small size. Penny participated in the adult general English program. Student participants' profiles are provided in Table 2. To ensure that the students' identities are not traceable, student participants are cited in pseudonyms in this thesis.

Table 2

Student participants' profile

Pseudonyms	Gender	Program	Length of Time at the Program	Interview Language	Taught by Teacher
Wang	Male	IELTS preparation (large size, about 15 students)	3 months since March, 2019	Mandarin	Ms. Jeney
Vicki	Female	IELTS preparation (small size, about 6 students)	Around one and a half months since December, 2019	Mandarin	Ms. Abby
Penny	Female	Adult general English	2 years roughly since 2017	Mandarin	Ms. Rebecca

4.4 Data Collection

To achieve the purpose of data triangulation (Cohen et al., 2011), I collected students' learning materials and interviews with both students and teachers.

4.4.1 Learning Materials

I collected student participants' learning materials in multiple forms. Students had the right to choose what kinds of learning materials they were willing to share with me. The learning materials were uploaded to OneDrive platform by students to ensure the confidentiality of student participants.

Collecting students' learning materials could help me get familiar with student participants' learning experiences in private educational classrooms. Based on the form and the content of learning materials, I was able to know certain aspects of how teachers delivered the courses and to what extent students were engaged in the classrooms. Also, the learning materials may be able to illustrate traits of how student participants make investment in their English learning.

4.4.2 Interviews

I employed interview as a data collection tool as well. Merriam (2009) contended that interview is an important tool when people's behavior or feelings, or how people interpret the world cannot be observed. Merriam also stated the necessity to conduct interviews "when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 88). Scarcity of literature on EFL learners' identity and investment in private educational settings leads to the necessity to conduct "qualitative interview" (Warren, 2002, p. 84) with both EFL teachers and students. By employing interview as a data collection technique, I was able to elicit data about Chinese EFL learners' identities and investment in language learning within a private educational setting.

In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with both student and teacher participants, which means most of the interviews were guided by a list of questions. The teachers' interviews were conducted before students' interviews. Interviewing EFL teachers was to explore their interactions with the students in the classrooms and the pedagogy they adopted in the programs. The student participants' interviews were about how students constructed dynamic identities in English learning programs and what factors shaped their investment in English learning. The

semi-structured interview guidelines for student and teacher participants are provided in Appendix C.

All six interviews were conducted online through Zoom because of the severe condition of COVID-19. I did not start to conduct interviews until the student participants had finished uploading their learning materials to OneDrive. The length of interviews with teachers was around 30 minutes and the length of interviews with students was around 60 minutes. Being bilingual, the researcher was able to conduct interviews in either English or Mandarin according to participants' preferences. As all participants preferred to use their first language (Mandarin), all the interviews were conducted in Mandarin.

4.5 Data Analysis

After data collection was done, I used both inductive and deductive data analysis in three steps (Atkinson, 2002; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) to examine various data illustrating students' identity and investment. Step One, audio records (interviews) were transcribed into written texts and notes of the learning materials were reorganized on my personal computer. I transcribed the six interviews with teacher and student participants, which were all in Mandarin Chinese. Step Two, I started coding all of the data. I used NVivo 12 (see *Figure 2.*) to assist me to achieve data organization and data analysis. Every piece of data from the original transcripts and learning materials was labeled to identify "chunks of data" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 193). In this step, a code list was created in order to retrieve them in future analysis. I generated categories that retrieved from the theoretical lenses on the model of investment. For example, I generated the theme of "resistance", within which I included students' unwillingness to speak or finish the tasks assigned by teachers. Step three, I generated patterns for chunks of data based on the original codes I created in Step Two. Inductive approach was used when there are themes that emerged from the data but were not covered by the selected theory in

my study (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). For example, from interviews and learning materials, I found the gap between the pedagogies adopted by teachers and the pedagogies perceived by students. The teachers reported some effective pedagogies which they used in classes but according to students' interviews they did not feel the same way. Therefore, I added the theme of "pedagogy adopted by EFL teachers" and theme of "pedagogy perceived by students".

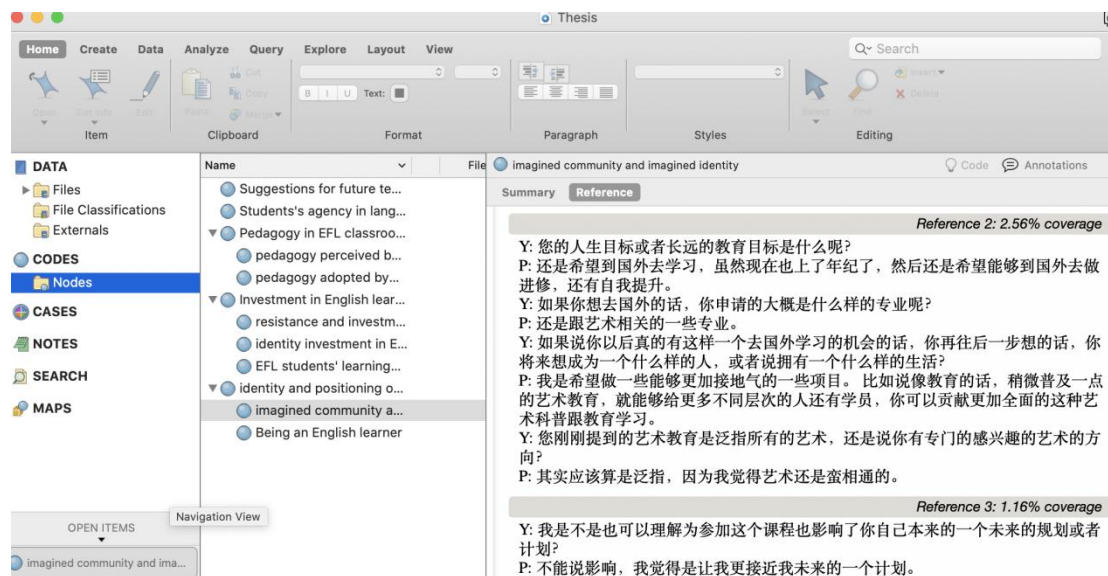


Figure 2. Data Organization and Analysis in NVivo 12

4.6 Ethical Considerations

The study followed Western's ethical research guidelines in order to protect participants' confidentiality, privacy, and rights throughout the whole process of the research. I did not carry out any research practice until I got the ethic approval from Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board. The first Ethical Approval Notice was received on March 11th. The data collection was originally designed to be on site. However, due to the severe condition of COVID-19, I submitted an amendment to the ethics to conduct all data collection processes from offline to online. The amendment was approved on April 16th. No research practice was carried out while I was waiting for the approval of the amendment. The Ethical Approval Notice and amendment approval letter are provided in Appendix D.

The approved Letter of Information and Consent form for teachers (Appendix A) and students (Appendix B) in both English and Chinese version were given to participants during the recruitment stage. The participants were informed by me regarding their contribution of participating in the research. I started to collect data until I received the scanned copied of participants' signed consent forms.

All participants' names were cited in pseudonyms to ensure that the participants' identities were not traceable. The key to the relationship between the pseudonyms and participants' names will be stored separately at all times. Student participants uploaded their learning materials to Western OneDrive platform through an encrypted link sent by me. Only I and the participant had the access to the profile. In terms of interviews, all interviews were conducted via Zoom. The participants were informed by me when they started to be recorded. After the audio recordings of interviews had been transcribed into written format, each participant was invited to review the transcripts and to offer clarification, elaboration, or any other feedback. All participants reviewed their transcripts in electronic copies. I uploaded the transcripts to Western OneDrive platform or WeChat depending on participants' expressed preferences so that participants were able to provide feedback. The collected data was stored in the researcher's encrypted computer and will be removed after 7 years of the study's commencement.

4.7 Limitations

A common concern for a case study approach is that case study has limited generalization (Cohen et al., 2011; Yin, 1994). In terms of generalizability, a frequently asked question would be: "How can you generalize from a single case?" (Yin, 1994, p. 10). However, as a qualitative research approach, case studies cannot be evaluated based on what Yin called "statistical generalization" (p. 10). Yin argued, the "answer is that case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (p. 10). In this sense, by employing

the case study approach, the researchers are able to “expand or generalize theories (analytic generalization)” (p. 10) rather than enumerating frequencies, which is statistical generalization. To achieve analytic generalization, I adopted the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) to interpret data and present findings regarding how EFL learners’ language learning experiences were influenced by various factors such as program types, class sizes, and even teachers’ autonomy in adjusting curriculum.

Regarding the limitations of conducting interview, the participants’ subjectivity has posed challenges to reveal the “truth” value of interview responses (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 33). The case study investigator might have biased views to influence the directions of the findings and conclusions (Yin, 1994). Gubrium and Holstein further commented that it is impossible to achieve the “neutrality” in interviews (p. 33). Therefore, to alleviate the effects of subjectivity bias (Yin, 1994; Zhang, 2012), the participants were invited to offer clarification, elaboration, or any other feedback of their interview responses to validate my interpretation of the research findings and conclusions.

I am bilingual and bicultural and was well poised to conduct this research in China. However, translation brought a methodological and ethical challenge to the credibility of translated data (Zhang, 2012). I only translated the data which was used in this thesis from Mandarin Chinese to English. To ensure the reliability of the translation, I invited another graduate student who was also bilingual and bicultural and familiar with cross-cultural research to crosscheck the English translation of the collected data in Mandarin Chinese. Also, the translation is trust-worthy because my supervisor also helped checked the faithfulness of translation of the cited quotes.

Chapter 5

5. Findings

In this chapter, I present data collected from students' learning materials and interviews with students and teachers. Through the theoretical lenses of identity and investment, I identified five themes: identity and positioning of EFL learners, learners' investment in English learning in EFL classrooms, the pedagogies of teachers in EFL classrooms, students' agency in EFL classrooms, and students' suggestions for future teachers and program developers.

5.1 Identity and Positioning of EFL Learners

The data of interviews with students and learning materials revealed how student participants constructed identities as related with English learning and how learning of English enabled their imagined identities and helped them get access to their imagined communities. The direct quotes from student participants in this chapter were translated from Mandarin Chinese.

5.1.1 Being an English Learner

Three student participants reported that they constructed different identities as related with English learning. For example, Wang participated in the IELTS preparation program (large size). Wang described himself as a thinking person. During the three-month learning of English, Wang was able to “grasp useful information”. As a university student, Wang shared that learning English offers him more opportunities to read foreign websites (e.g., Wikipedia) and original literature which Wang thought was useful. This has provided Wang more channels to get information and helped him absorb more “deep thoughts” towards current issues or social affairs. However, Wang stated that his language output (speaking and writing) cannot match up with his input (reading and listening), which constrained him from

expressing his opinions. Wang expressed his lack of confidence in oral speaking in the interview. To quote Wang,

Anyway, I think oral English is the most difficult to practice, and I don't know why. For example, you can do some exercises or work on some (exercise) books for reading and listening, and (for writing) you can write it by yourself to practice. But for speaking, I always have a feeling of embarrassment.

Wang also stated that the difficulties of improving oral English was common among Chinese learners of English and both he and his friends had encountered such gaps between their productive skills (especially oral English) and receptive skills.

Vicki participated in the IELTS preparation program (small size). Vicki described herself as a person who loved to communicate with different people and she expressed her joy to communicate with foreigners in English. Vicki defined her English proficiency as “not bad” and she said that through English she would be exposed to different ways of thinking while talking to foreigners in English. Although Vicki participated in a standardized-test-oriented program, she clearly knew that learning English was not just about passing exams. For Vicki, learning English is a life-long benefit for her and could enhance her competitiveness in job market. To quote Vicki,

English is an international language. The better you learn the language, the more help it will bring you in the future, and of course even in your life. In the future, no matter in examinations or work, as long as you have mastered English or you have an examination score that can prove your English proficiency, and then show it to others. English learning definitely helps me to get more qualifications or change others' opinions toward myself.

Penny participated in the adult general English program. As an art teacher, Penny shared that she was used to feel distant from her students at workplace. Before joining in the program Penny was unable to express herself fluently and clearly in English. It is hard for Penny to fit in with her students because sometimes her students would communicate in English. Therefore, Penny perceived the productive skills (especially oral speaking) as the most important thing in her English learning. Penny now saw

that she had the “ease to communicate with foreigners”. In the interview, Penny communicated about her the level of confidence after two-year experience of learning English. To quote Penny,

That's because my English was poor, and then when asked by foreigners or when talking to foreigners, I was very nervous and my mind went blank, and I couldn't remember any words. But after taking this course, because there is a foreign teacher chatting with me every day, many things become natural, and then there is an inexplicable self-confidence. I think learning a language will make people feel confident, although you may not be able to use it now. For example, if there is no foreigner around you then you may not be able to use it right now. But if you encounter someone one day, which means that when you want to communicate with foreigners, you won't be shy and it is more natural.

Three participants reported their constructed identities related to English learning and identity changes (e.g., being more confident) brought by their English learning experiences at the programs.

5.1.2 The Imagined Community and Imagined Identity of EFL Learners

The data revealed student participants' different imagined communities. For example, for Wang and Vicki, they participated in IELTS preparation programs with the goals to reach certain scores in the IELTS exams so that they can be enrolled into their dream schools. Both of them did not like the major they currently were studying so that they would like to apply for a new university to change their major. Wang studied civil engineering in a domestic university and wanted to apply for biomedical science in New Zealand. Vicki used to study accounting in Hong Kong and wanted to apply for a finance program in another university in Hong Kong. In a speaking exercise provided by Wang, he described his intention to go abroad as a “major decision taken in life” (the original title in Wang's audio exercise):

After high school, I went to the university... which I am in, but... once I went to this university and studying the subject, I found that I was quite dislike.....maybe I pretty dislike the subject which I studying in. So I want to

re-study the high-school degree but my parents definitely won't let me to do that. So I continue studying the major for about one year. Nowadays I found that I absolutely won't do something that I dislike so I thought about studying abroad. Now I think it is the most correct decision that I made because studying abroad is better than studying in domestic university. Although the major problem is the major problem (although I changed the major), but I think it's worthy and I won't regret that. (This quote was transcribed from Wang's speaking exercise. I have kept the original mistakes.)

The students shared that their experiences of English learning have provided students with access to their imagined communities. Both Wang and Vicki expressed that the experiences of participating in the programs not only helped them pass the examination (IELTS), but also improved their certain abilities for future study. For example, Wang especially appreciated the increase of his vocabulary knowledge and reading speed after studying in the program. Wang reported that by taking the reading courses, his ability to comprehend English readings greatly improved, which would help him to read academic medical papers in the future. Also, Vicki said that the writing courses provided strategies for her to present and analyze financial data more accurately. For example, being trained in IELTS Writing Task One (i.e., a 150-word essay to describe graphs or charts) enabled Vicki to identify and analyze data through different uses of charts and graphs.

Participants also reported how English learning enabled their imagined identities. For example, Penny described her imagined identity as an art teacher who can provide art education to people around the world regardless of their social economic status or cultural differences. Penny emphasized the importance of equal access to art education and the need for more people, especially foreign people, to know about Chinese traditional arts. Penny perceived English as an important medium of communication to introduce arts to her current domestic students and future foreign students.

In the interviews, all the three student participants self-reported a similar imagined identity as "a competent English learner", with authentic accents, fluency in

speaking, accurate expressions, and adequate comprehension skills (being able to understand news, movies etc.). Three student participants stated that these features were the goals they wanted to achieve in the future. It is clear to see students' emphasis on productive skills in English learning. Penny emphasized the importance of communication skills in her English learning experiences and contended that in her language learning she prioritized the oral English compared with many other aspects of English learning (e.g., grammar, academic writing, etc.). Vicki expressed her admiration for authentic British or American accents in communication and viewed this as a standard of English learning. To quote Vicki:

First of all, they (qualified English learners) need to have an English without an accent. English or American accents and fluency are important. Then they can use some vocabulary freely in expression and communication, and then the sentence structure must be able to help express his meaning clearly. I think that basic reading and writing skills are enough because I think qualified English learners should have strong abilities to communicate, not his test-taking ability. As long as they can express clearly in speaking or writing, I think it's fine.

Student participants reported how their English learning experiences (both prior experiences and experiences in the programs) provided them with access to their imagined communities and enabled their imagined identities. English learning enabled Wang and Vicki to gain higher educational opportunities and allowed Penny to achieve her career goal in art education. Student participants considered English as a medium of communication to enhance their confidence and competitiveness in the society. However, despite students' strong desire to become fluent English speakers, oral speaking skills remain rather difficult for students to improve.

5.2 Learners' Investment in English Learning in EFL Classrooms

The data of students' interviews and learning materials revealed how students made investment in their respective English learning programs. In this section I present examples of students' investment with three different perspectives: students'

identity investment, students' learning strategies, and students' resistance in EFL classrooms.

5.2.1 Identity Investment in EFL Classrooms

As Norton (2013) contended, “an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own identity” (p. 103). According to students’ interviews, student participants showed different identity investment in English learning. For example, as an art teacher, Penny was passionate about drawing. Since the classes of foreign teachers might take place on different campuses, Penny would spend a lot of time commuting to the foreign teachers’ classes which she wanted to take. Penny called this behavior as “star-chasing”. Penny especially mentioned one of her favorite teachers who taught biology. Penny would take notes of the classes in forms of extraordinary beautiful paintings. She would spend a lot of time drawing the figures of cells and write English descriptions next to the figures.

Other than that, Penny also invested lots of time and efforts on promoting arts and culture that she was interested in. Penny said that every once in a while she would have an opportunity to deliver a presentation in English on her interested topic so that she can move to the next-stage study. While other students would choose life-related topics, Penny treated such an opportunity as a chance of teaching. In Penny’s three presentations she introduced the Ancient Chinese arts such as Chinese painting, bronze, and jade. To quote Penny:

I completely regarded this kind of speech opportunity as a teaching opportunity, and I created my slides to teach about art science. I chose ancient Chinese art, such as Chinese painting, bronze, and jade, and I would give a popular science lecture in English. I saw it as an opportunity to exercise. It has something to do with the future projects I want to do. I feel a little bit of proud of myself because there are some foreign teachers listening to my speeches. I actually have an idea to introduce some of our traditional Chinese culture to foreigners.

Wang's investment in English writing illustrated how he invested his identity as a thinking person in English learning. Wang considered the ability of critical thinking as helpful for him to express his voices in English learning. Wang would spend time practicing writing out of class not only for the purpose of getting a better score but also practicing his ability of critical thinking. The IELTS writing test has two parts: a 150-word essay describing graphs and a 250-word argumentative essay. Wang stated that the argumentative essay exercises would give him opportunities to reflect on social issues. Wang would analyze the issues from its pros and cons and write a summary to help organize his ideas and language. This helped Wang get a better score in IELTS writing from 5.5 to 6.5. Another reason for Wang to practice argumentative essays outside of classes is that students were given uneven time in the two different tasks of IELTS writing in classes. Wang reported that in class the teacher asked him to exercise task one (i.e., describing graphs or charts) more than the task two (i.e., writing an argumentative essay).

5.2.2 EFL Students' Learning Strategies

The three EFL students adopted different learning strategies (Cohen & Griffiths, 2015; Darwin & Norton, 2015) to make investment in their English learning. According to Darwin and Norton, learning strategies refer to learners' abilities to deploy both linguistic and nonlinguistic resources to be engaged in multiple activities. Their most frequently reported learning strategies included using English learning apps, reading English materials outside of classes, and creating opportunities to talk to foreigners. Students would choose different strategies based on their own needs and interests. By adopting these strategies, students were able to learn English in multiple ways.

All the student participants reported that they used different English learning apps to help them improve their English. For example, Wang and Vicki reported that they would use apps to help them memorize more vocabulary; Penny said she would use

WeChat mini programs to participate in different mini online courses. To quote Penny,

In fact, there are quite a lot of online courses, small programs, or learning groups in WeChat. I have also participated in courses related to some kind of talks like TED talks, which analyze the speech of the speakers. In the course people are asked to do some teaching. For example, how to use sentences, or how to use these parts of speech.

The student participants also mentioned the importance to read as much English materials as possible outside of classes (e.g., English books, English articles). Wang said that he found it rewarding to read English books. When he encountered words that he was unfamiliar with, he would search them on the English version of Wikipedia rather than on the Chinese one to get more information. Other than that, Wang also mentioned that he used an app called Quora to have more opportunities to read English articles. As for Vicki, she emphasized the importance to form a good reading habit. To quote Vicki:

For example, it is mandatory to let yourself read English e-mails. You cannot use translation software. You can check it if you don't know the words. Under normal circumstances, you will have an English reading habit, and then improve your language reading speed. I will push myself to be immersed in reading.

The three student participants clearly realized the importance of having more opportunities to talk to foreigners in English in real life. Since English is still not predominantly used in many Chinese people's daily life, students found different ways to use English as much as possible in their own daily life. Wang reported that he was able to talk to foreigners when he played Person to Person (PVP) games on computer. To quote Wang,

Because there are some games, because playing that game is sometimes not limited to the national server, and some will be matched to some foreign countries. Then I think it is a very good environment, because after all, there is no resistance (for me) to playing games, and then you have to (speak English). Otherwise, how could you communicate when you are playing with foreigners.

Vicki and Penny both had foreign teachers, so they can use English more often. Vicki said she hired foreign teachers outside of classes in order to practice her oral English more often. According to Vicki, she would have some discussions with the foreign teachers regarding certain issues such as political affairs or the current news. For Penny, even though she had opportunities to meet foreign teachers in classes, she regularly used an app called Hello Talk to have more opportunities to talk with foreigners. To quote Penny:

By using it (Hello Talk) I can communicate and learn with many different people from all over the world. There are many foreigners who would like to learn Chinese, so we can teach each other and make friends. There are many people from different countries in the world. You can choose the language as soon as you go in. You can find some languages you want to learn, not only English, for example, Japanese, Korean and various languages. It is actually mainly a social media platform with purpose of learning to find a language partner.

The student participants reported that they made investment in English learning by adopting different learning strategies. These strategies have helped students get more exposure to English or more opportunities to use English in daily life.

5.2.3 Resistance in EFL Classrooms

All the three student participants reported their overall satisfaction with their learning experiences in the private educational company. However, there were still some moments when students were reluctant to be engaged in language learning. For example, Wang reported his reluctance to memorize templates in both writing and speaking exercises. He believed this template memorization in a way restricted his perceptions of the world because using the templates might constrain Wang from expressing his opinions freely. When asked how he thought about the way he learned writing and speaking in class, Wang stated, “It’s okay. There are also suggestions for us to use templates but normally I will choose not to use the template.”

Vicki reported her resistance towards the way that her teacher asked her to memorize vocabulary. Students, including Vicki, were given a vocabulary book where every word was listed with its Chinese meanings and sample sentences. However, Vicki was unsatisfied with the design of the book. When asked why she did not like the book, Vicki said:

Because the vocabulary book has words on it with just one example sentence, but each word has a lot of meanings, the book only gave me one example. Therefore, I think that book is very bad, and then I don't want to use it. This book makes me feel very reluctant to recite words.

Vicki explained another reason why she disliked the way of memorizing words. She said that there was little opportunity for her to actually use the memorized words in learning. Vicki stated her preference to keep practicing the new vocabulary. "It is better to understand words in context rather than simply memorizing the Chinese meanings", Vicki said.

Penny reported her discomfort in her encounters with foreign teachers who would not adjust the courses based on students' needs or who showed disrespect to students. According to Penny, some teachers would rigidly follow textbooks without considering students' actual needs, and a lot of time was "wasted" on discussing meaningless questions and doing boring tasks. "They (teachers) would get paid anyway as long as they finished the classes", Penny said. Moreover, Penny mentioned foreign teachers' attitudinal superiority (certain teachers' behaviors with a sense of superiority to students), which made her feel uncomfortable in class. To quote Penny:

For example, like names, we usually call foreign teachers' names. They are all abbreviated names. For example, Tom is an abbreviated name, but there are some foreign teachers who have a sense of superiority. They say that if you call him Tom and then he will ignore you. He requires you to call out his full name. But the full name is very long.

The data of students' interviews and learning materials revealed how students made investment in their participated English learning programs. Wang and Penny had invested in English learning to express their different identities (e.g., Penny as an

art teacher and Wang as a critical thinker). All these students had adopted different learning strategies to meet their needs and achieve their learning goals. Students sometimes showed resistance towards the structured ways of teaching in the programs (e.g., using templates, not differentiating teaching based on students' needs, and vocabulary-memorization).

5.3 The Pedagogies of Teachers in EFL Classrooms

The data of interviews of students and teachers and learning materials revealed how teacher participants adopted different pedagogies to help students invest in language learning. In the following part I present examples of the two most frequently mentioned pedagogies: encouraging students' voices in expressing and creating diverse speaking scenarios.

5.3.1 Encourage Students' Voice Expressing

In different programs, all the three teacher participants used different ways to encourage students to express their voices. Ms. Jeney described the IELTS speaking test as "all-inclusive" so that she would choose topics which students feel connected with. Ms. Jeney mentioned that topics such as technology, science fiction, game, and E-sport were some of the favorite topics of students. Ms. Jeney clearly knew the significance of students' own life experiences and interests in language learning and tried her best to make the content of the course closely relevant to her students' experiences. To quote Ms. Jeney:

I did find that the enthusiasm of the students would be even higher (after practicing the topic they can make connections with). Because asking them to talk about something they don't understand at all, we actually need to force input. But if they are asked to talk about something they are already a little interested in, they would even know more than me. In this way, the more he can talk about, the more he can fit into the class.

As a teacher of reading and writing courses, Ms. Abby found it efficient to involved students in debates (e.g., whether the death penalty should be abolished) in

class in order to encourage them to express different voices and train their ability of critical thinking, especially when students are not interested in the topics. The debates can be in English or in Chinese. After the debates the teacher would discuss with the students about the topics and then lead students to learn English expressions related to the topics. Vicki acknowledged the pedagogical value of such debates. When asked about her experiences in debates, Vicki said that the debates had helped her have a holistic understanding towards certain issues. Besides debates, Ms. Abby said in her classes she always “uses questions and encourages discussions”. Ms. Abby considered “guiding students” is more important than “giving them answers”. When faced with questions, students are pushed to think and express their opinions. Also, for students who already had opinions towards certain topics, Ms. Abby would lead them to view the topics from different perspectives. Ms. Abby mentioned a method she used in classes, which she called *stakeholder analysis*, which is about analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of different groups of people that may be involved in certain events. Ms. Abby conveyed that the stated methods she used in classes were to “make students realize that no position is absolutely right or wrong”.

Ms. Rebecca also emphasized the importance of finding voices in expressions. Similar to Ms. Abby, Ms. Rebecca frequently used questions to guide students. She emphasized that there is no “right or wrong” answer towards the questions, and that it is important to “express yourselves”. In her view, English is a “medium” for students to air their thoughts and opinions. Ms. Rebecca stated that learning a new language was also about learning “a new way of thinking”. Therefore, Ms. Rebecca always required her students to think independently. According to Ms. Rebecca, every student would get chances to express their opinions in her classes. To quote Ms. Rebecca:

First of all, during the class I will tell them (the students) that don't just answer me with a yes or no and it's done. I need the students to give me reasons. Why would you think in this way? I will encourage them to think about it in this way. Our homework will be a little simpler, because our homework is based on the courseware which includes a lot of questions. I will tell the students that I

don't want them to just answer a yes or no to the questions. They have to give me reasons. Just as they did in the class, they need to give me the complete sentences.

The data of teachers' interviews revealed that the teachers have adopted different ways to encourage students to express their opinions such as asking questions, discussing topics interested by students, and holding debates.

5.3.2 Creating Diverse Speaking Scenarios

The data of interviews with teachers and students and learning materials revealed that teachers tried their best to create diverse speaking scenarios for students. The teachers created different kinds of opportunities for students so that they could practice oral English in different scenarios. Ms. Jeney said she would have *a random activity* when students did not have life experiences with certain topics in IELTS speaking. According to Ms. Jeney, random activity is more like a game where students can brainstorm what things they can do or what things they can see in certain places (e.g., library, supermarket) or certain events. For example, people usually "search for useful information" or "fight for examination" in the library. Ms. Jeney would make use of such norms and explain how these norms can be used as part of an answer in response to the IELTS speaking questions about a specific place (e.g., library) or an event (e.g., encountering strangers). Ms. Jeney said students enjoyed doing random activities and some students would consider themselves as "good writers" after they participated in this activity. To quote Ms. Jeney:

The students are quite enjoyable. Because it is a game to play so that the classroom atmosphere is actually very active. Then they have a feeling of making up stories, and they also feel that they are good writers. They will be happier if they tell some hilarious plots from their imagination. It's pretty good.

When asked about the experiences of doing random activity, Wang did not provide details because he said that he could not remember it well.

Both Ms. Rebecca and Penny mentioned extra curriculum activities (ECA) in the adult general English programs, such as the English corner activity. Students' participation in ECA was not mandatory. Every month teachers would design different activities for students to communicate in English. Ms. Rebecca especially mentioned one of the ECA that she designed: students had opportunities to differentiate cocktails (see *Figure 3*). In this well-received activity, the teacher bought different kinds of wine for students to make different kinds of cocktails. Students were thus able to simulate the real scenes (e.g., in the bar) and learn to use authentic English expressions, particularly when foreign teachers joined the ECA. Penny described the ECA as “thematic” and stated that ECA could help her learn “intensively”. To quote Penny:

The program also has a lot of activity classes. There will be a theme every month. For example, this month is planting flowers and plants, and next month will be baking. Every month there will be a different activity. Foreign teachers and Chinese teachers will cooperate with the students. I think it's quite good, because one is that it has a strong theme, such as when it's a holiday, such as Halloween, and then you can learn some corresponding vocabulary from it, and then how to express about some customs. It is good to know some foreign customs and habits. Each topic has a corresponding module and we learn it one by one. It is good to learn intensively.



Figure 3. The Cocktail Which Penny Made in ECA

The interview data with teachers and students and learning materials revealed how teachers created different scenarios for students to speak and practice oral English.

5.4 Students' Agency in EFL Classrooms

The data revealed the extent to which EFL learners exercised agency in EFL classrooms. In this case, students' agency refers to students' abilities to challenge normative ways of thinking or negotiate symbolic capital in order to claim their right to speak or assert their own identities (Darvin & Norton, 2015). In this section I present examples of students exercising agency from three perspectives: students' interests and needs, supportive learning opportunities, and the relationship between teachers and students.

5.4.1 Students' Interests and Needs

Three teacher participants reported that they would consider students' own interests and needs when the programs began. Teachers said that they would briefly ask about students' goals and backgrounds. According to Ms. Rebecca, some frequently asked questions were: "What goals you want to achieve in English learning?", "What are you interests?", "What are your opinions about English learning?". These questions help teachers adjust their curriculum in the later classes. Also, Ms. Jeney reported she would have "portraits" for students in order to have more targeted courses. Ms. Jeney contented that even though the curriculum or the textbook was "fixed", the course can be "personalized" based on three things: 1) what are students' intention to participate in the program?; 2) what do students actually want from English learning?; 3) what outcomes do students want to achieve in English learning. Ms. Jeney stated that teachers would be given a curriculum which specified the contents of teaching. The teachers had the autonomy to not strictly follow the curriculum. Besides, Ms. Abby stated that knowing the opinions of

students towards English learning in the first class could help her adopt targeted pedagogies in future teaching.

In the interviews of Ms. Jeney and Ms. Abby, they both said that the stated methods of making “portraits” can only be done when “it is not large-sized classes”. According to the two teachers, they regarded the classes with around 15 students as “large-sized classes” and the classes with no more than 6 students as “small-sized classes”. Ms. Abby stated that she was unable to know every students’ needs and interests in a large-sized class. Ms. Jeney especially mentioned her heavy workload including not only teaching but also supervising students’ learning progress. Ms Jeney said that since teachers had fewer teaching hours to cover the teaching content in large-size classes, it is hard for her to both complete the teaching goals and consider the students’ needs. Ms. Jeney conveyed her powerlessness to pay attention to every student and said she would only be able to have a detailed understanding (considering students’ goals and needs) for a few students.

5.4.2 Supportive Learning Opportunities

Vicki and Penny shared with the researcher about the moment when they felt they were supported by their teachers. Vicki shared her experiences of disagreeing with the ideas of a sample essay given by the teacher. It was an argumentative essay discussing whether technology could replace lecture or not. The sample essay said lectures cannot be replaced by technology. Since the given topic was in Chinese, Vicki considered it was not persuasive to use the word “lectures” to stand for all kinds of classes she participated before. Vicki said that according to her experiences at the university, there were two kinds of classes: lecture and tutorial. From Vicki’s perspective, lecture and tutorial were different, and lecture can be replaced but tutorial cannot since Vicki thought it is more effective for teachers and students to have face-to-face discussions in the tutorial. Vicki stated that she expressed her confusion to the teacher after class and received her teacher’s positive feedback on her critical

thinking. Therefore, Vicki described her experiences at the program as “happy” and “motivating” and commented on the teaching in the company as “very mature”.

In comparison, Penny shared how her teacher supported her creative thinking in assignments. For instance, when asked to write one of the trades she knew, Penny thought this topic talking about trades was quite boring since she did not have any business experiences. Creatively, Penny invested a lot of time to search for information about the Black slave trade and wrote an essay about it. Penny said her teacher was surprised by her work because Penny did not write on the expected topics such as selling or trading in one’s iPhone. Penny stated that there were always moments when she presented some unexpected works in the classes and she was supported by teachers when Penny having such behaviors of “not following the textbook”. To quote Penny:

I think the teachers will think that I am amazing. They always think that I am amazing because I will give them some different ideas and answers. They are very supportive as well. Because they don’t like to strictly follow the textbooks while teaching so that they actually hope to see more different sparks and new ideas coming out.

Penny’s teacher Ms. Rebecca reported that even though she had the autonomy to choose how she delivered the classes or adopted different pedagogies to help students learn English, the topics of students’ learning were fixed (e.g., colors, numbers, countries) according to the textbook they used. Ms. Rebecca further stated that teachers would be given autonomy to change the topics based on students’ needs only in VIP classes (only one student with one teacher in classes).

The students shared the moments when they felt they were supported by their teachers. The reported data of supportive learning opportunities happened in small-size classes with no more than six students.

5.4.3 The Relationship Between Teachers and Students

The data of interviews with student participants revealed the close relationship between teachers and students in the private educational company. Vicki stated the relationship between teachers and students was quite different from what she experienced at the public high school. She said that in high school the way how she learned English totally depended on teachers, particularly in terms of the “best” learning practices and the interpretation of textbooks. According to Vicki, in high school the way she learned English was influenced by how her English teachers taught the English language. In the private education company, in contrast, Vicki described herself as the “center of small classes” because she as the student had power to make the classes more “diverse and interesting”. However, Vicki contended that teachers would only listen to students’ opinions and make adjustments to a certain extent. The students did not have complete control over the classroom. Penny stated that studying at the private educational company made her feel “active”. She described her previous English learning at a public school as “passively taking exams” and kept being told “what is right or wrong”. According to Penny, the roles of teachers in the private educational company are more like “a guide”. To quote Penny:

The atmosphere (in the private educational company) is different, and then the learning attitude of students is different because the purpose of study is different. Teachers will guide me to learn from different directions. At this institution, I feel that I am actively looking for learning opportunities on my own. I am more active in finding learning opportunities that suit me best.

The data revealed that students did exercise their agency to some extent in EFL classrooms. Teachers respected students’ own interests and needs, supported students’ different ideas and opinions, and acted as a guide to students. The interview data of students and teachers also revealed that agency of students was greatly effected by the class size. Students in small-size classes (no more than 6 students) tend to get more attention, help, and support from teachers.

5.5 Students’ Suggestions for Future Teachers and Program Developers

Student participants provided their suggestions for future teachers and program developers based on their learning experiences. Wang hoped that teachers could provide more opportunities for students to practice oral English. This was because he felt a sense of embarrassment when he completed the routine tasks of impromptu speeches and audio recording. Also, since there were about 15 students in Wang's class, not every student had the chance to do impromptu speeches due to the limited class time. According to Wang, he preferred to have a "face-to-face", "creative", "expressive" and "peer-involving" environment to speak rather than talking alone in front of his mobile phone. Wang said that he needed "a mandatory environment" to speak English where he must use English to communicate with others such as playing games with foreigners.

As an art teacher, Penny expressed her worries about supervision of foreign teachers. As some foreign teachers would teach classes without enough preparation or strictly following the textbook without considering students' own needs, Penny called for stronger institutional supervision on the quality of the foreign teachers' courses. Penny also pointed out the reason behind the foreign teachers' irresponsibility, to quote Penny:

Because the time for each of their courses is fixed, for example, one hour is one hour. After their time is wasted, they still can get the salary. Or the teacher will deliberately ask students to do some very meaningless things, such as asking students some boring questions, and then let the students waste a lot of class time on these boring things.

The student participants' suggestions reflected some of the weaknesses of the private educational company. The lack of authentic speaking opportunities might be one of the main reasons why Wang thought oral English was the most difficult to practice. There was a call from Penny for stronger supervision on the quality of foreign teachers' courses in order to create a more supportive learning environment and better learning experiences.

5.6 Summary

In this chapter, I reported the difficulties of students in enhancing their oral English skills despite their strong desire to be fluent English speakers. Students in a way lacked opportunities to truly use English for real-life purposes and expressed their needs to have authentic speaking scenarios (e.g., talking to foreigners). The lack of speaking opportunities might constrain students' identity and investment in English learning. The data also revealed different learning experiences within different sized programs (IELTS preparation programs consisting of large- and small-sized classes) and programs with different instructional purposes (IELTS preparation programs and adult general English programs). The data revealed that the efforts which teachers made in classes were greatly affected by the class size. Students in small-sized classes (no more than 6 students) tend to receive more attention and support from teachers.

It was also found that EFL students exercised their agency actively in their language learning experiences at the private educational company. Students had a clear understanding of what would be helpful for them to achieve their future goals and what would not. Accordingly, the teachers to some extent provided students with appropriate guidance and support. Students who exercised agency more actively tend to make more investment in language learning.

Chapter 6

6. Discussion

In this chapter, I provide conclusive remarks about the findings in response to my research questions, namely, “How do students perceive themselves as English learners in English learning classes at the private company?”, “How do students invest in their English learning and what factors shape their investment in English learning classes at the private company?”, and “In particular, how do students invest their identities in their English learning and what factors shape their identity investment in English learning classes at the private company?”.

6.1 Identity and Positioning of EFL Learners

The data of interviews with students and learning materials revealed how students constructed identities related with English learning and how their English learning experiences provided them with access to their imagined communities and imagined identities. Particularly, students reported the lack of their confidence in oral English regardless of their strong desires to become fluent English speakers.

Similar to the research findings about how Chinese English learners constructed their different identities related with English learning (Gao, Cheng, & Kelly, 2008), the students reported their self-confidence in language competence and how English learning enabled them to be more competitive in job market and more opportunities to get higher education. For example, Penny reported that after participating the program she became more confident with the improvement of her language competency. Vicki said that getting a good score in IELTS test could help her apply for overseas university programs and prove her language competency in the future job market.

Moreover, the reported data aligned with what scholars (Norton & Mickinney, 2011; Darwin & Norton, 2015) claimed about *imagined community*, that is, learners

would invest in their language learning if it can provide them with access to their imagined communities. The English learning experiences (both prior experiences and experiences at the programs) of three student participants has helped them obtain opportunities to get higher education (e.g., Wang and Vicki) or achieve career goal (e.g., Penny). By connecting with different imagined communities through the “power of imagination” (Norton & Mickinney, 2011, p. 76), three students were able to invest in their English learning to get more closer to their imagined communities.

The data of students’ interviews also revealed the EFL students’ lack of confidence in oral English regardless of their strong desires to be fluent English speakers. Three student participants in this study have reported their preferences on the productive skills of speaking and writing (especially oral English speaking) and they placed less emphasis on the receptive skills of listening and reading. Three student participants shared a similar image of “a competent English learner” being competent in productive skills: authentic accents, fluency in speaking, and accurate expressions. The way how students defined a competent English learner illustrated how students conceived how English shall be learned. Three students emphasized more on the authentic “use” of language in real life and treated English more as a medium of communication with foreigners. For example, Vicki emphasized the importance of communicative skills in English learning and said that “a qualified English learner should have strong abilities to communicate”. However, Wang reported his difficulties in practicing oral English despite his strong desire to improve his oral English and commented that the gap between the productive skills and receptive skills did not only exist in his case but common among Chinese EFL learners. Wang further reported that improving oral English was not as easy as improving other skills (e.g., reading) because he cannot practice it alone without interactions with others. Therefore, Wang suggested an environment where he could interact with others instead of talking alone in front of his mobile phone as he practiced in the program. Wang’s desire to have social interactions in oral English aligned with findings of previous studies (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Teng, 2019) about

the importance of social interactions in language learners' identities. According to the three scholars, language learning is a social practice and identity is negotiated and reproduced through social interactions. Therefore, the lack of social interaction in oral English exercises in the program may constrain students from constructing or negotiating positive identities related to language learning (e.g., being confident communicators).

6.2 Learners' Investment in English Learning in EFL Classrooms

The data of interviews with students and learning materials revealed how students invested their identities in English learning and how they made investment in English learning by adopting different learning strategies. In line with the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015), the data reflected the intertwined relationship between identity, capital, ideology, and investment. I also identified the different ways of investment of students in different contexts (inside and outside of classrooms) and different programs (IELTS preparation programs and adult general English programs).

The findings supported what Darvin and Norton (2015) claimed regarding how EFL students' investment in English learning was impacted by their identities. For example, Wang and Penny had invested in English learning to assert their different identities. Wang practiced writing of argumentative essays actively outside of classes in order to assert his identity as a critical thinker. Penny invested in her three presentations to promote and introduce her interested arts and culture in order to assert her identity as an art teacher who especially loved Chinese traditional arts. The examples of Wang and Penny supported the claims of Norton (2013) that "an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity" (p. 103).

Students are not “empty vessels” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45) when they entered into a new environment (the programs at the company) but equipped with capital such as linguistic skills, life experiences, and social network. The different learning strategies adopted by three student participants reflected how they made use of their own linguistic and nonlinguistic resources (e.g., money, language, relationship etc.) to obtain something that was regarded as “valuable” capital in the language learning programs (e.g., improvement in oral English). As Darvin and Norton (2015) asserted, language learners transformed capital they already possessed into something valuable while learners traversed across different sites. For instance, to get more opportunities to use English in real life, Vicki hired foreign teachers outside of classes. Vicki reported she would have discussions with the foreign teachers toward certain topics (e.g., political affairs). In this case, Vicki transformed her resources such as money (hiring teachers) and digital devices (to communicate with foreign teachers) into linguistic capital, namely the improvement of her oral English.

The interviews with students also reflected the power associated with authentic British or American English on EFL students’ learning experiences. Vicki’s admiration of authentic American or British accents and her learning strategy of obtaining more opportunities to talk to foreigners supported what Darvin and Norton (2015) contended that capital is subject to but not constrained by different dominant ideologies. The ideology influenced how students perceived certain symbolic capital as beneficial to their language learning. For example, the British-American norms influenced how Vicki valued different accents and how she defined “authentic accents” in her English learning. This aligned with the findings of Wei (2016) that the monolingual bias was strong among Chinese learners of English. Wei contended that the monolingual bias related to “the idolization of native speakers as ideal English teachers” (p. 102). The inclination of American and British English reflected that the closeness to native American or British speakers was perceived as benchmark in English learning by Vicki. Therefore, Vicki thought that having authentic accents and using native-like expressions were an important standard for a successful English

learner. The example of Vicki supported the findings of previous studies (Gao, Jia, & Zhou, 2015; Wei, 2016) that the pluralism of English is recognized by Chinese EFL learners in a limited way. Students' obsessions with authentic American or British accents reveals that the British-American norms are still in a way predominant among Chinese EFL learners.

Similar to the research findings about students' different ways of investment in different contexts (Sung, 2019), the interview with Wang and his learning materials presented Wang's different ways of investment on IELTS writing. Though Wang actively practiced the argumentative essays (Task Two of IELTS writing) outside of classes, he got much fewer opportunities to practice the Task Two in class. Wang shared his in-class learning materials of writing assignments which were all about Task One writing (i.e., describing graphs). This reflected the uneven time which teachers assigned to students on different tasks of IELTS writing and therefore in a way constrained Wang's investment on writing in classes. However, I did not identify any data that would help explain why teachers allocated uneven time on two different writing tasks.

Different from one previous study (Sung, 2019), the data of students' interviews and learning materials reflected different ways of investment among different types of programs. According to the data, Penny in adult general English programs tends to invest more than the students (Wang and Vicki) in IELTS preparation programs. For example, Penny expressed her opinions and asserted her identities more actively in her learning experiences such as doing presentations and drawing pictures as class notes because the adult general English program offered Penny such opportunities. However, students in standardized-test-oriented IELTS programs got fewer chances to express themselves due to different course designs (e.g., fewer opportunities to speak).

The standardized test (IELTS) reshaped both students' and teachers' practices to cater to the standardized testing expectations. For example, Wang's resistance to

using templates in IELTS and Vicki's unwillingness to memorize vocabularies reflected their "ambivalent desire" to learn English (Norton & Mickinney, 2011, p. 75) when facing the requirements of the test. Wang expressed his resistance to using templates in writing assignments because he was eager to get more chances to freely express his perceptions of the world in argumentative essay writing. Similar to Wang, Vicki showed her reluctance to use the vocabulary book because she had her own preferred way of learning new vocabulary, which is understanding the words in contexts rather than memorizing its meanings. It seems that the use of templates and vocabulary books serves to the programs' goal of helping students boost their scores in the standardized test (IELTS). Students joined the programs for boosting scores while also cherishing their own preferred ways of learning English for real-life purposes.

The presented data revealed how the participated EFL students' investment in language learning was impacted by identity, capital, and ideology. Students in standardized-test-oriented programs expressed their ambivalent desires towards certain test-oriented literacy practices.

6.3 The Pedagogies of Teachers in EFL Classrooms

The data of interviews of students and teachers and learning materials revealed how teacher participants adopted different pedagogies to help students invest in language learning. There were two main pedagogies where teachers encouraged students to express their opinions and created different opportunities for students to speak.

Through different pedagogies mentioned by the teacher participants, students were encouraged by their English teachers to challenge or question the information that they read, view, or access in class and reflect on issues from different perspectives. In my view, this approach reflected the ideological model of literacy (Street, 2003). Teachers in both standardized-test-oriented programs and adult general

English programs realized the importance of nurturing critical thinking in the text-level in English learning (e.g., detecting misleading arguments). For example, Ms. Abby in IELTS preparation programs stated that she tried to make students understand that “no position is absolutely right or wrong” through debates and *stakeholder analysis* (analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of different groups of people that may be involved in certain events). Ms. Rebecca in the adult general English programs treated her teaching as “guiding students” and invited students to express their own opinions in English by keeping asking students questions. However, I did not identify data that reflected that students were encouraged by teachers to expose unjust social hierarchies or use the English language as a weapon to effect social changes.

The interview with Ms. Rebecca and Penny’s learning materials also reflected how teachers’ pedagogies influenced students’ investment in English learning by encouraging students to speak in outside-class activities. For examples, students in adult general English programs had opportunities to participate in extra curriculum activities (ECA). The ECA were not mandatory for students to attend and were designed by teachers. Penny shared her experiences in an ECA about cocktails, which was designed and implemented by Ms. Rebecca. In this ECA activity, Penny practiced her oral English by communicating with her foreign teachers. The ECA in different themes (e.g., baking, holiday etc.) provided students with chances to use English outside of classes. Except for ECA, Penny was able to express herself and invested in her presentations introducing her interested Chinese traditional arts. In these presentations Penny was able to assert her identity as an art teacher and introduced her interested Chinese traditional arts to not only her classmates but also her foreign teachers with different cultural backgrounds. This enabled her imagined identity (Norton, 2001; Norton & Mickinney, 2011) as an art teacher who can provide art education to people from different social economic status and cultural backgrounds.

However, I did not identify data that reflected how students' investment was promoted by teachers' pedagogy in IELTS preparation programs. Although Ms. Jeney and Ms. Abby reported that they have used certain ways (e.g., random activities, debates) to empower students to speak, Wang and Vicki did not provide positive feedback towards the pedagogies mentioned by their teachers. One of the reasons why students did not provide positive feedback might be that students were unable to relate English learning with their own life experiences or interests. For example, even though Ms. Jeney described IELTS speaking as "all-inclusive" and used pedagogy such as trying to discuss the topics (e.g., technology, science fiction, game, and E-sport) which students might connect with, those topics cannot fit the need of every students. In the case of Wang, he was more willing to talk about social topics such as political issues rather than daily topics. Another reason might be the expectation of the standardized tests (IELTS). The previous studies (Li & De Costa, 2017; Zhang, 2012) reported the similar findings about the constraints of standardized test on teachers' teaching practices. In the present study, in IELTS preparation programs the efforts made by teachers served the same goal to help students reach their expected scores. Therefore, the topics are not "all-inclusive" as how Ms. Jeney described but limited to the expectations of the IELTS test.

The presented data revealed how teacher encouraged students' investment in English language learning by nurturing critical thinking and encouraging students to speak on various topics. The presented data also reflected the constraints of standardized tests on teachers' teaching practices.

6.4 Students' Agency in EFL Classrooms

The student participants exercised their agency in English learning from two perspectives: to be able to challenge the normative ways of thinking and to be able to negotiate symbolic capital to assert the identities or claim the right to speak (Darvin & Norton, 2015). For example, Vicki expressed her disagreement with the ideas of the

writing sample and got positive feedback from her teacher. Vicki's teacher Ms. Abby also said in her classes she wanted students to realize that no position is absolutely right or wrong. This aligned with the ideas of the ideological model of literacy (Street, 2003) that students are encouraged to challenge what people have taken for granted. Besides, Penny was supported by her teachers when she changed her assignment topics, which reflected students' autonomy to decide what would be helpful for their language learning and what would not. Penny changed the topic of her assignments from business trades to Black slaves because she did not have any related experiences with business. Therefore, Penny thought following her teacher's requirement was not beneficial for her existing identities (e.g., her interests and life experiences) or imagined identities (e.g., career of arts education). Penny's behavior of "not following the textbook" or "not following teachers' expectation" supported what Darwin and Norton claimed that learners exercised their agency by choosing what they perceived as beneficial to their existing and imagined identities.

The data of interviews with students and teachers reflected that students exercised their agency more actively in English learning within private educational settings compared with in public school. Both Penny and Vicki reported their agency to provide suggestions to the teaching approaches. For example, Vicki described herself as the "center of the classes" which indicated that students had the power to provide suggestions and then influenced how their teachers delivered the classes. Similar to Vicki, Penny described her English learning experiences at the company as looking for opportunities "for her own". In this way teachers in the private educational company more acted like a "guide" to students. Such approaches have helped Vicki and Penny develop identities as "legitimate" (Teng, 2019, p. 55) English learners in classrooms. The notion of "legitimate" is connected with the concept of communities of practice (Floding & Swier, 2012). A community of practice is a group of people who "share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Floding & Swier, 2012, p. 194). Language learners enter their communities of

practice (e.g., teachers and classmates in the English learning programs) and are recognized by their communities as “full participant” (Floding & Swier, 2012, p. 196) after becoming more involved and engaged in the communities. The two students’ previous English learning experiences in public schools were more teacher-centered where teachers held more power to decide what should be taught to students and how to teach the language to students. The cases of Penny and Vicki supported the previous findings that students’ agency is one of the contributing factors to students’ identity development and investment (Teng, 2019). However, data did not reveal that students were full participants of any established communities of practice within the private company.

Although students have more autonomy in private settings, students only exercised agency to some extent at the company because of the teachers’ limited autonomy to adjust curriculum. Ms. Rebecca stated that teachers had to follow the topics in the textbook and cannot change it. Ms. Jeney said that there would be assigned teaching contents which she needed to cover and teachers could make adjustment to teaching practices with the premise of covering the assigned content. Vicki also stated that the teacher only listened to students’ opinions and make adjustment to teaching practices “to a certain extent”, which revealed that students’ “agentic behaviors” (Teng, 2019, p. 55) were constrained by the limited autonomy of teachers to adjust the curriculum.

The data also revealed the different levels of students’ agency between classes of different sizes. No data reflected Wang’s agency in his language learning experiences. Wang is the only student in this study who participated in the “large-size classes” (about 15 students). The teacher interview data reflected the teachers’ different approaches toward different size classes. For example, Wang’s teacher Ms. Jeney said that she was unable to consider students’ goals and needs in large-size classes. Ms. Abby also said that she only asked students about their opinions of English learning in small-size classes (no more than 6 students). It seems that teachers tended to pay less

attention to students' needs and interests in large-size classes, which might have constrained students' agency to speak up about their needs in language learning . Besides, students in large-size classes had less autonomy to influence how teachers deliver the classes. Ms. Jeney stated that even though teachers were allowed by the institution to not strictly follow the curriculum, she would not be able to cover all the teaching content in large-size classes if she considered students' needs due to the time limit. Wang's lack of opportunities to practice his oral English and uneven time allocation on two tasks of writing in class reflected students' limited autonomy to influence teaching practices in large-size classes as Ms. Jeney said.

The presented data revealed that even though students exercised their agency in language learning more actively within private settings than in public settings. Students' impact on teachers' teaching practices was still limited especially for students in large-size classes.

6.5 Suggestions for Future Teachers and Program Developers in Language Education

The first implication of the study findings relates to the need to empower language learners with more opportunities to claim their "right to speak" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 43). Wang's strong desire to be a fluent English speaker but lack of confidence in oral English supported what Norton (2013) contended that high levels of motivation might not result in good language learning. The routine tasks of audio recording and impromptu speeches neglected the importance of social interactions in language learning. The present study has also revealed the need to create an environment to speak as Wang suggested where students can express their opinions freely and assert their identities through social interactions with others (e.g., teachers, peers). Also, the institution shall provide more room for teachers to adjust the curriculum so that teachers would be able to allow more room for students (especially

in large-size class) to exercise their agency in language learning by recognizing students' own learning needs and voices.

The research findings also refer to the neoliberal impacts on language education in private settings. The present study echoed the previous studies (Bernstein et. al, 2015; Li & De Costa, 2017; Pillar, Takahashi, & Watanabe, 2010) about the impacts of neoliberalism on language education. The privatization of English education has been documented as one of the manifestations of neoliberalism (Li & De Costa, 2017). The data of interviews with students revealed the constraints of the privatization of English on teaching practices. For example, Penny pointed out that the teachers got paid as soon as they finished the classes regardless of teachers' irresponsibility for not considering students' needs. It seems that the privatization of English does change the roles of teachers into "replaceable workers" (Bernstein et. al, 2015, p. 6) and make the English learning programs more sound like an industry with a main purpose of "boosting students' test scores" (Li & De Costa, 2017, p. 278). Therefore, both institutions and teachers need to consider how to help students construct meaningful identities in relation to English learning rather than merely helping them getting higher scores in the standardized tests.

6.6 The Significance of the Study

The present study investigated Chinese EFL learners' identity and investment in English learning in a private educational company. Despite emergent studies on Chinese EFL learners' identity and investment in English learning in China (Gu, 2010; Gao, Jia, & Zhou, 2015), there is a scarcity of literature on EFL learners' identity and investment in private educational settings. My study responds to the scarcity of literature and adds to the knowledge on factors contributing to EFL learners' investment at programs in private educational companies. Drawing on multiple sources of data (e.g., interviews with teachers and students, students' learning materials), I provided descriptions of students' English learning experiences at the

programs and discussions on how to promote students' investment from different perspectives. My study points to the necessity for teachers to provide more meaningful and relational oral speaking opportunities for students according to students' own needs and interests. My study also provides recommendations for both institutions and teachers to allow more room for students' "agentic behaviors" (Teng, 2019, p. 55) in their learning experiences and leave more power for students to influence teachers' teaching practices. All in all, this study may provide insights to private educational companies regarding how they can improve their programs to encourage students to engage in language learning in more meaningful ways.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Information and Consent Forms to Teachers



Project Title: A case study of EFL learners' identity and investment in a private educational company in China

Principal Investigator: Dr. Zheng Zhang

LETTER OF INFORMATION

(Teacher)

My name is Jing Yan and Dr. Zheng Zhang is my supervisor who is the professor at the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am currently conducting a research on Chinese English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' identity and investment in a private educational company. We would like to invite you to participate in this study because you are a language teacher who works in private educational company and deliver one or more than one course for the potential participants.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information required for you to make a decision regarding participation in this research. The project is designed for investigating the following impacts: 1) identify how students construct their identities as English learners while participating English learning programs provided by private educational company; 2) investigate how students invest in their English learning and the factors which shape students' investment in their language learning in a private educational company.

Regarding your contribution to the research, we will interview you about your interaction with the students in your class and the pedagogies you used in English learning classes (about 15 minutes).

If you consent to participate in this study, your students will be invited to participate in this study. The researcher will not disclose the student participants' identities to the teachers. The researcher will have interviews with the student participants regarding their identity construction as English learners and how they

make investment in English learning. The researcher will also collect their learning materials. Your student(s) have the right to choose what materials to share with us. There will be no evaluation of the quality of your students' learning materials. The collected learning materials might have your comments or feedback which will be removed for all types of dissemination in this study. The interviews will be conducted online or through telephone. All interviews will be audio-recorded and be transcribed into written format. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded but still want to take part in the study, we will take notes of your responses to the interview. The learning material collection will be conducted during the normal part of the program and the interviews will be conducted at the end of the program. You will also be invited to check the transcripts and offer clarification, elaboration, or any other feedback you want to add. You will be able to remove parts of the interview. You are able to choose the way you prefer to review the transcripts, uploaded on Western's OneDrive or OWL platforms. You could check the transcript through internet and make comments if you want to make any revision. The review of the transcript might take 5 minutes. The researchers will only collect the learning materials which might reflect students' identity and investment in English learning and will ask questions related to this topic in the interview with you. The researchers may ask questions related to pedagogy which you adopted in the English learning program.

The information collected will be used for research purposes only. Only the investigators will have the access to the tape and the transcripts. The researchers will keep your personal information in a secure and confidential location for a minimum of 7 years. A list linking your number/pseudonym with your name will be kept by the researchers in a secure place, separate from your study file. With your permission, the researchers will use direct quotes. You may (or may not) be quoted directly in the research report, but once you are quoted, you will not be identified as the source of the quotation and any information that could identify you will be removed. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. The study results will be presented in the researcher's MA thesis or future published papers. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of study results, please contact Dr. Zheng Zhang (Canada: XXX; XXX). Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your status at your institution. If you choose to withdraw from this study, all information about you will be removed from my database. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

There are no known risks or discomfort in participating in this study. I will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study. You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study. No information including your identity as participant and your data will be shared with the institution.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Human Research Ethics, Western University, at XXX or XXX. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Zheng Zhang (Canada: XXX; XXX) or Jing Yan (Canada: XXX; China: XXX; XXX). This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Dr. Zheng Zhang

Assistant Professor

Faculty of Education

Western University

Jing Yan

Faculty of Education

Western University



Consent Form

Project Title: A case study of EFL learners’ identity and investment in a private educational company in China

Principal Investigator: Dr. Zheng Zhang

Western University, London, Ontario, Canada

I have read the Letter of Information and have had the nature of the study explained to me. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate and give permission to the research team to (please select):

1. quote me directly in reports or publications on the premise that a pseudonym is used.

Yes

No

2. audio-record the interview. Yes No

Name of teacher : _____

Signature of teacher: _____

Date: _____

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: ____Jing Yan_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: _____

Date: _____

Contact Information of Investigator:

Jing Yan (Canada: XXX; China: XXX; XXX)



研究项目名称： 中国英语作为外语学习者在私立教育公司的身份和投资的案例研究

主研究人： 张箏

研究项目信息介绍函

(教师)

我是晏菁，我的导师张箏博士是加拿大安大略省伦敦市韦仕敦大学（西安大略大学）教育学院的教授。我正在进行一项关于中国英语作为外语学习者在私立教育公司的身份和投资的一项研究。由于您在私立教育公司工作，并担任一或多个英语学习项目的教师，我们诚挚的邀请您参与此项研究。

这封项目信息介绍函旨在为您介绍此项研究。此项研究的研究目的是：1) 调研参加私立教育公司的英语学习课程对中国英语作为外语学习者的英语学习，以及作为英语学习者的身份认同有何种影响；2) 调研中国英语作为外语学习者，在参加英语学习课程的过程中，是如何对他们的英语学习过程进行投资，以及受到何种因素影响。

关于您在此次研究中做出的贡献，我们将会与您进行教师访谈（约 15 分钟），访谈内容将涉及教师在课堂上与学生之间的交流，以及教师在上课过程中所采用的教学法。

如果您同意参加这项研究，您的学生也将被邀请参加这项研究。您不会被告知您的学生作为研究参与者的身份。研究人员将就学生作为英语学习者的身份建构以及他们如何投资英语学习与学生参与者进行访谈。研究人员还将收集他们的学习资料。您的学生有权利选择与我们分享何种学习材料的信息。收集的学习材料可能会有您的评论或反馈，对于本研究中的任何传播形式，都将删除您的评论或反馈。研究过程将不涉及任何对学习材料质量的评判。所有的访谈将会以网络视频或电话的形式进行。所有的访谈将会被录音转成文字。如果研究参与者不想被录音，但仍然想参加本项研究，我们会用笔记的形式记录参与者对访谈问题的回答情况。学习材料收集环节将会在日常的项目过程中进行，访谈环节将会在项目结束后进行。此外，我们还会邀请您审阅访谈转录稿（约 5 分钟），并对转录稿的相关内容做进一步的解释和反馈意见。您可以移除访谈中的内容。您可以选择以何种方式审阅转录稿。转录稿将会被上传在例如 OneDrive 或者 OWL 等平台上。您可以审阅转录稿并提出您的反馈意见。研究者只收集可能反映学生身份认同和对英语学习投资的学习材料，并且在对学生和教师的访谈中只提出与此相关的问题。研究者可能会问一些与教师在英语学习计划中所采用的教学法相关的问题。

研究中所收集的数据只用于研究目的。只有研究人员可以接触到访谈录音与文字转录稿。我们会将您的个人信息存在安全保密的地方至少 7 年。记录您研究号码/假名的名单将会被存放在安全的地方，并且和您的其他研究档案分开存放。只有在征得您同意的前提下，我们才会直接引用您说的话，但是，一旦您的话被引用，任何能识别您身份的信息将会被删除。研究结果将发表在研究人员的硕士学位论文或以后发表的论文中。您的姓名也不会出现在任何有关此项研究的出版物中。如果您想获得研究结果的副本，请与张箬博士联系（加拿大：XXX；XXX）。您参与本项研究纯属自愿。您不参与此项研究，不愿意回答任何问题，或在任何时间想退出本项研究，都不会对您的工作以及工作地位产生任何影响。如果您选择退出本项研究，我们将会从数据库中清除与您相关的所有数据及信息。此外，韦仕敦大学非医学研究伦理协会的代表将有可能联系您，或要求查看您参与本项研究的相关记录，其目的是监控本项研究的实施。

您参与本项研究将没有任何已知风险或不适。应您的要求，我们不会向您所在学校透露您作为本项研究参与者的身份。在研究过程中，我们会及时向您提供可能影响您的决定是否继续参与本项研究的最新信息。您同意参与本项研究不会影响您的任何合法权益。任何关于您身份的信息以及您的研究数据将不会与该机构共享。

若您对本项研究的开展或您作为本项研究参与者的权利有任何疑问，请您联系韦仕敦大学研究伦理办公室（电话：XXX；电子邮件：XXX）。若您对于本项研究本身有任何问题，请您联系张箬博士（加拿大：XXX；XXX）或者晏菁（加拿大电话：XXX；中国电话：XXX；电子邮件：XXX）。敬请惠存此函，以便日后参考。

张箬博士
助理教授
教育学院
韦仕敦大学

晏菁
教育学院
韦仕敦大学



研究项目名称： 中国英语作为外语学习者在

私立教育公司的身份和投资的案例研究

主研究人： 张箏

研究项目参与同意书

兹证明我已阅读了张箏教授和晏菁的研究项目信息介绍函，她们想我介绍了研究项目的本质，并回答了我的疑问。我同意参加此项研究并允许她们的研究团队（请选择）：

1. 在使用假名的前提下，在研究报告或出版物中直接引用我说的话。是
否
2. 对与我的访谈进行录音。 是 否

教师姓名（请用正楷填写）：

教师签名：

日期：

回收该研究项目参与同意书的研究人员姓名： 晏菁

回收该研究项目参与同意书的研究人员签名：

日期：

项目研究人联系信息： 晏菁（加拿大电话： XXX； 中国电话： XXX； 电子邮件： XXX）

Appendix B: Letter of Information and Consent Forms to Students



Project Title: A case study of EFL learners investment in private educational company in China

Principal Investigator: Dr. Zheng Zhang

LETTER OF INFORMATION

(Student)

My name is Jing Yan and Dr. Zheng Zhang is my supervisor who is the professor at the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am currently conducting a research on Chinese English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' identity and investment in private educational company. We would like to invite you to participate in this study because you participate in an English learning program provided by a private educational company.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information required for you to make a decision regarding participation in this research. The project is designed for investigating the following impacts: 1) identify how students in construct their identities as English learners while participating English learning programs provided by private educational company; 2) investigate how students invest in their English learning and the factors which shape students' investment in their language learning in a private educational company.

Regarding your contribution to the research, we will 1) collect your learning materials (e.g., writing assignments and exercise book) in the English learning program. Collecting your learning materials is for the purpose of investigating your identity construction as an English learner in English learning and how you make investment in your English learning; 2) interview you (about 45 minutes) about how you construct identity in the English learning program and what factors shape your investment in the English learning program.

You have the right to choose what materials to share with us. We may collect your assignments with teachers' comments if you grant us to do so. The learning materials might be shared upon dissemination (e.g., excerpts, photos, etc.). The forms of sharing the learning materials depend on what kind of learning materials you are willing to share with the researcher. The learning materials might be shared in excerpts if the materials are writing samples or in audio formats (the audio will be transcribed). If the materials are drawings or images, they might be shared as figures

in the researcher's master thesis. The researcher will collect your learning materials through internet (e.g., Western's OneDrive or OWL platforms) so that your classmates would not know you participate in the research. The learning materials will be sent in photo copies if they are in written format or in audio copies if they are in audio format. There will be no evaluation of the quality of your learning materials.

The interviews will be conducted online or through telephone. All interviews will be audio-recorded and be transcribed into written format. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded but still want to take part in the study, we will take notes of your responses to the interviews. The learning material collection will be conducted during the normal part of the program and the interviews will be conducted at the end of the program. You will also be invited to check the transcripts and offer clarification, elaboration, or any other feedback you want to add. You will be able to remove parts of the interview. You are able to choose the way you prefer to review the transcripts. The transcripts will be uploaded on Western's OneDrive or OWL platforms. You could check the transcript through internet and make comments if you want to make any revision. The review of the transcript might take 15 minutes. Your teachers will also be asked to participate in this study. The teacher will have an interview (about 15 minutes) with the researcher before having interview with you. Teacher's interview is mainly about his/her interaction with the students in the classroom and the pedagogy they adopted in the program you participated in. Interviewing your teacher will help the researcher gain a basic understanding regarding the students' in-class learning experiences and how teacher help the students learn English. The researcher will not disclose the student participants' identities to the teachers. The interview with teacher will be conducted at the end of program.

The information collected will be used for research purposes only. Only the investigators will have access to the tape and the transcripts. The researchers will keep your personal information in a secure and confidential location for a minimum of 7 years. A list linking your number/pseudonym with your name will be kept by the researchers in a secure place, separate from your study file. With your permission, I will use direct quotes. You may (or may not) be quoted directly in the research report, but once you are quoted, you will not be identified as the source of the quotation and any information that could identify you will be removed. The study results will be presented in the researcher's MA thesis or future published papers. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact Dr. Zheng Zhang (Canada: XXX; XXX) . Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your status at the institution. If you choose to withdraw from this study, all information about you will be removed from my database. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

There are no known risks or discomfort in participating in this study. I will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study. You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study. No information including your identity as participant and your data will be shared with the institution.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Human Research Ethics, Western University, at 1-844-720-9816 or ethics@uwo.ca. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Zheng Zhang (Canada: XXX; XXX) or Jing Yan (Canada: XXX; China: XXX; XXX). This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Dr. Zheng Zhang

Assistant Professor

Faculty of Education

Western University

Jing Yan

Faculty of Education

Western University



Consent Form

Project Title: A case study of EFL learners investment in private educational company in China

Principal Investigator: Dr. Zheng Zhang

Western University, London, Ontario, Canada

I have read the Letter of Information and have had the nature of the study explained to me. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate and give permission to the research team to (please select):

1. quote me directly in reports or publications on the premise that a pseudonym is used.

Yes

No

2. audio-record the interview. Yes No

3. collect my learning materials. Yes No

Name of participant : _____

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: Jing Yan

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: _____

Date: _____

Contact Information of Investigator:

Jing Yan (Canada: XXX; China: XXX; XXX)



研究项目名称： 中国英语作为外语学习者在

私立教育公司的身份和投资的案例研究

主研究人： 张箏

研究项目信息介绍函

(学生)

我是晏菁，我的导师张箏博士是加拿大安大略省伦敦市韦仕敦大学（西安大略大学）教育学院的教授。我正在进行一项关于中国英语作为外语学习者在私立教育公司的身份和投资的一项研究。由于您在私立教育公司参与了英语学习项目，我们诚挚的邀请您参与此项研究。

这封项目信息介绍函旨在为您介绍此项研究。此项研究的研究目的是：1) 调研参加私立教育公司的英语学习课程对中国英语作为外语学习者的英语学习，以及作为英语学习者的身份认同有何种影响；2) 调研中国英语作为外语学习者，在参加英语学习课程的过程中，是如何对他们的英语学习过程进行投资，以及受到何种因素影响。

关于您在此次研究中做出的贡献，我们将会：1) 收集您在英语学习项目中的学习材料（写作样本，练习册）。收集您的学习材料是为了研究是否以及如何各种学习材料中表达自己的身份认同信息，以及您如何对英语学习投资；2) 对您进行个人采访（约 45 分钟），访谈内容将涉及学生如何建构自己对于英语学习者的身份认同，以及何种因素影响了学生在英语学习过程中进行投资。

您有权利选择与我们分享何种学习材料的信息。在您的允许下，我们可能会收集到含有老师评论的学生作业。您的学习材料将以多种形式分享（例如，摘录，照片等）。共享学习材料的形式取决于您愿意与研究人员共享什么样的学习材料。学习材料可能会以摘录的形式共享如果材料是写作样本或者音频（音频将会被转录成文字）。研究者会通过网络收集您的学习材料，以便课堂内其他的学生不知道您对于这项研究的参与。您可以将你的学习材料以图片（如果是文字）或者音频（如果是录音）的形式通过例如 OneDrive 或者 OWL 等平台发送给研究者。研究过程将不涉及任何对学习材料质量的评判。

所有的访谈将会以网络视频或电话的形式进行。所有的访谈将会被录音转成文字。如果您不想被录音，但仍然想参加本项研究，我们会用笔记的形式记录参与者对访谈问题的回答情况。学习材料收集环节将会在日常的项目过程中进行，访谈环节将会在项目结束后进行。此外，我们还会邀请您审阅访谈转录稿（约 15 分钟），并对转录稿的相关内容做进一步的解释和反馈意见。您可以移除访谈中的内容。您可以选择以何种方式审阅转录稿。转录稿将会被上传在例如

OneDrive 或者 OWL 等平台上。您可以审阅转录稿并提出您的反馈意见。您的老师也将被要求参加这项研究。在与您访谈之前，我会与老师进行访谈（约 15 分钟）。老师的访谈主要是关于他/她在课堂上与学生的互动以及他们在您参加的课程中采用的教学法。与老师进行访谈对您的课堂学习经历有一个基本了解以及了解教师是如何帮助学生进行英语学习。老师的访谈将在课程结束后进行。您有关参加本研究的信息将不会向老师透露。

研究中所收集的数据只用于研究目的。只有研究人员可以接触到访谈录音与文字转录稿。我们会将您的个人信息存在安全保密的地方至少 7 年。记录您研究号码/假名的名单将会被存放在安全的地方，并且和您的其他研究档案分开存放。只有在征得您同意的前提下，我们才会直接引用您说的话，但是，一旦您的话被引用，任何能识别您身份的信息将会被删除。研究结果将发表在研究人员的硕士学位论文或以后发表的论文中。您的姓名也不会出现在任何有关此项研究的出版物中。如果您想获得研究结果的副本，请与张箬博士联系（加拿大: XXX; XXX）。您参与本项研究纯属自愿。您不参与此项研究，不愿意回答任何问题，或在任何时间想退出本项研究，都不会对您的工作以及工作地位产生任何影响。如果您选择退出本项研究，我们将会从数据库中清除与您相关的所有数据及信息。此外，韦仕敦大学非医学研究伦理协会的代表将有可能联系您，或要求查看您参与本项研究的相关记录，其目的是监控本项研究的实施。

您参与本项研究将没有任何已知风险或不适。应您的要求，我们不会向您所在学校透露您作为本项研究参与者的身份。在研究过程中，我们会及时向您提供可能影响您的决定是否继续参与本项研究的最新信息。您同意参与本项研究不会影响您的任何合法权益。任何关于您身份的信息以及您的研究数据将不会与该机构共享。

若您对本项研究的开展或您作为本项研究参与者的权利有任何疑问，请您联系韦仕敦大学研究伦理办公室（电话: XXX; 电子邮件: XXX）。若您对于本项研究本身有任何问题，请您联系张箬博士（加拿大: XXX; XXX）或晏菁（加拿大电话: XXX; 中国电话: XXX; 电子邮件: XXX）。敬请惠存此函，以便日后参考。

张箬博士

助理教师

教育学院

韦仕敦大学

晏菁

教育学院

韦仕敦大学



研究项目名称： 中国英语作为外语学习者在
私立教育公司的身份和投资的案例研究

主研究人： 张箏

研究项目参与同意书

兹证明我已阅读了张箏教授和晏菁的研究项目信息介绍函，她们想我介绍了研究项目的本质，并回答了我的疑问。我同意参加此项研究并允许她们的研究团队（请选择）：

1. 在使用假名的前提下，在研究报告或出版物中直接引用我说的话。是
否
2. 对与我的访谈进行录音。 是 否
3. 收集我的学习材料。 是 否

学生姓名（请用正楷填写）：

学生签名：

日期：

回收该研究项目参与同意书的研究人员姓名： 晏菁

回收该研究项目参与同意书的研究人员签名：

日期：

项目研究人联系信息： 晏菁（加拿大电话： XXX； 中国电话： XXX； 电子邮件：
XXX)

Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Guideline

Question for students:

Perceived benefits, learning goal, identity

1. Please briefly introduce your English learning background (e.g., how long have you been studying English etc.).
2. Why do you attend this program? How long have you been studying in this company? What benefits (e.g., having a better score in standardized test, improved English skills, become a more competent English user etc.) do you think you could receive in this program?
3. Do you think participating in this program has affected your English learning strategies? Do you think participating in this program has affected your future planning for further education or career? Do think participating in this program has affected your language use in daily life or online communication?
4. How do you define your English proficiency levels? Regarding the four English skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking), what features do you think a good/competent English reader/listener/writer/speaker would have?
5. Do you have any hobbies related with English outside of classrooms (e.g., watching English drama, listen to English songs, using social networking software etc.)? How are the classes you took connected or different from your outside-of-class hobbies or interests?

Imagined community and imagined identity

6. What's your life goal or goal of further education (where to)? What kind of person/life you want to be/have in the future (e.g., job.)? What learning opportunities is the program providing you to achieve this goal?

7. How do the learning experiences in the program enable/constrain you to achieve your life goal or become the person you want to be?

8. How would you define your current English language proficiency levels? Are you satisfied with this proficiency level? If not, what kinds of characteristics do you think a qualified English user would have (e.g., having native accents, good writing skills, fluent oral speaking etc.)? Is that also your goal of learning English?

Resistance, investment

9. How much time (e.g., how many hours a day you spend in program-related work) you have invested in this program? How much financial resources you have invested in the program (e.g., to pay the tuition, buy program-related books, use electronic devices such as computers or tablets to do English-learning activities)?

10. What parts of the program (subjects/assignment) do you think you work the hardest? How do you allot your time on different subject-related activities (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) in the program you participated in (e.g., which subjects or tasks take you the most and the least time)?

11. Have you ever shown resistance or feel resistant (e.g., unwilling to participate in the class; refuse to complete the assignment) in the program? If so, why?

12. Have you ever included your own voice in writing or speaking tasks (e.g., choosing the topic you are interested in and expressing who you are and your worldviews in your writing and speaking)? If so, please describe./ I have taken a look at the learning materials (e.g., writing samples) you've shared with, would you please explain how you express your own voice in the task?

Pedagogy

13. How do you think the pedagogy of the program? Is it different from the English learning classes you took before? What kind of suggestions would you have?

Questions for teachers:

Investment, resistance

1. What forms of investment(e.g., spend time on English-related tasks or activities, express voices in writing assignments) you have seen in your class?
2. What kinds of pedagogy did you adopt to encourage or help your students make investment in their English learning?
3. Did the students in your class show any resistance in their learning (e.g., unwilling to participate in the class; refuse to complete the assignment)? If so, please describe the situation. What measures did you take to improve the situation?

Autonomous and ideological model of literacy, capital

4. As a teacher, will you consider students' beliefs about English or about how they consider themselves as English learners? If so, how this would change you pedagogy in classes?
5. Would you engage students with their own voices and experiences no matter in class or in assignments? If so, how?
6. Except from helping students passing the standardized exam, what other benefits or help do you think this program could provide to students?

Appendix D: Ethics Approval Notice



Date: 11 March 2020

To: Dr. Zheng Zhang

Project ID: 114903

Study Title: A case study of EFL learners' identity and investment in a private educational company in China

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: 03/Apr/2020

Date Approval Issued: 11/Mar/2020 16:58

REB Approval Expiry Date: 11/Mar/2021

Dear Dr. Zheng Zhang

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

Documents Approved:

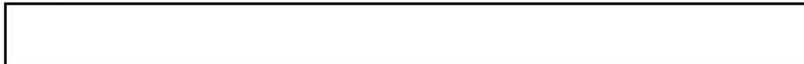
Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Debriefing Form	Debriefing document		
Information letter (company administrator)	Oral Script	07/Feb/2020	3
Letter of Information and consent (student)	Written Consent/Assent	27/Feb/2020	5
Letter of information and consent (teacher)	Written Consent/Assent	27/Feb/2020	3
Semi-structured interview questions	Interview Guide	15/Feb/2020	2
Translated materials	Translated Documents	09/Mar/2020	2
Verbal Recruitment Script (student)	Oral Script	27/Feb/2020	3
Verbal Recruitment Script (teacher)	Oral Script	27/Feb/2020	2

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,





Date: 16 April 2020

To: Dr. Zheng Zhang

Project ID: 114903

Study Title: A case study of EFL learners' identity and investment in a private educational company in China

Application Type: NMREB Amendment Form

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: 01/May/2020

Date Approval Issued: 16/Apr/2020 10:40

REB Approval Expiry Date: 11/Mar/2021

Dear Dr. Zheng Zhang,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the amendment, as of the date noted above.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Letter of Information and consent (student)	Written Consent/Assent	02/Apr/2020	2
Letter of information and consent (teacher)	Written Consent/Assent	02/Apr/2020	2
Translated materials	Translated Documents	02/Apr/2020	2

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Jing Yan

Post-secondary Education and Huazhong University of Science and Technology

Degrees: Wuhan, Hubei, China

2014–2018 B.A.

The University of Western Ontario

London, Ontario, Canada

2018–2021 M.A.

Honours and Awards: AER Graduate Scholarship for Literacy Studies in

Education

2019, 2020

Entrance Scholarship

2018–2020

Mitacs Research Training Award

2020

Related Work Experience Graduate student assistant (GSA)

The University of Western Ontario

2018–2020