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Language learning experiences and learning strategy shifts: voices of Chinese (Master) students in one UK University

By

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Declaration

I declare that, apart from work whose authors are explicitly acknowledged, this thesis and the materials contained in this thesis represent the author's own original work. I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Abstract

Although there has been considerable research into Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in a variety of educational and cultural contexts, it is still the case that there have been few sociocultural LLS studies that have tried to understand learners' approaches to learning and using a second language within a particular cultural context. In contrast to widespread LLS studies conducted within a cognitive psychology framework, this interpretive study has attempted to understand the dynamics of the shifts and developments in language learning strategies used by a group of Chinese Masters students in a UK University within a sociocultural theoretical framework. A qualitative approach was used in this research. Data was collected at three stages over a time span of one year of Chinese students' MA academic study in the UK. The first and second stage data collection involved interviews that explored the participants' LLS use and how this changed and developed during their period of study abroad. The third stage data collection involved a questionnaire survey to validate whether the salient findings identified from the first and second stage interviews also applied to a wider group. Findings suggest the overall characteristics of the participants' LLS use tend to be creative, flexible, voluntary and independent. The participants' dynamic changing language learning strategies were shaped by interaction with various social mediating agents: peers, teachers and tutors and other native speakers, social material resources, technology and other artifacts, socio-contextual realities, assessment modes, and all in interaction with learner agency. The outcomes provide insightful and useful guidance to Chinese university students who are planning to pursue their higher education abroad in English-speaking education systems and offer suggestions to teachers and policy makers in China and the UK about the kinds of support that they can offer Chinese students, especially in terms of the development of their competence in their studies through English.

List of Abbreviations

CALLA	Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach
CET	College English Test
COP	Community of Practice
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
FLL	Foreign Language Learning
GLL	Good Language Learner
IDs	Individual Differences
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L2	Second Language
LLS	Language Learning Strategy
PPT	PowerPoint
SCT	Sociocultural Theory
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TA	Thematic Analysis
TL	Target Language

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter covers:

- the English Curriculum in Chinese schools; the predominant teacher centred classroom teaching in China; the English testing and assessment in the education system; a summary and evaluation of the main characteristics and limitations of English teaching,

- my personal experiences and interest,

- the significance of the study and the thesis structure.

This study is about the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and English learning development of Chinese Masters students studying in the UK. Mixed research methods were used in this study and data were collected from interview and questionnaire survey. This study attempts to find out what sociocultural factors influence the Chinese students' LLS use and English learning development. This is an important study as with China's growing economy and the UK government's education policy tending to welcome international students to study in the UK, Chinese students have become the largest group of international students in the UK. According to the UK Council for International Students Affairs (UKCISA), the total number of international students in the UK in 2014-2015 had risen to 436,585, while, the number of Chinese students far exceeds any other nationality at 89,540

(http://institutions.ukcisa.org.uk/) and the number of Chinese students coming to study in the UK Universities has risen by 15% per year since year 2011 (The telegraph, 2011).

Before looking at the Chinese students' English learning experiences in the UK, I will start by looking at their English learning background in China.

1.1. The English curriculum in Chinese schools

Since the economic reforms and open door policy of the late 1970s, 'English language education has been increasingly given emphasis for its critical role in China's modernization and individual learners' access to new socioeconomic opportunities' (Wengfeng and Gao, 2008:386). Since 1982, English has been considered the main foreign language in high school education (Lam, 2002:247), and in the mid-1990s, English also became a compulsory subject in primary schools in China, starting from year 3 (Cheng, 2008:16). English is generally taught from Grade 3, but in the larger cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, English is taught from Grade 1. In addition, nearly all urban primary schools start to teach English in Year 1, while in the rural areas, it may begin in Year 3, the delay being a result of the shortage of English teachers (Zhao, 2005:6). During the six years of high school English education, students have on average, 4 to 5 hours of English teaching per week. Senior high school students are required to master 2000 English words. When the students upgrade to tertiary education, as Siemon (2010) illustrated, 20 million of them continue to learn English for 2 to 3 years and many of these continue to learn English

for a fourth year. Moreover, as Siemon (2010) points out, tertiary level students must pass the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4), as it is one of the requirements to get their Bachelor's degree. At level CET-4, students are required to master 4500 English words. More specifically, CET-4 is designed for non- English major students, such as the students whose subjects are Engineering, Computer Science, History, Medicine, for example. The reason the students need to pass the CET-4 in higher education is having English as a communicative tool will enhance the students' professional and communicative skills in their future career. A higher level of CET-6 is also available.

Gan et al. (2004: 232) point out that China's rapid economic development and increasing exchanges with Western countries has given rise to a high demand for competent English speakers in a wide range of professions. This situation became more urgent once China joined the World Trade Organization. In Gan et al's view, the recent political, economic, and social changes in China were bound to affect English language teaching and learning, or have already affected them. With more recent events like the 27th Olympic Games in 2008 in Beijing attracting many foreign companies from English speaking countries, Chinese people's interest in learning English has become more intense.

Throughout all the stages of English teaching in China, textbooks play a key role in defining what is taught and how to teach. Textbooks are written in English and Chinese and edited by Chinese authors. Throughout all the stages, an Intensive

Reading Course is taught as compulsory, using a uniform syllabus, textbooks and final exams. The standardised / uniform textbooks used in the Intensive Reading Course, as Cortazzi and Jin (1996:184) indicate, are especially designed to focus on teachers' explanations - the grammar-translation method. This teaching mode is well suited to the centuries-old Chinese approach to learning, which is mainly characterised by rote memorisation, as further pointed out by McKnight.

'While the currently fashionable Western communicative approaches to English language teaching are known and used in some Chinese institutions, the dominant teaching strategy remains the "grammar and translation approach...' (McKnight, 1994: 46-7)

Although textbooks may be communicatively oriented with the teaching of vocabulary advocated through inference and contextual cues, in reality, the learning of vocabulary is effected through the use of mnemonic strategies such as word lists, oral repetition, visual repetition, etc. In addition, despite the advocacy of communicative methodology by the Chinese Ministry of Education and English language department heads and the adoption of nation-wide communicative textbooks, this approach has not provided the expected results because teachers still use drills and the time-tested grammar-translation methodology.

Chinese students are often seen as 'deaf' and 'dumb' in their English learning since

little emphasis is given to improve their listening and speaking abilities (Siemon, 2010). Memorisation is still considered an essential skill for learning English in China. Students are expected to memorize new English vocabulary after class and be tested in a later class. As a result, Chinese students are good at memorising and can recite long lists of English vocabulary and grammar rules, but fail to be proficient in using the vocabulary and grammar rules appropriately, either in basic oral communication or in their written work. Hu (2002: 93) indicated that Chinese students' learning strategies primarily focus on reading and writing, on memorising vocabulary and grammar rules, on translation. These traditional grammar translation English learning strategies fail to provide the students with an adequate level of communicative competence, that is, the ability to interact and communicate authentically in English. Weir et al. (2000:2) argue that the current system in China does not equip students with the necessary skills and abilities to access foreign academic and technical literature through the medium of English, and little attention has been paid to the students' development of language skills and strategies.

1.2 Teacher centred classroom teaching

In China, instruction tends to be teacher-centred and teaching is very formal (Siemon, 2010). The teacher-centred mode of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching has dominated China's schools at all levels, from elementary, secondary and senior school as well as tertiary level. In China, the teacher plays the dominant role both in class activities and in the planning of teaching content due to the heavy influence of

the traditional grammar translation based EFL teaching style. Compared with the teacher's role, students have supporting roles and get less opportunity to speak in class. Compared with the teacher-centred Chinese education, Western education is more student centred. Chinese students often view the focus on discussion critically in Western class as unproductive (Zhao, 2012; Liu & Carney, 2012).

Most university English teachers in China are BA graduates, who have studied linguistics, applied linguistics, languages, literature, English for Specific Purposes, or English Language Teaching. Only a few have gained their master's degree in the above subjects (Zhao, 2005:8). According to Zhao (2005), due to the shortage of English teachers, these graduates start to teach immediately after graduation. Consequently, their previous learning experiences as students have a strong impact on their teaching methods, so they tend to copy their previous teachers' test-oriented grammar-translation methods. In view of the large class sizes, the shortage of trained teachers, difficult texts, unfamiliar vocabulary and the lack of comprehensible input outside the classroom, the 'best' teachers can only keep the lesson 'afloat' by the pedagogical use of two languages (Zhao, 2012; Liu & Carney, 2012).

Although most Chinese students can get very high or even full marks in most English exams, many of them still have difficulty in having simple conversations with English speakers, even when referring to everyday things. The main reason is the traditional text-based, grammar and translation oriented teacher-centred EFL teaching

approaches in China, are more likely to produce silent English learners. As a result, Zhao argues (2012: 32), the teacher-centred EFL teaching fails to meet the needs of either society or students, or the 'requirement of both the university and Ministry of Education.'

1.3 Testing and assessment

In spite of starting to learn English at different times in school, all students face standardised English tests for their subsequent entrance exams, such as those for junior and senior middle schools. Furthermore, English is a compulsory subject tested in the university entrance exam for all university candidates (Zhao, 2005:6; Cheng, 2008:16-7). At the end of senior middle school, English teaching is mainly test-oriented as students are preparing for their university entrance exams (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006:10). There is widespread recognition by teachers, students and parents that passing examinations in English is needed not only to gain admittance to university, but also to achieve high scores on the Test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL), Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and College English Test (CET) examinations (Wu, 2006).

The CET-4 (College English Test Band 4) certificate is one of the requirements for obtaining a Bachelor' Degree as well as a requirement of most employers; most Chinese college students spend a great deal of time preparing for the CET

examination (Zhao, 2012; Liu & Carney, 2012). However, these examinations also prevent the students 'from achieving the balanced development of different skills,' that is, these exams give priority to the students' writing and reading skills, and put less emphasis on the examine students' listening and speaking ability (ibid.). Zhao (2005) claims the end product is emphasized in Chinese education so Chinese students and their families value hard work and successful exam results.

Summary

The above discussion suggests that Chinese international students' experiences of language learning may distinguish them from other international students upon their arrival in UK. They may have had little time to develop speaking/listening in English. Since their learning of English in China was characterised by English tests, one after another, it is likely that most will tend to focus on factual information in a text and take it at face value, rather than evaluate it critically. Apart from this, students may experience English language problems, not only because their exposure to English material in China is limited, but also because what is available in China is usually too difficult for them to read (Pang, 2008:13). English teaching in China can be summarised into the following points:

- English is widely taught in China, generally starting from year 3 in primary school up to Bachelor's degree level education. Great efforts have been made to improve the quality of English education in the past three decades, however, students are still likely to encounter several difficulties.

- The main characteristics of English teaching in China are translation, grammar and memorisation oriented teaching. This means teacher centred and text book based classroom teaching and standardised tests as compulsory assessment.

- Chinese students are used to their traditional English forms of learning and how they are taught in China, which emphasise reading and writing ability. In spite of being able to gain high scores in the test assessment, they lack the ability to apply what they have learnt to making practical, authentic spoken communication, in particular.

1.4 My personal experiences and interest

1.4.1 Positionality

I would like to begin this thesis by describing my position with regards to this research topic. This is formed by my experiences, my skills and my background beliefs. I myself have experienced a change in the approaches to learning English at first hand as a Chinese Masters student and subsequently continuing my academic study as a Doctoral student at the University of Warwick in the UK. My interest in researching how Chinese students learn English in different social contexts is derived from my English language learning experiences before and after my study in the UK.

I started learning English when I was in my middle School, Year 1, at the age of 12, in China. English was regarded as one of the three important subjects in China, the other

two being Maths and Chinese. I agreed with my English teachers about the importance of learning English, as a universal language, and the importance of being able to communicate in English as a basic skill for everyone wanting to pursue a successful future career. Therefore, I never stopped learning English and have spared no efforts to improve my English proficiency since I started learning English. I remember the English education I received in my middle school and high school as being mainly about reciting words, translating, and learning English grammar. The only way used to assess the students' ability was through the English test. At that time, I found learning English was quite simple. As long as I could remember the words I had to learn or the grammar rules correctly, I could get high scores in the English test, which were assumed to demonstrate my good English ability.

Thanks to high scores in the College Entrance Examination, I was able to continue learning English as my major subject for my undergraduate study. It was not until I became a major in English that I realized learning English was not just about simply memorising or translating. As an undergraduate student majoring in English, I was specializing in the English Language. The classes we had such as English reading comprehension, applied linguistics, oral English provided me with sound background knowledge and skills. I discovered there was a special research area named SLA, which was particularly interested in researching how people learnt a second language.

Apart from my own personal interest, I also noted the research into how to effectively

improve Chinese learners' English proficiency was an ongoing practical issue for both learners and teachers, even for policy makers. As a learner of English as my second language, I myself always felt being a good language learner was not an easy thing. Before I studied abroad in the UK, I experienced a great dilemma in my English learning. Even though I tried different ways of improving my English proficiency, I could not use the English language like native speakers do and my English accent and expression was a kind of *Chinglish*. Encouraged by my teachers, I pursed my Master's study in the UK. During this study period in the UK, I developed various new ways of practising English and gradually noticed the important roles of different social contexts in mediating my English learning and overcoming the language difficulties in the new English context, and I found myself making amazing progress. The *absent* social context which had had a constraining role on my progress when I was learning English in China, changed to offering an important supportive role that lead me to make a breakthrough in my English studies in the UK.

During my Master's study in the UK, I noticed an increasing number of Chinese students were coming to study in the UK through English to receive a better education and improve their English proficiency. But many of them, including myself, had no or little study abroad experience, therefore faced great challenges in how to cope with life in the UK, and might not know how to overcome the linguistic, academic and cultural problems in the new setting (Benson et al, 2013:152). Keeping these questions in mind, I began researching Chinese students' adaption to life in the UK in

my Master's dissertation, when I came across the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning developed by Rebecca Oxford (1990). At that point, I decided to narrow down my research to find out about well established and updated language learning strategies that were particularly appropriate for Chinese students in the current UK context.

All my English learning experience and knowledge taught me that we Chinese could be effective English learners if we adopted the appropriate language learning strategies in the new UK context. All these ideas drove me to conduct empirical research to see what different ways current Chinese students had tried to improve their English proficiency in the UK context. I hope the outcome of this research can help make Chinese students aware of the importance of different social factors in assisting their language study in the UK, and adopt suitable language learning strategies to achieve effective English learning.

1.4.2 Confucian confusions

I used to get labelled as a stereotypical Chinese student, as a reticent and passive learner under the Confucian education system. It is my impression that Chinese students are indeed more reluctant to participant in classroom interaction and are unwilling to speak in English in classroom discourse and social contexts, which contrasts with students from Western countries who enjoy classroom interaction. In

general, the reasons for Chinese students' unwillingness to practice spoken English are due to a face-saving strategy, low risk-taking in communication, intolerance of ambiguity and so on. For example, Chinese students dare not raise questions in class discussion for fear of losing face, so they behave very shyly and passively during group discussions. They are reluctant to raise arguments or 'stand up' for their ideas and express them if they contrast with the teacher's opinion. They like to maintain harmony within the group. Other problems rooted in passivity and reticence are identified as non-participation, lack of questioning, giving no indications of understanding or lack of understanding, writing which simply reproduces the published literature but with no critical or independent thinking, lack of autonomy in study practices. As a typical Chinese student who completed primary school, secondary school and gained an undergraduate degree all in China, I can sympathise with the above statements. After I came to study the UK, I experienced a huge culture and language shock and had to make great efforts to attempt to adapt to life and study in the UK. However, I wonder whether all Chinese students experience the same problems? Are all Chinese students who growing up in the Confucian education culture passive or reticent?

Several surveys have been carried out concerning this question and suggested the idea that Asian learners are reticent and passive could be a myth, rather than a universal truth. Zhao's (2012) study of the range of self-study language learning strategies reported by two groups of students, one European, and the other Chinese, showed the

Chinese students were ahead of the European students in terms of the range of strategies they used. However, the European students use narrower range of strategies slightly more often than Chinese students. The Europeans seemed to concentrate on extensive reading and listening, on grammar activities, and on making use of opportunities for oral interaction. Of course, Chinese students had reported similar strategies but a large proportion of them used listening to the radio as a strategy as well. There seems to be no basis then, for, concluding that Chinese students were less committed to finding ways of under taking self-study to support their English language acquisition.

Another researcher (Siemon, 2010), who taught English as a foreign teacher for many years in a Chinese secondary school, also contests the notion that Asian students are disengaged or uninterested when they are in the classroom. Based on her many years' teaching experiences in China, she found that, normally, there were over 60 students per class, so it was hard for teachers to ensure that every individual was noticed during the 45 minutes allocated for each class. Consequently, most of English classes were predominately concerned with grammar, reading and writing, leaving very little time for speaking and listening. However, Siemon (2010) found if offered enough opportunities, keen students were desperate to maximize opportunities for speaking, inside and even outside of class. In fact, Chinese students wanted to be noticed, to stand out from the class as a whole.

As I became more familiar with the research in this field, I began to notice that the causal relationship between culture and language learning was overstated and overgeneralized. Language learning is such an extremely complex process that any particular observed behaviour may be caused by a number of different factors in combination. The passive behaviour of Chinese students when learning English may result from inappropriate teaching methods, a lack of English proficiency, irrelevant or offensive topics, lack of motivation or even their mood on a particular day.

I believe that teaching methods really influence students' learning motivation and learning beliefs. For example, Chinese teachers always work hard to impart knowledge to the students directly and completely, but Western teachers prefer working with heuristic teaching methods; they encourage the students to be inquiring so they acquire knowledge by themselves. If Chinese students could be taught in the same way as most westerners are, such as through self-directed learning, with teachers taking note of students as individuals in class, I suggest Chinese students could be active, creative and positive as well. Bearing all these questions in mind, I decided to conduct empirical research to look at real Chinese students' English learning experiences in the new to them UK education system.

From these different reflections on literature and my own experience, I want to know are all Chinese students who grew up in a Confucian education culture passive or reticent? Do they stay unchanged or only use uniform LLS to learn English as they

were taught by teachers in China? Can Chinese students be creative or independent in English learning? Can they make progress in English learning after they study in the UK? What LLS are they using in the UK and were they influenced by sociocultural factors? These questions led me to the research questions in my study.

1.5 Significance of the study

The outcomes of this research may provide further insightful and useful guidance to Chinese university students (and possibly other Asians) who are planning to pursue their higher education abroad in English-speaking education systems, about the linguistic and academic culture challenges that they might face, the impacts of these on them and how they can deal with these challenges. Moreover, to enable Chinese students to learn English successfully, it is vital to establish effective ways of teaching English. These need to build not only linguistic knowledge, but include English learning strategies to ultimately create the most appropriate support for language learning through pedagogy and the curriculum. My study aims to provide insights for English language students, teachers and policy makers in China and the UK about the kinds of support that they can offer Chinese students, especially in terms of the development of their competence in their studies through English.

1.6 Thesis structure

My overarching interest in this study is to uncover how Chinese students learn English in the UK and what factors influence their language learning.

Chapter 2 reviews the background literature to this study, namely, Chinese students' English learning in the UK and Language Learning Strategy (LLS) research. It is organised by critiquing the widespread LLS research conducted from a cognitive perspective and it discusses the importance of focusing on LLS research from a sociocultural perspective. It explains why my study will be conducted from a sociocultural perspective.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and research design, including the theoretical assumptions, methods and data collection of this study. This is an interpretive study using mixed research methods. There are three stages of data collection, interviews for the first and second stage, questionnaire survey for the third stage. This sequential study sees each round of data collection as episodes enabling a deepening understanding.

Chapter 4 describes the detailed process of analysing the data and presents the findings from the interviews and questionnaire. I used a thematic approach to analyse interview data and to show broad themes. The findings mainly concern the students' language learning development, their changing LLS use and influential sociocultural

factors.

Chapter 5 discusses the main findings in light of the literature. This chapter answers the research questions, and outlines the pedagogical and political implications of this study. Chinese students' language learning outcomes and LLS use were seen as influenced by social agents (peers, teachers/ tutors and other native speakers); social material recourses (technology); socio-contextual realities (assessment mode) and the interaction with learner agency.

Chapter 6 concludes with the outcomes and some limitations of this study, as well as suggestions for further research in the future. It reaches the conclusion that Chinese students are able to develop suitable LLS and change to independent/ creative learners to live a new life in the UK successfully.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter covers:

- a review of the overall picture of Chinese students' English learning experiences in the UK

- a review of Language Learning Strategy (LLS) research, including research into what makes a good language learner; the fundamental contributions of LLS research; an examination of the criticisms of LLS research underpinned by cognitive theories and suggestions for a social aspect of LLS research in response to those criticisms.

- the importance of LLS research underpinned by a sociocultural framework, picking up the two key concepts, namely, learner agency and context, and exploring the role these two key factors play in mediating the learners' LLS choices and their language learning.

- a drawing out of key research gaps, leading to the research questions which guided this study.

2.2 Chinese students accommodating to the UK HE context

This section aims to provide a full picture of the Chinese students' accommodation to

life in the UK, to find out from the literature what language, academic and cultural challenges Chinese students may face during their study in the UK University, followed by a comparison of Chinese and the UK cultural and education systems in terms of language, academic work or culture that Chinese students will need to adapt to in the UK.

2.2.1 Speaking the English language: problems and challenges encountered by Chinese students

One of the first problems that international Chinese students encounter on their arrival in the UK is the contrast between the level of linguistic competence necessary to guarantee fluent English language ability for daily communication and their existing linguistic ability. Liu (2012) summarized the possible reasons for Chinese students' speaking difficulties: the change in the way of life and strangeness of a different culture; anxiety about starting a new university programme, all of which could lead to Chinese students experiencing a mixture of frustration and silence.

Chinese students need to pass the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) with a minimum score of 6.5 as the entry qualification for most postgraduate programmes in British Universities (Macrae, 1997). However, according to Ryan (2005: 87), 'the level of spoken and written ability varies significantly across a cohort, and in any case, there is no guarantee that holding this minimum level of English for study at higher education level in the UK is reliable as a predictor of language ability.'

Additionally, English language ability is essential as the medium of communication, so insufficient language ability impedes both the international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment (Hofstede, 1991). Language is a core problem for students studying in a country where their first language is not spoken, and it is 'a source of strain' for students who speak the country's language as second language especially when they need sufficient linguistic competence to finish their written work (Cammish, 1997:67).

Liu's (2012) research found that in China, students were trained to listen to the BBC or the Voice of America as standard English. However, after they came to study in the UK, they found the students and teachers were from different countries and had different accents. This meant that they needed to explore ways of improving their abilities to understand different accents. Even Chinese students with high English proficiency levels claimed that they had to make efforts to speak and listen on their arrival in the UK and for the first two months (Liu, 2012).

Apart from the difficulty in adapting to the different accents, newly arrived Chinese students rely heavily on translation. As indicated from Liu's (2013) classroom observation and interview studies over a three-month period of Chinese students learning English in the UK, it was quite common for the Chinese students to translate unknown English words into Chinese, including students with high English proficiency levels. In class, Chinese students consulted the dictionary by mobile

phone so frequently to check the new word's meaning that some UK teachers thought they were sending messages. In addition, due to their inability to express themselves directly in English, newly arrived Chinese students tended to use Internet translation software as a support when reading English articles and writing essays in English at the beginning of their study in the UK. However, reliance on translation decreased as the students made progress in English and they used the translation software less and tried to think and understand in English by the middle or end of their study time.

Due to the language barrier, international students, including Chinese students, have a tough time participating in class and adapting to the academic culture, so that they rarely participate fully. They may form silent groups in class due to their inability to communicate with teachers and classmates (Gu, 2011). According to Chen's (2012) research, cultural shock, especially for Asian students in the UK, can also generate stress when they practise speaking in English by giving oral presentations or participating in group-activities or asking questions in class. Teachers are mostly native speakers from a Western cultural background and new Chinese students find it hard to communicate with them, and they may not even dare to express themselves. Moreover, Sun and Chen (1997) interviewed Chinese students and concluded that the main obstacle to their studies in the UK was language weakness. Yum's (1998) research found that international students felt depressed and fearful when they communicated using the target language in class. Huntely (1993) also claimed that Chinese students had difficulties and felt anxious in UK classes when involved in the

communicative activities such as giving presentations or speaking in public or discussing in group work. In addition, Zou (2000) shared her own experience of studying in the UK, saying she found the academic life tough and she had difficulty writing an essay as well as her native speaker classmates due to language problems. In sum, their lack of language skills impedes Chinese students' process of adapting to academic study in the UK. The language problems and other factors result in Chinese students' having difficulty adapting to academic life in the UK will be detailed in the following section 2.2.2.

2.2.2 Academic culture shock

Apart from language difficulties, Chinese students also often encounter difficulties when adapting to the academic life of the UK University due to the big difference in the educational systems and teaching models between the UK and China. In sum, the unfamiliarity with the teaching and learning system in the UK also challenges the newly arrived Chinese students 'to present a satisfactory academic outcome' (Chen, 2012:34).

The differences in teaching philosophy between China and the UK leads to some Chinese students experiencing academic cultural shock when they study in the UK. As Phuong-Mai et al. (2009) put it, the language barrier is not the only factor that influences Asian students' classroom participation, but how different students see the importance of classroom participation will also affect their classroom behaviours. In

general, the Chinese teaching system values teachers as having authority and students are taught to listen to the teachers' instructions and behave passively; in contrast, the UK teaching system values students' opinions and participation in class and teachers may regard their roles as being facilitators (Wan, 1999; Cohen, 2014). Sun (2005) also points out that students within Chinese teaching principles are asked to obey their teachers and they seldom share their opinions in class, so follow teacher-dominant teaching principles. As a result, Chinese students in the UK class are not used to asking questions since they regard this as offensive to their teachers, or sharing their opinions since they are afraid of making mistakes. These concerns make Chinese students silent and negative groups in the UK classroom (Liu, 2013). Chinese students are described as passive, quiet and overall compliant in tutorial discussions (Volet and Renshaw, 1996). Li and Campbell (2008) also found that Asian students had a relatively low rate of participation in group work and they tended to have little involvement in interactive activities.

Some studies have tried to offer suggestions for stimulating Chinese students' participation in class, especially within a multicultural context. As Remedios et al. (2008) pointed out, the reasons for the students' silent behaviour in class could be understood from two perspectives. Firstly, individual factors such as students' personalities, learning preferences, motivation and lack of preparation. Zhang and Xu (2007) suggested that lack of knowledge or confidence might cause some students to choose to be silent to avoid making mistakes or losing face in class. The second

aspect includes the contextual and sociocultural issues such as the various cultural beliefs of the speakers of different languages or different social norms. Wan (1999) further argued that the inability to make intercultural adaptation could result in overseas students having difficulty in performing satisfactorily and achieving the desired academic outcomes. Other reasons such as Chinese students being used to living up to their parents' expectations of being good students who fully obey their teachers' instructions, come within Confucian principles, which also affect their behaviour (Holmes, 2004).

However, the traditional view of passive, silent Chinese students within Confucian culture who will experience great academic culture shock has been challenged in more recent research. Even though Chinese students are used to being silent in the teacher-oriented teaching context in China, Wong (2004) found they tended to realize the importance of independent learning and began to enjoy the student-oriented learning style in the UK as they gradually familiarized themselves with the academic life here. Sun (2005) also claimed that as long as Chinese students could gradually improve their English ability and become more familiar with the local teaching system and got used to the new context, they could change and enhance their active participation in classroom activities. Additionally, Li and Campbell (2008) reported that Chinese students in New Zealand had successfully found a middle way between the two contradictory learning approaches - Confucian education and Western education - through which they could meet the academic demands while not needing

full cultural adaption. Montgomery and McDowell (2009) also supported this argument; despite the great cultural difficulties faced by the international students as reported, they found these students were more proactive in meeting the challenges than expected, for example, they made good use of peer support to overcome difficulties. Wu and Hammond's (2011:1) research into East Asian Masters level students in a UK University found that students largely enjoyed their sojourn and achieved satisfactory results for their academic study in the UK. They argued the students experienced 'cultural bumps' rather than culture shock since they had limited interaction with local students and local people and did not go in depth into the local culture during their Master's study in the UK. For example, East Asian students might, at times, work with local students on academic studies but rarely socialized beyond this. Wu and Hammond (2011: 1) would rather argue that these students experienced an 'international postgraduate student culture' in the UK University not integration into the local culture.

Other researchers holding different views to what constitutes Asian students' academic culture shock in a Western University suggest the problem may lay in the teaching strategies used rather than the students' learning strategies; tutors in a Western University may fail to provide adequate familiar contexts to Eastern Asian students when introducing ideas or concepts (Bamford, 2008). Brown (2007) also questions whether it is necessary for tutors to be aware of their students' background language and culture, and develop suitable teaching approaches to meet different

students' needs.

As Charlesworth (2007) put it, Asian students under the Confucian teaching culture can adapt to the teaching reality in UK to meet their own needs. Asian students are encouraged to express their needs in a way similar to the Western students. In order to fully adapt to the new teaching environment in the UK, Chinese students need to develop a positive attitude to life in the UK, and try to increase their participation in the new social context to increase their ability to adapt to the new teaching approaches. Moreover, it is important to enhance the students' mastery of language to better conduct interactive communication within the multicultural context for better academic outcomes (Gu et al., 2010).

2.2.3 Different education systems

Different conceptualization of the function of a university

When students enter a western university, 'teaching at undergraduate level displays a progressive shift from an analytical approach to more critical thinking' along Ballard's (1996:152) education continuum. University teaching aims at developing students' independent thinking and their ability to handle theory and abstraction. Knowledge is open to question and criticism. It is the teacher's job to open up any uncertainties or paradoxes in the academic domain. Teachers, instead of being the only authoritative source of knowledge, help students build up their own ideas and judgements (Ballard, 1996:152). In contrast to the textbook-focused and

teacher-focused tradition in China, Western education encourages students to engage in independent exploration in their learning (Gu and Maley, 2008:230). This indicates the potential confusion that Chinese international students might experience when they notice the different roles that teachers assume in these two education systems. At Master's level in the UK, critical thinking is one of the core learning skills required of all students.

However, unlike Western education, which has integrated Socrates' ideas into its education system, Confucius' ideas on thinking in learning are largely overshadowed by his philosophical principles. There are many reasons for this, one of which is probably the inconsistency in his philosophical and educational perspectives. Philosophically, Confucius posits that a harmonious society is built upon a hierarchical structure, where everybody knows her/his place, and hence behave accordingly. To maintain both a hierarchical social order and harmonious relationships, people are socialized to strictly follow the unwritten rules of society. One principle, for instance, is that words should be carefully chosen, and dissenting ideas always avoided, even between peers. Within such a social ideology, even though Confucius advocates the importance of reflective thinking in learning, his emphasis on hierarchy and obedience militates against people engaging in critical thinking. Consequently, Chinese people are more likely to prioritise harmony rather than question and challenge. Any disagreement would be regarded as showing disrespect to a senior, which is not the social norm (Ryan, 2010).

The contrast in education systems between East and West is becoming more and more distinctive, illustrated explicitly in Table 2.1 by Ryan (2010).

Western	Confucian
Critical thinking	Follow the Master
Independent learning	Dependence on the teacher
Student-centred learning	Respect for the teacher
Argumentative learners	Harmony, Passive learners
Achievement of the individual	Achievement of the group
Constructing new knowledge	Respect for historical texts
'Deep' learners seeking meaning	'Surface' or rote learners

Table 2.1: A comparison between the 'Western' and the 'Confucian' ways of learning (Ryan, 2010:43)

In this table, Western education is characterised by critical thinking and student-centred learning, within which different opinions and stances are welcome and encouraged. On the other hand, 'Confucian education' highlights the value of harmony. 'This knowledge-centred learning stresses the face-value of existing knowledge' (Wallace and Wray, 2016:8) and by following and respecting it, few opportunities are given for individuals to express their opinions and different voices. In contrast, Western education is more open to controversial arguments, and these are even considered essential for academic development. As for the students from 'Confucian societies' (including other Asian countries which have been influenced by Confucianism, like South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam), their

'learning styles and preferences are largely conditioned by the values of collectivism, conformity and respect' (Benson et al. 2003:23), and they are often regarded as passive and dependent learners.

However, this does not necessarily mean that Chinese international students do not have their own strengths, comparable to those of their Western counterparts. According to Wallace and Wray (2016:8), Western-educated students might be quick to pick up critical thinking skills, but they also tend to underestimate the effort needed to fully understand the work of others, and tend to overplay these critical skills. On the other hand, Chinese students (or non-Western-educated students) may pay more attention to understanding knowledge, but tend to accept too much at face value without engaging in critical evaluation.

Different evaluation/assessment systems

In the education system, evaluation criteria in Chinese universities focus on the structure and depth of knowledge, while evaluation criteria in the UK focus on the flexible application of the knowledge and creativity of the student. In China, the assessment of students' learning ability is mainly done through examinations (Zhao, 2012; Liu & Carney, 2012). However, postgraduate students in the UK are usually assessed by 'means of written assignments and sometimes by collaborative group work.' (Hajar, 2015: 298). These differences in the evaluation and assessment systems challenge old ways of learning and change the way Chinese students learn in the UK

(Liu, 2012).

Critical thinking, referring to 'not just passively accepting what you hear or read, but instead actively questioning and assessing' is an important academic writing/reading requirement in UK higher education (Bailey, 2013; Jiang and Sharpling, 2011; Hajar, 2015). Compared to western assessment that focuses on personal interpretation and critical thinking, Chinese education often assesses student factual knowledge through tests. Liu's study (2012) of the development of the UK Chinese MA students' reading strategies found that Chinese students used to adopt a word-by-word text-based reading strategy in China in order to get high scores in the comprehensive English reading test, however as there was a change in the academic reading requirement in the UK, students had to read extensively and to develop their own ideas and the word-by-word strategy was found to be inadequate for academic reading in the UK. Owing to the washback effect triggered by the testing system in China, Chinese students' reflective thinking gradually diminishes during the learning process and rote learning is further reinforced (Ryan, 2010). Pan and Block's (2011) investigation of learners and teachers' beliefs about English language in China also found a prevalent belief that English was an international and global language and a belief in the instrumental value of English. Although English competence was believed to be useful, the learning and teaching of English in China was still examination oriented. They further argued that the 'exams first' philosophy which reigns supreme in China's assessment system, had led to two distinctive beliefs about the functions of English in

contemporary China. One the one hand, 'it is a commodity, defined by exam results, which can be exchanged on the job market' (Block, 2010). This means students see the function of learning English as to pass the exams and to get a certificate which can help them find a job – even if the exam results do not really indicate communicative competence. On the other hand, for those who learn English to communicate with non-Chinese nationals, English actually serves a concrete communicative function. In short, these factors work together, and make a deep impact on Chinese students' English learning beliefs, behaviour and strategies use.

2.3 Understanding second language learning strategy research from cognitive and affective perspectives

It can be concluded from the above discussion that due to the sociocultural and educational system differences, Chinese international students face a myriad of challenges, particularly language difficulties, when they study in UK Universities. They, therefore need to find new ways, such as using suitable Language Learning Strategies, to improve their English abilities. This section now reviews Language Learning Strategy (LLS) research through considering the following questions:

- what is a language learning strategy;

- why do we need to use language learning strategies;

- what is the difference between an ordinary learning activity and a strategic learning activity;

- what is the difference between the process of language learning and the use of a language learning strategy;

- the research on what makes a good language learner and the importance of LLS in this field;

- the contributions and limitations of LLS research.

2.3.1 What makes a Good Language Learner (GLL)?

Research into what makes a good language learner in the field of English as a second/foreign language began in the mid-1970s. Rubin (1975: 42) argued that the significance of researching the good language learner lay in the hope that we might be able to apply the strategies used by successful learners to the less successful learners to enhance their learning ability. So far, research into GLL has expanded to consider learner variables, learning variables as well as training in language learning strategy expertise. Xiao (2012) summarised learner variables as including attitude, motivation, style, aptitude, personality, culture, gender, learning context, autonomy, metacognition, beliefs, and learning variables like grammar, vocabulary, function, pronunciation, speaking, listening, writing and reading, while training in language expertise includes teacher cognition, teacher expertise and teacher education.

Rubin (1975) gave a list of the characteristics of good language learners after her long observation research. These learners are: a) highly motivated to learn and interact with others; b) capable of monitoring their language learning process; c) actively

practising the language to generate suitable language learning patterns; d) willing to discover and correct their mistakes; e) able to pay attention to the meaning of the language. Less successful learners may be able to improve their language proficiency if they could adopt the characteristics of successful learners.

Based on numerous previous studies, there appear to be three major affective variables that have a crucial impact on the outcomes of second language performance, namely, motivation, beliefs and anxiety (Dörnyei, 2003; Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Horwitz et al., 1986; Williams & Burden, 1999). Of these three variables, motivation is believed by most researchers to have the most profound impact on success in language learning (Cotterall, 1995; Dörnyei, 2003; Ehrman et al., 2003; Gardner, 1990; Rubin, 1975). As Dörnyei (2009: 29) conceptualizes motivation as 'part of the learner's self-system'. Dörnyei (2005a: 8) also characterizes motivation as 'the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it and the effort expended on it'. Cheng and Dörnyei (2007: 153) further declared motivation is so important that even the most gifted learners are unlikely to persist long enough to achieve proficiency in a second language without sufficient motivation. Motivation is also considered as self-management in the field of affective variables (Andrade & Bunker, 2009; Hurd, 2006).

Wang et al. (2008) found learners' sense of being successful can help to increase their motivation as well as enhance the possibility of achieving better results (Wang et al.,

2008). Findings from Xiao's (2012) study also suggest that successful language learners are generally motivated and aware of what benefits they can get once they make progress in English as a second language. Language learners can benefit from monitoring and reflecting on their learning to make it more effective and reflective throughout the learning process. This view is also supported by Bandura, (1986) and Ehrman et al. (2003) 'Perceived progress and resulting benefits can lead to a better sense of success, which in turn can be an important source of learning motivation.'

Moreover, GLLs are able to take measures against a decrease in motivation. Dörnyei, (2005a) claims that individual motivation fluctuates throughout the overall learning process and a decline in motivation may result in poor learning, which in return may accelerate motivational decline. The measures adopted by successful language learners appear to be effective against any decline in learning motivation, and successful language learners can minimize any negative impact on their learning motivation and grasp effective methods, while less successful language learners find any reduction in motivation is often beyond their control.

Learners' beliefs are another important factor in effective language learning according to a large number of research studies (Cotterall, 1995; Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1999). For example, learners' beliefs about the responsibility for learning, the nature of language learning, and the 'actual self' – that is, 'your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) believes you actually possess' (Higgins, 1987: 320)

– may influence how they learn and how well they can learn (Bandura, 1986; Bown, 2006; Rubin, 2005). Beliefs are often seen as comparatively stable; however, most researchers reveal that beliefs can change over time as a result of a non-traditional learning mode (second language learning mode) (Hurd, 2005; White, 1999; Zhang & Cui, 2010).

Anxiety ranks high among the factors influencing language learning (Arnold & Brown, 2000; Horwitz et al., 1986; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). For example, anxiety is closely linked to learners' self-efficacy (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999), specific language skills (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999), and willingness to communicate.

Xiao (2012) conducted a study to find out the role motivation, learners' beliefs and anxiety play in real second language learning settings. His findings on how motivation, learner's beliefs and anxiety factors affect successful and less successful learners can be summarized as follows:

- Confidence: successful language learners are confident in their learning ability and in their learning outcomes, while less successful language learners have poor confidence in their English proficiency and fear heavy work commitment;

- Attitude: successful language learners are optimistic about constructive criticism and happy to deal with mistakes, while less successful language

learners are afraid of making mistakes.

- Goal: 'learners without specific reasons for their study cannot sustain their motivation' (Boyd, 2004, p. 35). Successful language learners are able to set goals, both in the short and long term, and make every effort to achieve their goals. By contrast, less successful language learners do not set themselves goals, so they may no longer work towards any specific goals after repeated failures. In Rubin and Thompson's (1994) book entitled *How to be a More Successful Language Learner*, they also state that one should set clear goals for each skill to be more successful language learners.

However, these studies only focus on individual, internal characteristics which are not accepted by all GLL researchers. Norton & Toohey's (2001) research offers a more complex understanding of what makes GLL. Their research focused on the situated experiences of two good language learners, one adult and one child, suggesting that the proficiencies of good language learners were not only 'bound up in what they did individually but also in the possibilities their various communities offered them' (Norton & Toohey, 2001: 318). Apart from the learners' inner individual factors, it is also necessary to understand the importance of social contexts that offer supportive social material or other resources to assist the learners' language learning. Davis (1995) also pointed out the context was a modifier in GLL's learning progress. Rubin and Thompson (1994) maintain that 'language is a social phenomenon which cannot be successfully achieved without taking into account social intercourse'. The role of

social intercourse in language study will be further discussed in the shifting of the language learning research landscape towards a social perspective (see details in section 2.6).

Moreover, Norton and Toohey's (2001) research into GLL also placed importance on human agency, that is, GLLs were also able to successfully exercise their agency to use social resources, make effective connections and adjust their identities in the learning context. In sum, learning context and the learner agency are seen as complementary in good language learning. Apart from GLL research focusing on both sociocultural and individual factors, Griffiths (2008) indicated other learning factors, such as vocabulary, grammar, listening, pronunciation, reading, writing, teaching/ learning methods, strategy instruction and error correction also play a role in making a good language learners.

Research into individual differences in second language learning

Apart from the discussion of individual, internal factors and social context realities in influencing learners' language learning, individual differences research has also occupied a considerable part of applied linguistics research. Based on a review of publications in the Modern language Journal from 1920s to the end of 1970s, Horwitz (2000) found the interest in L2 learner differences evolved over the decades. She notes the changes in the terms used to refer to individual differences as 'the labels good and bad, intelligent and dull, motivated and unmotivated have given way to a

serious of new concepts such as integratively and instrumentally motivated, anxious and comfortable, field independent and field sensitive, auditory and visual' (Horwitz, 2000: 257). There has been a radical shift in researchers' ways of perceiving language learners and Horwitz (2000) characterizes these changes as 'evolutionary rather than revolutionary'.

Interest in Individual Differences (IDs) research has grown since 1970s and this interest is reflected in numerous articles published in all the major SLA journals, makes IDs a major area in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. Dörnyei (2005b, p.6) observed that individual variation played a major role in influencing the ultimate success of second language learning outcomes and pointed out language aptitude and language learning motivation were two keys factors in the study of IDs. The study of language aptitude and language learning motivation started in the 1960s and gained momentum in the 1970s by the influential studies of the good language learner. The results indicate that the 'the high degree of language aptitude and motivation were the factors that helped students to excel, in particular the students' own active and creative participation in the learning process through the application of individualized learning technics' (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Cohen and Dörnyei, 2002). Rubin and Thompson (1994) in 'How to Be A More Successful Language Learner' found it was more useful to learn a little every day rather than spend a long time learning only every now and then.

However, it appears that studies only focusing on individual differences in motivation, aptitude and time spent on study cannot fully predict an individual's language learning outcomes. In studies of IDs in the second language learning context, researchers began to realize the importance of appropriate language learning strategies. Skehan's (1989) *Individual Differences in Second Language Learning* and his follow-up overview paper of the same title (Skehan, 1991) presented the notion of language learning strategies and assumed they were related to learner characteristics and he added learning styles to the list of IDs in language learning. Ting's (2006) research also found that the successful language learner preferred to apply various strategies overall and integrate them, while the less successful tended to use one strategy, such as memorisation, throughout the whole learning process.

Vann and Abraham (1990) argued that the same language learning strategies being used by different language learners can cause different results. They also suggested that if learners were aware of the significance of applying good language learning strategies as well as taught how to evaluate any possible outcomes, the results would be more effective. In addition, Rubin and Thompson (1994, p.1) pointed out that 'there is no stereotype of the good language learner.' They found that not all good language learners' language learning strategies work for all learners, and an individual's characteristics and real learning situations have to be taken into account and the language learning strategies that best suit them used. They further explained that only when EFL learners combine the traits of good language learning strategies in

the appropriate way could they enhance their foreign language proficiency and become successful EFL learners. Green and Oxford (1995) also supported this view claiming that the more successful learners' practices appear to be natural and they are able to combine a variety of strategies used frequently or moderately frequently by learners at all levels.

Overall, it can be inferred from the above discussion that language learning strategies (LLS) play an important role in influencing learners' language learning outcomes, and next section will give a detailed exploration of LLS research.

2.3.2 Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

As discussed above, research into what makes a good language learner has not only focused on learner variables and learning variables but also expanded to Language Learning Strategy expertise. With the development of cognitive psychology, the notion of language learning strategies has been gradually recognized and developed as a crucial element in the field of language learning (Oxford, 1990; Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). This section will start by introducing some leading researchers in this field and their main contributions to get an overall view of second language learning strategies.

According to Oxford's (1999) definition, Language Learning Strategy refers to adopting specific actions, behavioural steps and activities to improve learning efficiency and outcomes in second language learning through developing language

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learning skills. LLS can facilitate the internalization and storage retrieval of information or the use of a new language. Another definition given by one of the most influential American strategy experts in the field of educational psychology, Claire Weinstein, elaborated the idea that LLS contains any thoughts, behaviours, beliefs or emotions that can facilitate the acquisition or understanding or later transfer of new knowledge or language learning skills. She further offered three distinguishing features of LLS as goal 'directed, intentionally invoked and effortful' (Dörnyei, 2003: 24).

The growing awareness of the particular language learning strategies used by different individuals has been recognized as the most important outcome of recent language research and the current research approaches have been conducted mainly from a learner-centred perspective (Ellis, 1994; Skehan, 1991). Chamot (2004: 14) defines 'learning strategy as any learners' conscious thoughts and actions that help her in achieving her educational goals'. The concept of 'language learning strategy' is by now more familiar than 'learning strategy', which first started investigations of the efficient strategies used by good language learners in the mid-1970s to help language learners achieve their language learning goals more successfully. Researchers believe that identifying what a good language learner does would help them help less successful learners to learn more successfully (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978; Oxford, 1989; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975). Studies on the LLS are offering a detailed classification of strategies and analyses and frameworks for practical

application (see O'Malley et al. (1985); Oxford (1990); O'Malley & Chamot (1990); Wenden (1991); Oxford et al. (2004)).

This section now looks at the prominent figures and their main achievements in the field of language learning strategies. Joan Rubin, Rebecca L. Oxford, Anna Uhl Chamot and Joan Michael O'Malley are four of the most active researchers in this field. Various categories of language learning strategy based on the above four prominent researchers' work will be discussed and their theories reviewed since they are fundamental to this study. The following section briefly elaborates and evaluates these four researchers' main contributions.

1. Joan Rubin

Rubin's work in the field of language learning research is the earliest. Rubin (1975) was the first to compare the characteristics of successful language learners with less unsuccessful learners. She identified a series of language learning strategies used by good second or foreign language learners to enhance their language fluency and improve their learning efficiency. Based on Rubin's pioneering work, various categories and taxonomies of language learning strategies were adopted (Cohen, 1990). Rubin (1981: 198) identified the strategies that 'contribute to achieving L2/FL proficiency with great success either directly via using inductive inferencing and memorizing or indirectly by creating practice opportunities or using production tricks.' Later in 1994, Rubin co-authored *How To Be Successful Learner* with Thompson,

who developed a same interest in this area, which made a great contribution to the study of language learning strategies.

Cohen (2011, 863) pointed out the limitations of Rubin's (1975) research because she mainly focused on what language learners were doing in language classrooms, drawing the simple conclusion that good teaching automatically meant good language learning. Other important factors such as language learning strategies, individual differences and social factors were ignored. Jang and Jiménez (2011: 142) also pointed out the traditional research such as Rubin's (1975), tended to isolate the individual L2 learners' strategic performance from the context in which they were situated.

2. Rebecca L. Oxford

Her greatest contribution to this field is her Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990). SILL was developed and sub-scaled into 6 groups of learning strategies. They are: a) Memory strategies; b) Cognitive strategies; c) Compensation strategies; d) Metacognitive strategies; e) Affective/emotional/motivation-related strategies; f) Social strategies.

Oxford (1990) also summarised the above six strategies under two categories: memory, cognitive, and compensation as direct strategies, for example grouping, analysing, guessing meaning from context via reading and listening; and

metacognitive, affective and social strategies as indirect strategies, for example consciously searching for practice opportunities, self-encouragement and practising with native speakers.

However, there appeared some limitations to Oxford's six categories. Griffiths & Parr (2001) argued there appeared to be some difficulties in dividing strategies into Oxford's six categories in some real situations. They found there was always one strategy item that could not be neatly classified into only one group. For example, 'looking for opportunities to practice English' could be considered as social because it contains interaction with others, on the other hand, it could be considered as metacognitive since it contains self-encouragement (Griffths, 2008). Thus, sometimes some English learning strategies might be both direct and indirect.

Dörnyei (2005b) also pointed out limitations of Oxford's classification. He maintained that the compensation strategy acted as a language use rather than a learning strategy. It should be noted that language use and language learning are two different processes since they have different applications and psycholinguistic expressions.

3. Anna Uhl Chamot and Joan Michael O'Malley

Chamot & O'Malley started co-authoring articles in this subject area in 1985. They are best known for their CALLA Model (Cognitive Academic Language Learning

Approach); (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987), which considers progress over time and the accommodation to the changing situation and conditions of learning (Chamot, 2005). According to Raftari (2013) CALLA represents three aspects of learning: the content area instruction, academic language development and the explicit instruction of learning strategies.

CALLA is particularly suitable for learners whose English proficiency is at advanced-beginner or intermediate level. The CALLA model is formed of the following five stages: preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion. Table 2.2 briefly elaborates what the teachers and the learners should do in different steps.

The above leading studies have made important contributions in understanding L2 learner LLS in many aspects. However, as Donato & McCormick (1994: 459) and Jang & Jiménez (2011: 142) argued, these studies only focused on learner's cognitive or individual traits and so left some critical questions unanswered, such as 'why do some learners use different strategies in different contexts, rather than the same strategies in all situations?' These questions suggest the contextualized and situated experiences of L2 learner were rarely considered in the above cognitive LLS studies. Handsfield & Jiménez (2009) argued the effectiveness of learners' strategy use cannot be fully understand without considering the situated contexts in which the strategies emerge and develop as well as the diverse backgrounds of the L2 learners.

Furthermore, Jang & Jiménez's (2011) found that social factors, such as ethnicity and race, influenced the L2 learner strategy choice and the use of LLS. Overall, it is not sufficient to understand LLS research from the cognitive perspective alone; other factors such as contextual realities and learners' social backgrounds should be accounted for and the next section will give a full account of the various factors influencing learners' LLS choice and use.

Phase / Step	What the teachers and the students do
Step one: Preparation	The teachers provide advanced notice about the lesson so the students can identify what they already know about a topic, using elaboration as a strategy, and what is new.
Step two: Presentation	Teachers provide new information to students, using techniques which make their input comprehensible. Teachers can encourage the students to organize their knowledge, what they know and what is new and thus the use of selective attention, self-monitoring, inferencing, summarizing, and transfer skills.
Step three: Practice	Students engage in activities through

	which they can apply their learning strategies, often in cooperative small-group sessions. During this phase, the teacher should encourage the use of strategies, such as grouping, imagery, organizational planning, deduction, inference, and questioning for clarification.
Step four: Evaluation	Students reflect on their individual learning and plan to remedy any deficiencies they may have identified.
Step five: Expansion	Students are provided with opportunities to relate and apply the new information to their own lives, call on the expertise of their parents and other family members and compare what they have learned in school with their own cultural experiences

Table 2.2: CALLA model, source: based on Chamot & O'Malley (1987), Raftari et al (2013).

2.3.3 Factors affecting the learner's use and choice of language learning strategies

Based on the above discussion, it can be inferred that there are a number of independent variables that potentially influence the learners' choice of LLS and this section will further explore the factors affecting the learners' use and choice of LLS.

These major variables have been recognized by researchers: culture and background (Grainger, 1997), environment (Takeuchi, 2003), gender (Green and Oxford, 1995), age, learning style, motivation and target language (Chamot et al., 1996). Grainger (2012) further agued if the strategy use impacted upon the target language proficiency, then the independent learning variables would, in fact, have a potential relationship with both the choice of the strategy used and language proficiency.

Oxford et al. (1988) emphasized gender as an important factor in the use of language learning strategies. She suggested that female students tended to adopt more effective strategies than male students; however, she also made the point that such results might vary according to different cultures and societies. In addition, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) found that different learning background influenced the learners' strategy choice. Based on Oxford and Nyikos (1989) studies, although different backgrounds affected the use of language learning strategies, on the whole, university students were active strategy users. Furthermore, 'students' self-rating of motivation was the most powerful influential variable that affected the choice of language learning

strategies, followed by the gender of learners and all the other variables' (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

In addition, Takeuchi (2003) found that some strategies were specifically preferred by certain ethnic groups and Asian learners of English often devoted large amounts of time and energy to memorizing words or sentences, good language learners are characterised as being good imitators as well as having good sensitivity to authentic English sounds and pronunciation, and the choice of some language learning strategies seemed to have a certain relationship with the learner's stage of learning.

It also appears that learners who may be from different cultural and ethnic groups, but who have certain features in common, tend to use certain types of strategies. The review of studies on cultural background suggests that cultural background plays an important role in LLS choice. Griffiths' (2003) research suggested that European students are predisposed to adopt strategies more frequently than students from other cultures due to their identifiable grammatical structures and alphabet, cultural ideals and educational backgrounds. Compared to European students, students from Asian backgrounds tended to use traditional strategies, such as memorizing words, rote learning and repetition as well as rule-oriented strategies (Griffiths, 2003). This view is also supported by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), who found that Asian students were predisposed to adopt their own rote learning strategies. Lee and Oxford's (2006) research suggested that Asian background learners relied on more traditional

rote-memorization strategies.

However according to Grainger's (2012) study of the impact of cultural background on the choice of language learning strategies in the Japanese Foreign Language (JFL) context, Asian students used more strategies and in different ways than Australian students. He suggested the significance of the learning environment determines strategy preferences, meaning if Asian students are in an environment or a country where English is spoken as a native language, they tend to be less inclined to stick to traditional rote learning strategies and are more flexible to experimentation in their strategy use. On the whole, despite their cultural background, Asian learners adopted similar strategies to Australian learners in order to communicate in spoken interactive situations when they were in the same language learning contexts. This study took the view that once Asian students were in an English speaking social context, they would not consistently use traditional rote-learning strategies; instead, they more proactively adopted western learning styles such as asking questions or interacting than normally expected. Their use of strategy would change to meet the needs of communication when interacting in oral situations. Moreover, despite previous findings that indicated cultural background was a significant factor in strategy choice (Politzer and McGroarty, 1985; Grainger, 1997; Griffiths, 2003), Grainger's (2012: 492) study concluded that 'the nature of the task itself and the impact of the environment, determine the nature of the strategies used to assist in completing the task'. More specifically, regardless of the cultural background, both Asian and Western learners

must ask questions to achieve communication when they were exposed in the foreign language speaking social context. The conclusion is that the language learning environment, as well as a multi-lingual capacity can be an important factor for the choice of LLS.

Yang (2007) further supported the view that ethnicity plays a fundamental role in the selection of LLS based on his research into the LLS use and choices of Taiwanese high school and college students with different ethnicities and proficiencies in EFL. Yang (2007) also found successful language learners adopted LLS more often than less successful ones. However, Liyanage et al. (2010) argued that when ethnicity is compared with religion, religious identity is more important in determining the choice of LLS than ethnic identity.

Dadour and Robbins's (1996: 162) investigation into the effects of explicit strategy instruction revealed that 'a well-structured strategy instruction course that allowed creativity on the part of both teacher and students could have a strong positive effect on oral communication and the use of all sorts of strategies.'

Learners' variation in strategy choice and use

Apart from the various factors listed above, different learners can make different choices and use of LLS at different times. Wharton (2000) found that Chinese students mostly preferred social strategies rather than affective strategies. Griffiths'

(2003) study suggested that more proficient language learners appear to use more complex and more interactive strategies, while the lower level language learners tended to use fewer, suggesting that the choice of LLS could vary according to the different dimensions of higher and lower level students.

Gao (2010a) summarized different individual characteristics into three categories. According to the malleability of the characteristics under the influence of the context, he analysed how these learners' characteristics influence their LLS choices and use as follows:

- Learners' innate characteristics refers to variables such as gender roles (sex), age, learning styles and personality, which it 'is assumed they have little control over, were born with or have been socialized into over a long period of time' (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Goh and Foong, 1997; Gu, 2003: 515).

- Learners' acquired characteristics refers to the motivation, belief and language proficiency whereby 'language learners can effect changes to motivations, beliefs etc. through conscious and deliberate effort; they have acquired these in the socialization process and these characteristics are subject to dynamic changes in particular contexts' (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Yang, 1999).

- Learners' social background characteristics refers to the study programmes, institutions, career choice and ethnicity, which 'to some degree reflect the features of learning contexts as experienced by language learners, be they the ones that they were born into or chose to affiliate themselves with' (Ehrman &

Oxford, 1989; Gu, 2003; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Peacock & Ho, 2003: 182).

2.3.4 Major limitations of LLS research from the cognitive perspective

The above discussion was of LLS research underpinned by cognitive theory; this section will discuss the criticisms and limitations of cognitive LLS research. The criticisms will mainly be considered from two perspectives: the conceptualization of the construct of LLS and the methodological approaches.

To only see LLS research from a cognitive perspective is not a holistic approach. Learners' strategic behaviour should been seen as dynamic; learners' use of LLS can be varied or change according to different individual characteristics. Learners' LLS use needs to be situated in specific settings as well as the aim to achieve particular individual's goals (Phakiti, 2003; Macaro, 2006). Tseng et al. (2006: 82) argue that in the cognitive LLS research, the 'commonly used self-report survey tool is based on the assumption that strategic use and strategic learning are related to an underlying trait because items ask respondents to generalize their actions across situations rather than referencing singular and specific learning events'. This concern is similar to the psychological concept that learners' language learning strategy can have 'traits' and different 'states' (Hong & O'Neil, 2001: 186). A trait in LLS use may refer to a learner's 'relative stable knowledge of strategy use across occasions' (Pen, 2012) - abstract or general knowledge - while the state of LLS use may refer to the learner's actual LLS use, which may be under development, according to different learning

settings or contexts (Wenden, 1998). Gao's (2006) reinterpreted data of his earlier study in 2002 was used to examine the changing use of LLSs by fourteen Chinese learners after their arrival in the UK for MA study at Warwick University. Gao's (2006) study found that the participants' language learning strategy use was inconsistent, depending on their changing contextual environment. The study indicated that, the participants adopted mainly note-taking, repetition and rote memorisation strategies in their learning context due to the dominant cultural beliefs that 'a person can memorize a word if s/he repeats exposure to it (particularly visually) seven times' (ibid: 60). However, the frequency of the above language strategy use decreased after their arrival in the UK; they gradually changed their language learning strategy, mostly according to the demands of their coursework such as only retaining the most frequently used words in their coursework rather than relying heavily on the dictionary. This indicates the Chinese students' LLS use shifted from the 'authoritative' examination-oriented standards in China to the 'coursework assessment' oriented standard in the UK. It can be concluded that the choice of learner strategy use is not only the result of mental process or personal motivation, but also the result of the social learning context, and 'the mediating agents, including teachers, learning experts, and family members.' (Gao, 2006: 64)

Individuals thus develop appropriate LLS to meet the different learning tasks in certain learning situations over time. As well as the understanding of LLS research from a cognitive perspective, it is useful to adopt a more qualitative and

contextualized approach. Questionnaire surveys and SILL research tools in cognitive LLS study seem to merely reveal the learners' frequency of strategy use without considering the importance of either the task's influence or contextual variations (Gao, 2004; 2010b).

Moreover, questions like 'why do certain learners behave in certain ways?' also calls for LLS research not only focusing on quantitative results, like the learners' frequency of the LLS use, but also the need to go in deeper and look at the quality of the strategy use. Macaro (2001: 269) argued that 'although it is the range and combinations of all strategies that ineffective learners lack, it is the metacognitive … strategies which seem to be the strategy types most lacking in the arsenal of less successful learners.' It is agreed that good learners are clear about selecting the most appropriate LLS to enhance their language learning in certain settings and consistently evaluate their LLS use. However, why some learners can determine or combine strategies effectively while other learners cannot, is not clear. One of the reasons might be the 'very nature of the research questions themselves' (Macaro, 2001: 269). Therefore, the quality of learners' LLS use from the metacognitive perspective needs more exploration.

The four central problems of LLS research from the cognitive psychology perspective can be summarised as follows (Cohen, 2011):

(1) LLSs should be regarded as either unobservable mental operations such as selective attention, or observable behaviour such as seeking out a conversation partner

or both. LLSs can be both behavioural and mental since the process of LLS use and development is the by-product of learners' cognitive choices (i.e. exercising their agency) mediated by different contextual conditions (e.g. social agents, material resources and artefacts).

(2) LLSs should be kept at a more flexible and general level or need to be specifically combined with other strategies to complete specific language tasks. This problem, in turn, has led to overlaps in the different terms used to describe the construct of LLS such as tactics, behaviours, thoughts and techniques.

(3) LLSs can involve consciousness or awareness on the part of the learner and can be deliberately chosen by an L2 learner (Cohen, 2011: 7).

(4) LLS researchers vary greatly in their opinions about what motivates the use of LLSs.

2.4 The shifting language learning strategy research landscape- towards a sociocultural perspective

It can be inferred from the above argumentation that LLS research under the traditional cognitive perspective seems inadequate to present a perfect picture of the learners' LLS use, and that, LLS should be explored from other, newer perspectives and this section will give the rationale for research from the sociocultural perspective. The problems of existing LLS research will be considered in detail, leading to the importance and necessity of conducting LLS research from a sociocultural

perspective.

2.4.1 Why the shift in the language learning research landscape?

Cognitive theories of language learning have provided the foundations for mainstream SLA research for years, but are currently challenged by the assumption that language learning takes place not just in individual learners' minds but also within social contexts (Gao, 2010b). Terms like 'community of practice' (COP) (Wenger, 2000) are increasingly adopted in SLA research to describe the social networks through which language learners mediate themselves. Gao (2010b) has made a simplified comparison between cognitive and sociocultural LLS research from some basic aspects:

a) Context. In the field of cognitive psychology, context is seen as an immediate material learning setting and an important variable modifying learners' cognition and metacognition. However, in the field of sociocultural perspectives, context is regarded as a more complex issue - not only a fundamental setting for the language learning, but also a combination of material conditions, sociocultural discourses and sociocultural networks. Moreover, context should consider the social relations underlying the alignments and arrangements of various contextual elements.

b) Learners. In the field of cognitive psychology, learners are seen as autonomous actors processing language-related information and skills. But from a social perspective, learners are seen as social beings that have a range of socially constructed elements in their identities and their relationships to learning, such as class, ethnicity,

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gender. They also have a dynamic, reflexive and constantly changing relationship with the social context of learning.

c) Language learning. The process of language learning is seen as a collection of cognitive and metacognitive activities in individual brains in cognitive psychological research, whereas from the sociocultural perspective, language learning is regarded as both a kind of action and a 'form of belonging'.

d) LLS. In the cognitive psychological research, LLSs are cognitive and metacognitive procedures that enhance the mental processing of language; in sociocultural research, LLSs are learner actions to subvert the contextual conditions for alternative learning opportunities, apart from their role in enhancing the cognitive/metacognitive process.

2.4.2 Criticisms of LLS research

Rose (2012) after reviewing recent articles in Applied Linguistics, summarises the criticisms of LLS research from a number of key areas: first, the categorization of LLS; second, the methodology of using questionnaires in LLS research; and third, the over generalization of strategy use across all aspects of language learning.

Gao (2004) found the most frequent data collection methods in LLS research were:

- Survey tools or written questionnaires, (up to date, online/ paper questionnaires) for example, Oxford's (1990) survey research using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning.

- Interviews, most past and current research have used interviews, for instance,

O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Gao (2003), Gu (2003), Parks and Raymond (2004).

- Think-aloud protocols or verbal reports (e.g. Block, 1986; Lawson and Hogben, 1996; Nassaji, 2003).

- Diaries or dialogue journals (e.g. Carson and Longhini, 2002).

- Recollective narratives (e.g. Oxford et al, 1996; He, 2002).

- Observation (e.g. O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

The student-completed, summative rating scales questionnaire survey methods are believed to be one of the most frequently adopted research methods in the field of LLS study due to their advantage of cost-effectiveness and allowing both researchers and participants to gain a quick understanding of the topic. Thus, questionnaire research is used in a wide range of LLS studies, beyond general language learning strategies, along with cross-cultural and internalisation studies. For example, Gu and Johnson (1996) used a vocabulary-learning questionnaire for Chinese tertiary students; Hayashi (1999) used questionnaires to study Japanese tertiary students' reading strategy use; Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001) also developed a questionnaire to investigate learners' second language writing strategies. Furthermore, SILL has been widely used among LLS researchers; it was adopted early in North American studies (e.g. Ehrman and Oxford, 1989; Nykios and Oxford, 1993) then it increasingly spread to the Asia-Pacific region (e.g. Lin 1999; Ma 1999; Peacock and Ho 2003). Research found SILL had various functions in different contexts. For example, Sheorey (1999)

modified the SILL model to investigate Indian university students. Yamamori et al (2003) adopted several SILL strategy items to investigate Japanese learners of English from the perspective of strategy use, motivation, and learning outcomes. In addition, Lan and Oxford (2003) used a children's version of SILL to study Taiwanese young learners' language strategy use. It can be concluded from the above, the adoption of the questionnaire survey method has been broadly internationalised and has been widely used in every aspect of language learning research.

However, there are criticisms of using questionnaires in LLS research. Gao (2004) points to five major problems:

a) Diversity and standardization.

In the field of LLS research, there are various classifications or categories for language learners based on different theoretical approaches. For example, O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification divides the language learning strategies into: meta-cognitive; cognitive; and socio-affective strategies. Oxford's (1990) SILL model puts learning strategies into six categories: meta-cognitive; memory; cognitive; compensation; social and affective strategies. In addition, Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) listed at least 10 other LLS questionnaires developed by other researchers. This suggests researchers have found it difficult to agree a strategy inventory that works (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). However, Ellis (1994: 529) and Hsiao & Oxford (2002) argued that 'a well-developed LLS survey tool should be able to capture the way in which strategies are used in reality, but LLS research has often been

characterised by fuzziness or little consensus.' Since it is difficult to define the nature

of a learning strategy, the diversity of theoretical approaches and LLS survey tools has

caused great problems for researchers in communicating their research findings (Gao,

2004; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002).

In order to address the problem of the diversity of LLS survey tools, Hsiao and

Oxford (2002), through comparing different language learning theories, modified the

SILL model by taking out 'direct' and 'indirect' supra-categories in order to make the

SILL model the most consistent with the learners' reported strategy use. At the same,

Hsiao and Oxford (2002) pointed out the possible limitations of adopting

questionnaires in LLS research should no longer be ignored. They made several

suggestions for future LLS research, and recommended that the inventory style of

LLS research should be more context-oriented as well as task-based. However, Gao

(2004) raised the concern that contextualized and task-based LLS research might go

against Hsiao and Oxford's call for consistency in LLS theory and LLS survey tools.

Gao (2004) further argued that the development of a more contextualized and

task-based inventory in strategy use might lead to the breakdown of any pursuit for

standardized strategy survey tools in LLS research.

b) Universal against contextual.

By overemphasizing the importance of developing a standard questionnaire, the

contexts in which questionnaires were initially used have been neglected; researchers

pay too much attention to 'universal' or 'standardized' elements and underestimate the importance of contextual variations and task influence. Hsiao and Oxford (2002) assume there is a contradiction between a standardized survey tool and contextual specific or task-based questionnaires. On the one hand, researchers ask for a more universal questionnaire (tool) which suits all the language learners and cuts across cultures. On the other hand, an increased need to develop a more local, context-based and task-specific language learning theoretical tool to fit different situations has come into vogue (LoCastro, 1994; Oxford et al, 2004). LoCastro (1994) supported this view after she compared her interview data and questionnaire data in her language learning study, confessing that the interview data cast serious doubts on her survey findings and there seemed to be a dilemma in the application of SILL methodological tools.

There are different questionnaires designed for different Foreign Language Learning contexts (FLL), but some items are not adaptable to some English as Foreign language contexts. For example, the item 'I use flashcards to remember new English words' may not be completely adaptable to the Chinese context since not everybody knows what a flashcard is. Wenden (1991) and Cohen (2003) further argue the importance of regarding task-specific or language skill-specific components as fundamental to studying learner strategy use. Bremner (1998) gives an example from pedagogy, where teachers find teaching dictionary-use strategies effective in helping students gain new vocabulary. Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) revealed that learners adopt various language strategies in relation to different learning stages. They also

assume that 'learners are not able to report strategy use in detail in response to a specific language task by using a standard survey tool such as SILL' (Oxford, 1990).

c) How often is often.

'The wording of some commonly used questionnaires is susceptible to different interpretations and may lead to different findings in different research contexts, although the same questionnaire is used' (Gao, 2004:7; Gu et al., 1995). For example, the scale points in Likert-scaled questionnaire cannot be precisely defined or the 'distance' between each point measured. Ambiguity in the questionnaire items' wording can cause further interpretation problems for learners with different understandings of 'how often is often'.

d) Depth against breadth.

Even a well-designed questionnaire may not be able to capture the multi-dimensionality of learners strategy use. Researchers can classify what learners' do according to their language learning goals, or relevant learning skills, such as listening or speaking, and so on. But it is not easy to find an inventory which can cover all aspects of learners' strategy use. Take the Likert-scale continuum for example. The measuring items ranging from 'never' to 'very often' can only reflect the frequency of the learners' strategy use. However, other dimensions in learners' strategy use such as efficacy, attitude and belief cannot be reflected in a Likert-scale questionnaire. In order to resolve such problems, researchers like Gu and Johnson

(1996), Gu (2002) and Fan (2003) developed much more complicated questionnaires to cover as many dimension in learners' language strategy use as they could. But, Gao (2004:7-8) argues that even if a well-designed and comprehensive questionnaire can cover all dimensions of language users' behaviours, 'it is still not enough to embrace the complexity of learners' strategy use at one particular moment when completing a specific task'.

f) Dynamic and static.

The popular use of questionnaires may appear to negate the dynamic and fluid nature of learners' strategy use and regard the learners' strategy use as unchangeable (Gao, 2004: 9).

Dornyei (2005b) has argued that a quantitative questionnaire as a survey instrument cannot investigate an individual's LLS psychological traits. Numbers can only provide simple and superficial answers; a questionnaire survey cannot avoid unreliable or unmotivated responses, or respondents' literacy problems; there is little or no opportunity to correct the respondents' mistakes, and social bias, self-deception, acquiescence bias, the halo effect, all these factors can also reduce reliability and validity.

Criticisms of the conceptualization of the LLS research

Apart from the major criticism of the use of questionnaires in the LLS research,

another major criticism is about the conceptualization of LLS research. Oxford (2003) defines language learning strategy from different perspectives; the technical view is that language learning strategies are tools which are 'given' by the teacher to the student through instruction, while the psychological view is that language learning strategies are individual features that can change through practice and strategy instruction, to formulate the best language learning strategy based on elements such as task, learning style and goals, etc.. Language learning strategies can also be viewed from the sociocultural perspectives. Oxford (2003) further understands language learning strategies as growing out of communities of practices (COP), and that during the cognitive learning process, learners gain strategies from expert practitioners. However, some researchers criticize the learning context as viewed in terms of COPs. Morgan (2007) assumes that previous research into COPs 'exaggerate the internal cohesion and cooperation of collectivities and understate the operation of discourse and power through the communication of group norms', Morgan (2007) also argues that sociocultural and COP (learning context) research tends to grant 'individuals a degree of autonomy and self-awareness', he makes the assumption that sociocultural research could be more invigorated if seen from more critical norms and conceptions.

Following criticisms of the conceptualization of LLS research emerged the call for the reconceptualization of LLS research. More recently, researchers have paid more attention to concepts such as power, identity and agency. With more research into social context, Zuengler & Miller (2006, p.37) admit that 'the social context or the

real-world situation are fundamental not ancillary to language learning.' In cognitive conceptualization, context is treated as 'a variable modifying the internal acquisition occurring in individual minds.' (Gao, 2010b)

2.5 Understanding language learning research from a sociocultural perspective

Being aware of the importance of shifting the LLS research paradigm towards a sociocultural perspective, this section gives a detailed review and understanding of LLS research from a sociocultural perspective.

2.5.1 Understanding Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and mediation

Lantolf (2000: 30) defines sociocultural theory as a theory of mind that recognizes the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artefacts plays in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking'.

Central to the understanding of SCT is mediation. Vygotsky (1978) claimed that human consciousness is a fundamentally mediated mental activity. He explained that 'historically, humans began to control and master nature through the creation and invention of tools that carry with them the characteristics of the particular culture'. There are two types of tools used by individuals to self-regulate, namely, controlling nature or controlling others or oneself, and these are technical tools and psychological tools. The technical tools are aimed at the object of an activity, the goal of an action,

while the psychological tools are oriented towards the subject of the action and the attempts to bring changes in the behaviour of oneself or others. As demonstrated by Vygotsky (1978), people never react directly (with innate reflexes) to the existing environment; they establish a relationship with the existing environment through mediation using tools, cultural means and signs (language), see Figure 1 below.

Mediating artefact: physical tool or sign system
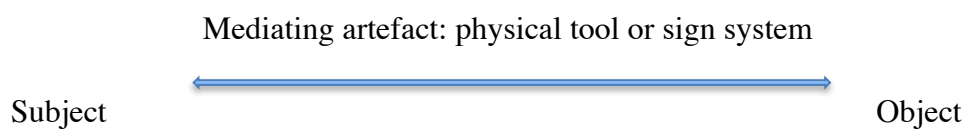
Subject ←————————————————————————————→ Object

Figure 1: Mediated relationship between subject and object

Both Lantolf (2000) and Gao (2010b) assume that in the concept of the 'human mind', mediation is seen as the nature or fundamental element in the study of the sociocultural perspective of learners' strategy use. From a macro-level understanding, Gao (2010b) sees the concept or the function of mediation can 'potentially be used to demonstrate the link between learners' strategy knowledge and their actual strategy use.' He further argues 'sociocultural LLS research aims to achieve a balanced theorization of agency and context in relation to their explanatory roles in understanding learners' strategy use.'

Sociocultural theory maintains that cultural institutions and social interaction, such as schools, classrooms, etc., have important roles in influencing an individual's cognitive growth and development. The development of language learning strategies is mainly a 'by-product' of mediation and socialization into a community of language learning

practice (Donato & Mccormick, 1994). The sociocultural perspective views language learning tasks and contexts as situated activities that are continually undergoing development and influence individuals' strategic orientations to classroom learning (Donato & Mccormick, 1994). Moll (1989, p.56) states, 'humans use cultural tools and artefacts (e.g., speech, literacy, mathematics, computers) to mediate their interaction with each other and their surroundings'. The importance of mediation cannot be neglected.

The notion of mediation emphasises the significance of context in shaping language learners' strategy use. There are three types of contextual resources that potentially mediate learners' language learning and strategy use, including learning discourse ('discursive resources'), artefacts and material conditions with their associated cultural practices ('material resources'), and social agents ('social resources') (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Palfreyman, 2006). Discourse refers to 'all utterances or texts which have meaning and which have some effect on the real world' (Palfreyman, 2006: 355). Gao (2010b) explains that contextual learning discourse reflects dominant values, attitudes and beliefs. As such, contextual learning discourse can lead to changes in learners' discourse about the learning process and, in turn, their strategy use. At the micro-level, learners' discourses enable them to organise and control mental processes, such as specific attention to the environment, planning, articulating steps in the process of solving a problem and so on. In other words, discourse activates learners' strategy use. At the macro-level, discourse about learning a

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language reflects the values that learners attach to the TL and the goals that they attempt to achieve through strategy use, while learners' motives or goals are crucial in determining their strategy use (Gillette, 1994; Oxford, 2003).

Sociocultural theory advocates maintain that strategy use is not only the cognitive choice of individuals but also an emergent phenomenon 'directly connected to the practices of cultural groups' (Donato & McCormick, 1994: 453). From this viewpoint, learners' strategy use can also subvert the imposed learning context to create alternative learning opportunities, rather than only enhance their cognitive and metacognitive learning processes (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Oxford, 2003). Consequently, the emergence of learners' strategy use can be considered closely related to a process of contextual mediation and learners' exercise of agency (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Toohey & Norton, 2003; Thorne, 2005; Gao & Benson, 2008). Therefore, sociocultural LLS research attempts to achieve a balanced theorization of agency and context associated with their explanatory roles in understanding learners' strategy use (Gao, 2010b).

2.5.2 Understanding sociocultural LLS research

Reviewing the general issues of SCT, this section will focus on LLS research underpinned by SCT. Sociocultural LLS studies question the connection between language learners' learning outcomes and their strategy use (Gillette, 1994; Parks & Raymond, 2004). Parks and Raymond (2004) challenge research into the correlation

between LLS use and other individual factors, such as motivation, since such research tends to view these variables as comparatively stable across different contexts. They argue that these studies often describe strategy use as 'largely [pertaining] to individual will and knowledge' (ibid: 375). If choice is a defining feature of learners' strategic learning behaviour (Cohen, 1998), then the extent to which choice is determined by learners or is mediated by the particular social contexts in which learners are involved must also be considered. Moreover, they argue that a shift in the conceptualization of language learners, learning, context and LLS is necessary (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Oxford, 2003). Furthermore, considering the three contextual (mediation) sources, namely discursive resources, social agents, and material conditions and cultural artefacts, can enhance our comprehension of the developmental process of learners' LLS use (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Palfreyman, 2003, 2006).

Block (2003) also argues that in a more interdisciplinary and social informed approach to SLA research, there is a need to broaden the horizons of second language acquisition. He suggests that concepts associated with Sociocultural/Activity Theory, such as participation, appropriation activity and collaborative dialogue, might serve as a complementary framework to help us understand the experience of language learners. Block (2003) also argues for the importance of a broader understanding of context and attempts to show that social context makes a difference in language learning. He suggests that the opportunities for learners to interact and participate in

the target language context are not always as abundant as is often assumed. He emphasizes the social turn in the conceptualisation of language learning and puts forward broader notions such as face-saving and learner identity.

Contemporary research into LLS tends to indicate a shift, from addressing learners' LLS use to the processes underlying it (Tseng et al., 2006). If learners' strategic behaviour is theorised as learners' efforts to 'open up access within power structures and cultural alternatives' for learning (Oxford 2003: 79), research adopting qualitative and multi- method approaches can reveal the dynamic interaction between language learners' agency and social structure which will deepen the understanding of learners' strategic learning as shaped by interaction (Gao, 2006).

2.6 The role of agency in sociocultural LLS research

The above section explored the importance of LLS research underpinned by a sociocultural framework; section 2.6 and section 2.7 will pick up two key concepts in sociocultural LLS research, namely, learner agency and context and explore the role these two key factors play in mediating learners' LLS choices and in their language learning. This section will first discuss:

- the concept of agency, provide a definition of agency and some suggestions as how to understand agency as a complex and dynamic issue.

- the role that agency has played in recent LLS research, particularly from the

social-cultural perspective

- illustrating how learner agency is related to their LLS use and how different learners' agency will lead to different learners' language learning strategies and thus may affect their second language learning outcomes.

2.6.1 A definition of agency

Ahearn (2001: 109) gives a provisional definition of agency, suggesting that 'agency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act.' However, the expression 'capacity to act' is over-simplistic since it belies the complexity of what these potential capacities could involve. This definition is given from a theoretical perspective, and it is hard to define a widely accepted concept of learner's agency from a practical or holistic perspective (Mercer, 2012). Current research advocates the need to investigate learners' agency from different perspectives, suggesting that the learner's capacity to act is not only mediated by sociocultural, contextual and interpersonal factors but also influenced by an individual's various cognitive, physical, motivational and affective capacities (Mercer, 2012). Therefore, it is better to try to understand learner agency as a complex system.

Additionally, learner agency is much more discussed within cultural-historical theory as an active self-determined activity. In cultural-historical theory, learners are not totally subordinated to their environment; instead, they actively 'meet' their objectives with selectivity and particularity (Nardi, 1996, p.90). In this way, learner agency

belongs to an activity constructed by individuals to achieve goals (Gao, 2010b; Lantolf, 2000). More specifically, it is through their agency that learners actively construct their own learning conditions, re-structure activities and re-construct tasks according to their personal goals (Lantolf & Genung, 2002). However, it should be noted that learner' agency has to be considered realistically, for example, not that it is only concerned with 'free will' or ultimate control over one's actions. Learner agency is linked to various other factors such as social, situational, material, individual constraints, whatever makes certain actions possible or impossible, probable or not (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; p.238). In sum, it is better to conceive agency as 'a relationship that is constantly re-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with society at large' (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; p.148).

2.6.2 Understanding agency as a complex dynamic system

Reviewing the concept of learner agency, this section considers the complex dynamic nature of agency. Central to the understanding of dynamism is the concept of emergence. In general, the concept of emergence relates to all the factors in one system that can generate a new system through their interaction (Mercer, 2012). More specifically, if all the components are interdependent of each other in one system, then changes in any one part of the system will probably lead to changes to other parts of the system, and consequently, to the generation of a new system; this process is called 'emergence'. So an agency system is typically described as complex rather than linear.

The nature of learner agency is not only complex but also dynamic. Mercer's (2011) studies indicated that learners' agency appears to emerge from the interaction and combination of several factors such as beliefs, self-concept, motivation, self-regulation. The study also found that the learner's agency is related to macro interactions such as sociocultural and education contexts, ranging from classroom to family contexts, or micro interactions such as the immediate context. So, there is no single certain variable that can definitely lead to the learner practising his or her agency in a particular way, but agency seems to be more properly perceived from a holistic perspective in that any emergence is generated from multiple interacted variables in many unpredictable ways and the results can vary.

2.6.3 Understanding learners' agency in LLS research taking a sociocultural approach

The sociocultural approach emphasizes the role of agency in a learner's strategy use through its theorization of activity. In general, activity theory refers to certain specific goal-directed actions which are mediated by the appropriate means to help individuals achieve their aims under particular temporal and spatial conditions (Lantolf, 2000). Learner agency is conceived as a changeable and fluctuating individual willingness and ability to act to achieve goals according to changing social conditions (Gao, 2010b). Learners actively construct their own learning conditions, re-structure activities, or conduct any actions selectively or particularly etc. all of which activities are conducted through learner agency, ultimately, to meet their objectives or pursue

their goals (Lantolf & Genung, 2002; Nardi, 1996; Duff, 2012; Stanfield, 2014). Socioculturally guided study of LLS, learner agency is seen as a complex dynamic system due to its multiple interactions with the system's constituents, which also include environmental factors. Therefore, learner agency is constantly in flux, but the direction of change cannot be ascribed to any single variable as 'it is a function of the overall state of the system' (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011, p.37).

2.6.4 Understanding the complexity of the role of learner agency in LLS study from a social-contextual perspective

Different learners' agency will lead to different learners' language learning strategies and learning experiences. Apart from the role of learning context, learner strategy use also shifts according to the individual's agency in the learning context.

Gkonou's (2015: 197) claims that learner agency should not be merely viewed as a reaction to contexts, but should also be viewed as proactive actions in response to the changing English learning context. In Gao's (2010b) exploration of Mainland Chinese students' language learning experiences focusing on the changes in their LLS use prior to and after their arrival in an English medium university in Hong Kong, it was concluded that learners' strategy use is interrelated with their exercise of power - the will and the ability to act. Some participants from Mainland China were creative or positive in making efforts to overcome or adopt to the new language speaking environment; however, other participants were constrained by the change in context. For example, one of Gao's (2010b) participants, Liu, was capable of creating and

sustaining a social network to support her language learning through manipulating her relationships with English, Cantonese and Mandarin appropriately. In contrast, Mengshi, another participant in Gao's (2010b) research, found it extremely hard to get successful access to such supportive social learning resources. These differences in a learner's capacity and willingness to act will lead to different perceptions of the learning context and different levels of satisfaction with the learning process, thus leading to different outcomes in second language learning.

Learner agency is not only dynamically shaped by a monolithic variable, but rather mediated by various contextual, intrapersonal and sociocultural factors across time and space (Gkonou, 2015; Lantolf, 2013). The findings of Gao's (2010b) research also support the view that the concept of 'learner agency' should be broadened to include a number of elements, not just learners' metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1998) or self-regulatory competence (Tseng et al., 2006) but also include social contextual elements. As demonstrated by Gao (2010b), language learners are more likely to realize the potential of their LLS knowledge in the learning process if they have an appropriate level of sociocultural identification of contextual elements for reconfiguration.

This point means that if the learners have some prior knowledge or experiences or cultural practices in the learning context, it will help them access or maintain supportive social learning resources or opportunities. For example, one of the

participants in Gao's (2010b) study was familiar with American culture. Although limited, the learner found it very helpful to interact with American exchange students in Hong Kong and the US. However, another student who lacked knowledge of English history or pop music found insufficient background knowledge became a barrier when he socialized with English-speaking exchange students. Moreover, in comparison with other students, the learners who were more capable of transforming or creating contextual conditions to become favourable social networks to support their language learning were more satisfied with their experience of learning English (Gao, 2010b). For instance, such learners turned out to be better at relating to both non-local and local students in Hong Kong and the more often recruited them as part of valuable social networks to support their language learning (Gao, 2010b).

Huang's (2011: 230) argument that apart from the learner agency arising from engaging in the social world, learner agency entailing action was often suggested to arise from deliberation and choice (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Learner agenda and agency are closely related. 'Agenda' in Huang's (2011: 242) study refers to 'things to do', 'a personally relevant and meaningful agenda might lead to the exercise of agency in return might lead to a greater autonomy'. Learner agenda and agency might be influenced by the learners' construction of future development, such as their general concept of English learning or their career planning. Learner agency enabled the learners to reflectively think whereby they 'introspectively or retrospectively look into their own thoughts, feelings, emotions,' and critically assess the results (Gao,

2013: 229). Gao (2013: 235) concluded that language learners were enabled to use by their agency 'through internal conversations or reflective/reflexive thinking', and during this process, learners discerned and deliberated various 'concerns, desires, and visions to identify their top priorities in the light of contextual and structural conditions' (Gao, 2007).

In sum, learner agency is complex and dynamic and should be seem as a variety of capacities, as both the motive/belief and social context systems which underlie the learners' active language strategy use and successful learning. Learner agency plays a significant role in the effectiveness of second language learning when people make choices, self-regulate and take control of their LLS use and thereby achieve their language goals (Stanfield, 2014:173; Duff, 2012; Gkonou, 2015:195).

2.7 The role of context in sociocultural LLS research

Apart from learner agency, context plays another important role in the concept of mediation through changing or shaping the learners' language strategy use. Gao (2010b) offers three types of contextual resource which potentially mediate learners' language learning and strategy use: 'discursive resources' namely learning discourses; 'material resources' which are artefacts, and material conditions with their associated cultural practices; and 'social resources', which refers to the social agents.

2.7.1 Understanding the role of context in sociocultural LLS research

Contextual learning discourses can reflect the dominant values, beliefs and attitudes from the target foreign language perspectives and can affect the learners values, attitudes and beliefs during the learning process. From a micro perspective, the language learning context can help the learners control or organize mental processes, such as selective attention to the environment or planning or articulating steps in the process of solving problems. From a macro perspective, contextual resources concerning the target foreign language can reflect learners values which then adhere to the target language and the goals they want to achieve through strategy use; learners' goals or motives are fundamental in shaping or determining their strategy use (Oxford, 2003).

Gao (2010b) points out that all material and artefact resources are made by the other humans to mediate language learners strategic use or thinking; in return, these mediators or agents can also affect or change language learners' strategic use. As Palfreyman (2006) points out, language learning resources or materials empower learners to adopt a variety of new strategies. Su's (2012) study found a group of Taiwanese learners in a UK University often used English language learning magazines, CD-ROMs and English films as their main source of English exposure. As Su (2012: 213) further explained, in real-time communication, people might get tired or not be patient enough or willing to repeat what they say again and again to L2 learners, therefore alternative learning approaches through using material resources

such as reading English magazines or using modern technology were also good ways for the participants to practice English by themselves. Pen's (2012) study also found L2 learners would use online communication to develop their writing skills.

The reason why participants commonly adopted technology-mediated English learning strategies could be partly explained by the lack of opportunities for practicing English with English or native speakers in everyday life in an EFL environment (Huang & Van Naerssen, 1987; Wu, 2008). Gao (2010b: 106) and Hajar (2015: 268) found UK universities provided better English learning resources and more advanced technologies than the L2 learner's home country, so encouraged and facilitated the participants' strategy use in a more favorable English learning environment. Hajar (2015: 268) in his study found Arab participants in a UK University had increasingly incorporated a variety of modern technologies to improve their language skills as well as their academic study efficiency, by watching British programmes, using electronic dictionaries, Dropbox, Medley Desktop, SkyDrive and Mindjet. Gao's (2010b: 106) participants 'actively attempt to increase their exposure to English and adopt flexible learning approaches,' however, the participants often found it difficult to maintain their use of the learning material resources due to the great pressures of their academic study. It also should be noted that material resources or the artefacts are often related to different kinds of cultural practices in particular contexts in mediating learners' language strategy use. For example, an English context could be their teachers forcing the learners to memorize large numbers of English words, or an

English context could be used by the learners with interest or for fun in another context (Gao, 2010b).

Social agents not only mediate the contextual discourses of language learners but also provide the material support and assistance which is important for learners' engagement to acquire linguistic competence (Gao, 2010b). Social agents such as teachers, native English speakers and peers will influence the L2 learners' LLS use directly or indirectly. For example, Cohen's (2014: 133-137) study about the feedback and appraisal from significant others agreed that teachers were the most prominent group of individuals influencing the foreign language learners' self-concept formation. And native speakers in the TL (Target Language) environments were found to be models for the L2 learners, so that L2 learners imitated their pronunciation and learned native expressions from native speakers (Hajar, 2015: 277). Pen's (2012) study found the L2 participants increased their use of social language learning strategies such as asking the native English speakers to correct their speaking errors, and this changed their thinking and language learning behaviour. Hajar (2015) found peers (mainly international students) formulated trust and advice networks when they were in the middle of their MA study in the UK, and their strategic language learning was found to be influenced by peers at the linguistic, intercultural and academic levels. In sum, language learners got inspiration or assistance in the process of language learning and strategy adoption through interaction with social agents.

Overall, learning contexts - seen as a combination of culture, discourses, social agents and material resources or artefacts - mediate the participants' language learning efforts (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Palfreyman, 2006). Drawing on a sociocultural interpretative framework (see Figure 2), Gao (2010b) investigated how different layers of contextual reality, including macro-social context and elements, affected Chinese learners' English learning actions (i.e. their strategy use) in the Hong Kong context.
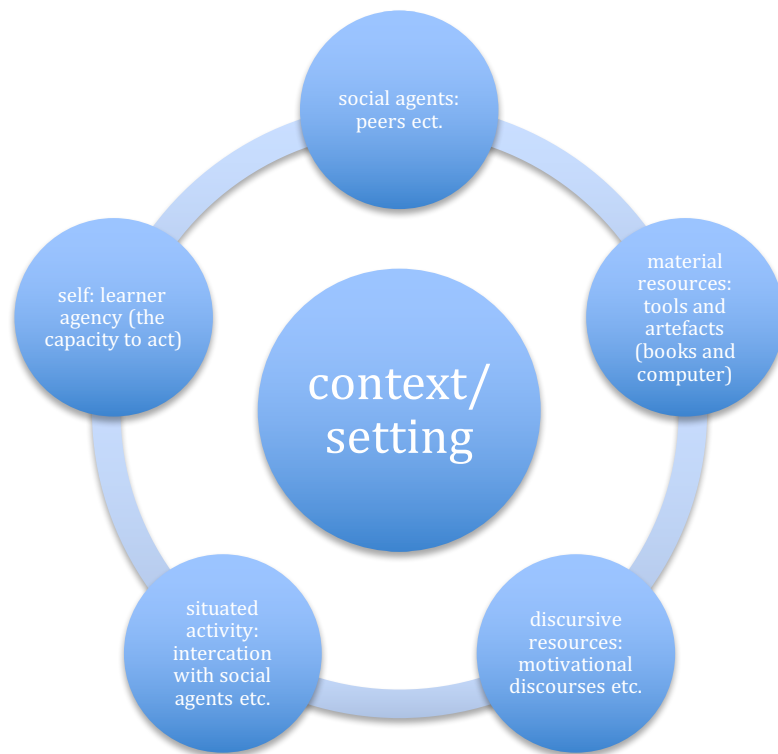
Figure 2: Simplified sociocultural interpretive framework (adopted from Layder, 1993)

The findings in Gao's (2010b) research support the view that learning contexts mediated the participants' strategy use in learning English and learning discourses underlay their strategy use. For instance, the participants' parents worked closely with teachers to imbue them with the societal and traditional learning discourses, including

'English is a tool', which became a motivational force driving the participants to memorize words, grammar points and texts for high-stakes examinations in the Chinese mainland. The abundance of learning resources in Hong Kong encouraged the participants to use strategies to increase their exposure to English. As another example, high-stakes examinations, as cultural artefacts, mediated the participants' use of exam-oriented learning strategies on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong. However, critical thinking referring to not just passively accepting what you hear or read, but actively questioning and making assessments, is an important academic writing/reading requirement in UK higher education, so this assessment criteria also mediated L2 learners' to use more critical/opinion valued-oriented language learning strategies (Bailey, 2013; Jiang and Sharpling, 2011; Hajar, 2015). These examples indicate that contextual realities, such as increasingly competitive educational processes and cultural emphasis on the pragmatic value of education, influenced the participants to adopt particular strategies. Thus, these findings underscore the important role that learning contexts have in mediating learners' strategic choices (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Norton & Toohey, 2001) and support sociocultural LLS researchers' criticisms of earlier LLS research which presented learners' strategy use as 'largely pertaining to individual will and knowledge' (Parks & Raymond, 2004: 375). In other words, learners' strategic use is often a constrained choice or a choice made possible by the learning context. As the importance of context in mediating the L2 learners' language learning choices and strategies has been established, the next section reviews the current studies concerning Chinese students' language learning

shifts after their arrival in an English speaking country.

2.7.2 Mainland Chinese students' changing English learning experiences in a new English native language context

Knowing the important role of context in mediating the learner's language learning, this section will review the role of a new English speaking context in Chinese students' English learning. After Mainland Chinese students' arrive in an English speaking country, they are encouraged to develop a variety of learning strategies (Gao, 2010b). Learners' motives or goals are also crucial in determining their strategy use (Dörnyei 2005b; Gillette, 1994; Oxford, 2003) and their deployment of LLS to achieve certain goals (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014). In the Chinese Mainland, most Chinese students regarded learning English as a compulsory academic subject, some even disliked learning English, while others linked English to their identities as elite students, and few had a strong intrinsic interest in English. But their motivation to learn English gradually changed to be more self-motivated after their arrival in the English as a native language context, as opposed to the examination-oriented one in China. For instance, some students were particularly motivated by a desire to maintain face in front of people with a better command of English; for some students who were planning to undertake further study abroad or trying to find jobs, English was understandably important in that they would need proficient English to pass the exams and any job interviews. Being exposed to an English native language environment, some students shared a strong desire to express themselves in English. Chinese students' motivation to learn English became more culturally-oriented (Gao, 2010b).

Most of the Chinese students shared the experiences that their English learning motives and beliefs were positively influenced by the local students. Their local classmates or friends became a valuable source of encouragement for them to practice more English (Gao, 2010b).

However, despite the Mainland Chinese students' increased motivation to practise English in the English speaking context, Gao's (2010b) research also found that in comparison with the motivated English learners in Mainland Chinese institutions, Mainland Chinese students studying in an English-speaking environment (Hong Kong) were less motivated to spend more time learning English because they were already in the 'English environment'. Peers were also found a demotivating factor for Mainland Chinese students' English learning in Gao's (2010b) research. Due to growing up within different cultures and values, there were barriers between Chinese students and their local English-speaking peers. For example, neither could understand each other's jokes. Gu's (2011) study also suggested that the majority of learners' personal lives during their study abroad tended to be coloured by the feeling of being 'a guest' and not belonging to the environment. All these things made it difficult for students to have deeper relationships. As Gao (2010b) pointed out, most of the Chinese students who tried to interact with local students became less motivated after they had a variety of experiences of socializing with their native speaker peers. Moreover, Gao (2010b) mentioned that it made Chinese students uncomfortable if native speaker peers had a particular image (stereotype) of Mainland Chinese students in their minds. This

undermined the relationship between the two groups as well as undermining the Chinese students' motivation to communicate with their local peers.

In addition, Dornyei (2005b) argued that 'those who were less proficient or confident in their oral skills were more nervous and reluctant to speak English with someone who is more fluent.' Consequently, Chinese students as non-native English speakers, had their enthusiasm for socializing with native speaker undermined as well. Academic studies also partly played a demotivating factor for the Chinese students in the new English-speaking context. Gao (2010b) pointed out if there was a clash between academic achievement and learning English, most of the Chinese students would chose to spend more time on getting a better academic result and would give up socializing to improve their English. For instance, academic study pressure was very high and once the students felt that their English level could enable them to achieve their academic aims, they quickly lost their enthusiasm for learning English.

However, some scholars have insisted that cultural and value difficulties can be dealt with. Ting-Toomey (2005) hypothesized that 'the more help the newcomers receive during the initial cultural adaption stages, the more positive are their perceptions of their new environment.' However, as Gao (2010b) noted, Mainland Chinese could not be reborn with different cultural and social experiences. So Chinese learners should first step forward to seek for assistance if they encountered difficulties and be encouraged to ask for help without hesitation, so facilitating their adaptation to the

new environment. Some scholars have indicated a variety of cultural adaptation strategies could be applied by the learners to strengthen the bonds across cultures and help them feel more a part of the community. Ward et al. (2001) encouraged 'learners to set goals that were socio-emotional in nature', for example, to make friends from other cultures. Through building relationships across cultures, learners could enhance their cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication skills and also undergo personal change. Chinese students could consider the above suggestions to improve cross-cultural relations and to be more engaged in English language communication.

2.8 Conclusion

Looking back at the literature, I have summarised the research into two themes. Firstly, Chinese students' adaption to the UK context. Secondly, LLS research.

The key findings are:

- Researchers have agreed that LLS play an essential role in language learning; LLS should be seen as part of a complex and dynamic system; the nature of LLS will keep changing as it is influenced by different factors; learner agency and context are the key two sociocultural factors that lead to the learners' changing use of LLS.

- Researchers have criticized 'traditional' LLS research conducted from a cognitive psychology perspective. There are methodological and conceptual problems with, and limitations in, LLS research conducted from this

perspective.

- There is a debate about theoretical perspectives in conducting LLS research. Researchers call for LLS research conducted from a sociocultural perspective to address the problems resulting from an exclusive cognitive psychology perspective.

- We already know there are some effects of sociocultural and educational system differences. Chinese international students face a myriad of challenges, particularly language difficulties when they come to study in the UK.

In summary we know too little about Chinese students' LLS use in the UK. To the best of my knowledge, there have been very few previous similar studies of the shifts in Chinese students' LLSs after their arrival in the UK, the latest being Pen's (2012) research on how Chinese/Taiwanese University students in the UK improve their English proficiency, focusing on their language strategy use and social identity development. Another study is Liu's (2012) work on the development of reading strategies which is a longitudinal study of Chinese international Master's students. Gao (2006) conducted a small study to understand the changes in Chinese students' use of learning strategies in China and Britain from a socio-cultural perspective.

The issue underlying this research is that, although LLS are clearly important in language learning and will keep changing over time and across contexts. What we need to know now is the Chinese students' English learning experiences and their

LLS use and the sociocultural factors that influence their LLS use. Thus, my study will set out to investigate the language challenges that Chinese students face and their efforts to adapt to their situation in UK, the overall shifts of LLS used specifically by newly-arrived MA students in the UK and to identify the sociocultural factors that lead to these changes. In addition, in response to the call for conducting LLS research from a sociocultural perspective, my study is the first that tries to interpret Chinese students' LLS use as shaped by their interaction with learner agency, social agents (teachers, peers etc.), material/cultural artefacts (learning materials, assessment modes etc.) or other contextual realities (of academic study). The learners' shifting motivation and identity development will also be explored. To address all the above inquiries, the following provisional research questions have been developed as a framework for this research:

Provisional research questions

RQ1: What English learning adjustments and developments do Chinese students make during their study in the UK?

RQ2. What language learning strategies do Chinese students studying in the UK use as they attempt to improve their English proficiency?

RQ3. How does the use of these strategies by Chinese students change and develop during their period of study abroad in UK?

RQ4: What social and cultural factors influence their changing experiences and their

changing use of language learning strategies?

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Methodological framework

3.1.1 Introduction

Building upon the previous studies in the field of language learning strategies (LLS), one conclusion appears to be that learners' strategy use is dynamic and varies across contexts. It is a 'temporally and contextually situated phenomenon' and the learners' strategy use will develop and change over time (Gao, 2005). Our understanding of how such development and change occurs, and the forms it takes, is - as yet - imperfect, however, and so the current language learning challenges faced by a specific group of learners (in this case Chinese students studying in the UK) and their efforts to adapt their language learning strategies to their current situation is worthy of investigation. Little is known about the overall shifts of LLS used specifically by a group such as this - newly-arrived MA students pursuing a course through the medium of English, a foreign language to them. This study aims to identify what exactly are the problems this group faces and to develop a deeper understanding of them as language learners and the strategies they use. This chapter describes and discusses:

- The methodological framework and approach used in my study;
- The rationale for choosing interviews and a questionnaire as my research methods underpinned by ontological, epistemological and methodological

paradigms;

- The research design: retrospective interviews for the first and second stage data collection, a Likert-scaled LLS questionnaire survey for the third stage, seeing each round of data collection as episodes enabling deepening understanding.

3.1.2 Ontological assumptions in my LLS research

Ontology is the branch of philosophy concerned with being and with what exists. Ontology in social science research asks about the nature of social entities (Bryman, 2012; p.32). There are two basic ontological positions: objectivism and constructionism. The difference between these two positions lies in whether social entities should be seen as objective entities in that they have a reality external to social factors or whether social entities should be seen as social constructions related to people's perceptions and social factors (Bryman, 2012).

Constructionism is an ontological position (often referred to as constructivism) that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being reinvented by social actors. This implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but they are in a constant state of revision (Bryman, 2012). The constructionist paradigm regards language learning as a social phenomenon which is not only produced through social interaction but also continually influenced by social actors. This paradigm assumes that the learner's

language learning not only involves mental or cognitive processes, but is also continually influenced by the social contextual conditions, such as mediating agents or learning discourses. In my research, Chinese students' use of English language strategies are seen as a changing reality that is continually influenced by the changing environment. Accordingly, I want to see how the UK English speaking environment as a social factor influences the Chinese students' use of English language learning strategies. Overall, the study essentially looks at the participants' views of the above issues, conducted under a constructive ontological paradigm.

3.1.3 Epistemological assumptions in my LLS research

Epistemology in social science research concerns what is or should be the means through which knowledge is acquired. According to Thomas (2009; p.87) if ontology is the study of what there is or exists in the social world, epistemology is about how we know about the world that we identified ontologically. There are two basic epistemological positions: positivism and interpretivism. The difference between these two positions lies in the whether we can or should study the world according to the same procedures, principles and ethos as the natural sciences (Bryman, 2012).

3.1.3.1 Positivism vs. Interpretivism paradigm

Positivism is difficult to define because it is understood in different ways by a number of authors. Put simply, the positivist position is that social research should try to emulate the methods of science as much as possible. We can explore in more depth the description of positivism as an epistemological position from a paragraph of

Thomas (2009):

Research under the positivism is to isolate the variables, measure the ways that varied, then look at the relationship between variables and finally develop hypotheses about the relationships, perhaps manipulate the variable for experimentation to test hypothesis, and draw conclusions according to the results of these studies. The key thing for research under the positivism position is to conduct the research under the 'scientific method' that the researchers should try to be objective, trying to avoid 'contaminating' the findings in anyway. Sometimes we call this realism that the world we perceive is straightforwardly the one that is 'out there'. We do not need too much interpretation about it.

In contrast to positivism, interpretivism accepts that the world keeps changing and that meanings shift constantly. Interpretivism accepts that there is no objective, pre-existing truth or reality waiting to be discovered; meanings are constructed and may be changing when influenced, so are not objective.

An interpretive research paradigm holds the view that people 'socially and symbolically construct their own organizational realities' (Berger & Luckman, 1967). By adopting an interpretive approach, the researcher assumes that the participants' perceptions about LLS use are not objective phenomena. The interpretive approach, accordingly, is consistent and compatible with the epistemological and ontological

assumptions that the world and reality are interpreted by people in the context of historical and social practices. Interpretivism contrasts with positivism (the scientific method) in social sciences study (Dudovskiy, 2011). The differences between interpretivism and positivism are demonstrated in the following table 3.1, according to Dudovskiy (2011):

Assumptions	Interpretivism	Positivism
Nature of reality	Socially constructed, multiple	Objective, single
Focus of interest	What is unique, specific	What is representative, general and average
Link between researcher and research subject	Cooperative, interactive, participative	Rigid separation
Goal of research	Understanding	Explanation
Desired results generated	What people think, what kind of problems they encounter, how they deal with them	How many people think and do something or have some problems

Table 3.1: Differences between interpretivism and positivism (Dudovskiy, 2011)

According to Table 3.1 above describing the interpretive approach, this is used in my research to understand the Chinese students' perceptions of their English learning experiences in the UK including what the students think, what kind of language

problems they encounter and how they deal with them.

My research is about understanding Chinese MA students' shifts in English language strategy use after they come to study in the UK. I will employ an interpretivist paradigm to look at the people and what they think and how they form ideas when they are situated in the UK English-speaking environment and how their LLS are constructed and shift. As Thomas (2009) suggests, the key point of interpretivism is in discovering other people's understandings about the world and how to interpret their understandings. Thomas (2009) recommends immersion in the research context, by talking to people in depth, observing every nuance of their behaviour. The key issue in my research is to explore the changing use of the Chinese students' English language strategies, so I will mainly collect the students' opinions, attitudes, hence my research will be conducted under the interpretive epistemological paradigm. Apart from interviews, another data collection tool, a modified Likert-Scaled LLS questionnaire was also used to explore some patterns and finally draw some conclusions. Questionnaire surveys are a means of canvassing individuals' opinions about a set of questions.

3.1.3.2 The rationale for applying an interpretive approach to explore the students' perceptions of their shifts in language strategy

Since I explore the participants' perceptions in my research, this section will review some studies that have used this approach and explain its strengths and weaknesses.

Understandings of perception

The word 'perception' originates from the Latin *perceptio*, while *peropio*, refers to the interpretation, identification and organization of sensory information that helps people to represent and understand the world (Schacter, 2011). In my research, the students' perception of the LLS use refers to the way that they think about using LLS and the impression they have of them. In Gibson's early work, perception is derived from 'perception–in-action', which means that 'perception is a requisite property of animate action, that without perception, action would be unguided, and without action, perception would serve no purpose' (Schacter, 2011). In the view of constructivism therefore, social reality is influenced by people's continually adjusting their actions according to the external input and their perception of this, which keeps changing overtime (ibid). In this notion, human perception is regarded as one component in the construction of social entities in the realm of Constructivism.

Interpretive research in understanding people's perceptions

My research was underpinned by a constructivist and interpretivist paradigms seeking to understand Chinese Master students' English learning experiences drawing on their perceptions and interpretations of the English language learning strategies they used in the UK university context. The use of constructivism is grounded in the following presuppositions:

a) the phenomenon under study –English learning– is complex and situated in social interactions,

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b) ELL (English language learning) cannot be reduced to a set of 'observable laws'

such as the technical skills   participants need to improve their English proficiency,

c) the meanings are always social, arising from the researcher's interactions with the

participants and their context,

d) the researcher engages with the participants to understand the context based on

their historical and social perspectives and on his/her own experience. The researcher

is also a Chinese student studying in a UK university, learning and practising English

as a second language, experiencing different English learning strategies in different

social and speaking contexts (Creswell 2003, p.8-9).

The phenomenographic interpretive research rationale for applying an interpretive

approach to understand people's perceptions comes from the following points. Firstly,

as interpretive research, Marton (1994) defines phenomenography: an empirical study

using an experiential, relational, contextual and qualitative approach to study the

various aspects of the phenomena of the world that can be researched through

conceptualizing, understanding, perceiving, experiencing and apprehending (Marton,

1994). Svensson (1997: 162) says the main features of the interpretive

phenomenographical methodology is the focus on generating categories of description,

the interpretive analysis of data and the 'open explorative form of data collection'.

Secondly, phenomenography as an interpretive research paradigm assumes that

human thinking is presented or studied through what is thought about or perceived.

The research is 'never separated from the object of perception or the content of

thought' (Marton, 1988: 185). Thirdly, interpretive phenomenographic studies as Marton (1988: 186) illustrates, will help to uncover 'conditions that facilitate the transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively better perception of reality' through people's different ways of thinking about phenomena. Therefore, interpretive phenomenographic research may help the researchers to find better ways to develop people's thinking and perceptions through mapping the ways of conceptualising and understanding people's living worlds. The main aim of interpretive phenomenographic research is to understand a given phenomenon in different ways. 'Understanding' here refers to the 'people's ways of experiencing or making sense of their world' (Sandberg, 2000: 12). Moreover, within the phenomenographic literature, the terms 'conceptions', 'experiences', 'understandings' and 'perceptions' are often interchangeably used (Marton and Booth, 1997: 114). Reality in phenomenography is understood 'through the way in which a person conceives of it' (Uljens 1996: 112-113). To summarise, phenomenography as an interpretive from of research, essentially working with a person's perceptions, understandings.

One limitation of interpretive research is that there can be many problems with what people say they think - are they telling the truth? Are their perceptions consistent? How do they reflect on their experiences? For example, it can be argued that people's answers to interview questions may not truly reveal the 'facts'. People may choose to mislead the interviewer or more problematically maybe mislead themselves. There is no way to determine whether their words really reflect the 'facts'. Conscious or

unconscious bias is always possible. Moreover, for me, as a researcher, even though I tried my best to interpret people's responses holistically and based on the respondents' understanding, as human beings we use different and complex ways to understand others. My interpretation of the results of this research may still be different from another researcher's understanding. There exists an inherent problem in interpretive research that reliability is always problematic. Therefore, the use of multiple methods (such as observation) of gathering data was an important strategy to try to overcome such potential bias.

3.1.4 Methodological assumptions in LLS research

Compared to other research methods in social science research, language learning strategies research has two distinctive features. Firstly, language learning strategies are, for their most part, not directly observable since they are mental, internal processes. Researchers normally rely on the learners' indirect accounts of these mental processes, so verbal reports of language learners' internal thoughts are used as one of the most frequently adopted data collection methods in language strategy research. Secondly, according to Cohen and Macaro (2007), 'strategy use is not a fixed attribute of individuals'; language learners' strategy use changes according to different conditions, such as different tasks, different learning contexts, so it is necessary to pay attention to the variable and dynamic nature of strategy use when choosing a research method. The research methods used in the SLA and LLS fields to investigate the learners' motivations and beliefs include diaries, observation, case

studies as well as interviews and focus groups, to access the learners' own interpretive meanings and experiences. The following two research methods are the most frequently used approaches in LLS research.

The retrospective interview (the definition of retrospective is looking back on something that happened in the past. When interviewees are interviewed about past events, this is an example of a retrospective interviewis) is the earliest research method used to investigate language learners' strategy use (for example, Rubin, 1975) and remains an important and widely used technique due to its flexibility. This method can help the researcher access deeper understanding of the learners' LLS use and how it influenced by particular cultural, individual, and contextual factors (Cohen and Macaro, 2007). This method helps the researcher explore and elaborate the different aspects of strategy use. The detailed advantages and problems of using interviews in my study is discussed in section 3.1.4.1.

Another important method frequently adopted for ascertaining learners' strategy use in the LLS research is the self-report questionnaire survey (Cohen,1998; Oxford, 1990). The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford (1990) has been widely used over the world to measure the perceived strategies and their relationships with other variables such as gender, learning style, culture, proficiency levels (Green and Oxford, 1995). The SILL questionnaire is no doubt the most widely used instrument in language LLS research. According to Cohen and

Macaro (2007) and Oxford (personal communication), over 30 doctoral dissertations and a number of articles have used SILL questionnaire surveys to assist their research. The detailed advantages and problems of using a questionnaire survey in my study will be discussed in section 3.1.4.1.

3.1.4.1 Methodological assumptions in my study

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), research methodology can be generally categorised according to three groups of users:

a.   Quantitatively oriented social and behavioural scientists (QUANs) primarily work within the postpositive/positivist paradigm and are principally interested in numerical data and analyses

b.   Qualitatively oriented social and behavioural scientists (QUALs) primarily work within the constructivist paradigm and are principally interested in narrative data and analyses

c.   Mixed methodology scientists work primarily within the pragmatist paradigm and interested in both narrative and numerical data and their analyses.

(Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:4)

Quantitative and qualitative research methods have their distinctive differences in terms of their characteristics, the role of theory, ontology and epistemology. However, quantitative and qualitative research methods are not incompatible, they can combine and complement each other. Nowadays, more and more social research tend to use

both quantitative and qualitative research methods - mixed method research.

My study aimed to find out the participants' views and thoughts to answer the research questions, and the data collected were all concerned with people's opinions and thoughts, thus is basically qualitative, therefore the research was principally underpinned by the qualitative research approach. However, I used two different data collection instruments in my study, namely interview and a questionnaire survey.

The rationale for adopting a mixed research tools was based on the premise that a range of data were able to provide a fuller picture of LLS use in the SLA area due to the advantages of each approach, which could complement and benefit each another. Mixed research instruments can be used in a single study to collect and analyse data both quantitatively and qualitatively. Data can be collected concurrently or sequentially using qualitative research methods while the data can be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively, either of the two may be given priority or be involved in one or more stages of the research process.

I believe the combination of using interview and questionnaire would be the best way to answer the research questions.

Interview

Whilst statistics can generalise patterns, the reason why participants behaved or

thought in certain ways will not be explained. Research into LLS needs to take account of both observable and inner mental processes (Dornyei, 2005b; Ellis, 1994). Moreover, Gao (2007) points out that 'research using qualitative and multi-method approaches can reveal the dynamic interaction between language learners' agency and social structure and this will deepen our understanding of learners' strategic learning as shaped by interaction'. In contrast to data collected from questionnaires, which is quantitatively analyzed, standardized, universal and static, the data collected and analyzed qualitatively from interviews can help to reflect individual LLS use and thus more diversity, which is highly contextual and dynamic (Gao, 2004). As supplementary to the more summative and quantitative results from questionnaire surveys, the data collected and analyzed from qualitative interviews can provide a fuller picture of learners' LLS use both in depth and breadth. Some major qualitative instruments like observation appear to be a 'restricted research tool to investigate since mental process seem unlikely to be captured' (Pen, 2012). So, I decided to use retrospective interviews/individual in-depth interviews to obtain insights into learners' mental processes.

Retrospective semi-structured Interview

Introspective research methods in LLS research

Since research into the learners' language changes or development and the learners' language use are invisible things, some research methods such as behavioural psychology oriented language research investigating the learners behaviour through

observation seemed inadequate here. It is widely accepted that if we want to know why people behave in certain ways, we need to first to know what is going on in their heads. Introspective techniques focusing much more on cognitive processes help the researcher to better investigate the language learners' invisible workings to better explore what people think and their mental processes underlying the language learners' ability and performance.

Introspection is 'the process of observing and reflecting on one's thoughts, feelings, motives, reasoning and mental states with a view to determining the ways in which these processes and states determine one behaviour.' (Nunan, 1992) Introspective accounts mainly accessed through people's verbal reports which reflect the cognitive processes that give rise to their behaviour. However, there are still some problems with introspective methods, as there might be some discrepancies between what the subjects thought they were doing and what they actually did.

Think-aloud techniques, diary studies, retrospection are the three main ways of introspection. My research used retrospective interviews, which means the data were collected some time after the event under investigation took place because it was neither feasible nor desirable to collect the data during the task performance under test conditions.

Semi-structured interview

'The oral interview has been widely used as a research tool in applied linguistics research, in addition to the survey research, it has been used by second language acquisition researchers seeking data on stages and process of acquisition (Ingram, 1984). It is used also by language testers who use the oral interview as a means of assessing proficiency (Ingram, 1984). Socio-cultural linguistics also use interviews to investigate linguistic variation, conversational analysis, and cross-cultural communication. According to Nunan (1992), the semi-structured interview's advantages for language research are, firstly, it allows the interviewees to control the course of the interview. Secondly, it gives the interviewees a great deal of flexibility. Thirdly, and the most distinctively, it gives both interviewees and researchers privileged access to other people's lives.

My research, used one-to- one in-depth semi-structured interviews to allow the interviewer and the interviewees to discuss the English language learning experience in a UK University in-depth. According to Hennik and Hutter (2011), 'the in-depth interview may be described as a conversation with a purpose.' The purpose of my research and of the interviews was to gain insights into the current Chinese students' English study situation using a semi-structured interview guide. If interviews are conducted properly, this can make the interview feel like a conversation. An in-depth interview, as recommended by Hennik and Hutter (2011), is a 'two-way dialogue,' in which the role of the interviewees is to share their stories and the role of the interviewer is to elicit the story. In-depth interviewing is described as 'a

meaning-making partnership between the interviewers and the interviewees' (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006: 128). The rationale for using in-depth interviews in my research is to gain a detailed insight into my participants' perspectives of my research topic. In-depth interviews can help the researcher capture the individuals' own stories and voices. In-depth interviewing is also used to understand the context in which people live (Hennik and Hutter, 2011), thus to better understand why or how individuals formulate a certain lifestyle or idea within a particular sociocultural context. The purpose of in-depth interviews in my research is to explore the students' perceptions of their English learning and the meanings students attach to these experiences in the UK university context.

The rationale for choosing one-to-one interviews instead of focus groups was that the research was focused on collecting the narratives or personal stories of the participants rather than a range of opinions from the participants. As suggested by Wengraf (2001), focus groups often discuss stories or share opinions of other people's experiences, while one-to-one interviews aim to explore the participants' own experiences and opinions. The research aimed to explore the languages problems Chinese Master students actually face, how they attempted to improve their language proficiency, how the use of these strategies changed and developed during their period of study abroad, therefore, it was more appropriate to use interviews to hear the participants' own stories rather than giving opinions on other people's experiences in focus groups, in order to get the most rounded, valid data from the participants' own

actual experiences and situation. The information provided was kept private and confidential as well, and the participants were assured of this.

There are, however, limitations to individual in-depth interviews, which are:

- The interpretation of the interviews can be too subjective. As illustrated by Bryman (2012), the research findings rely too much on the researchers' views. The research results will be influenced by the researchers' view of what is significant and important.

- One-to-one in-depth interviews are difficult to replicate. In the interview, the researcher/interviewer is the main instrument of the data collection. The interview results may be influenced by the characteristics of the researcher such as age, personality, gender and so on; interview results may be influenced by the quality of the researchers' ingenuity in posing questions; In the interview, what is noted depends on the researchers' preferences; all these factors make the interview results difficult to replicate.

- Problems of generalisation. It is often suggested that it is hard to generalize from qualitative research findings to a larger population. Individual interviews can be only conducted with a limited number or a small group since they are time-consuming and costly. The participants in my interview were 16, a relatively small number that cannot be representative of all cases. The students interviewed in my study were not meant to represent a population. As Mitchell (1983: 207) and Yin (2009) suggest, the findings from the interview design are

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more generalisable to theory rather than to populations. In my research, I identified 19 frequently mentioned items concerning different aspects of the current Chinese students' English learning in the UK from the interview results. However, I wanted to test whether these 19 items could apply to a larger population. The interview results can help to develop theory while the self-completed questionnaire can help assess how far the interview findings apply to a larger population.

- Lack of transparency. It is difficult to identify or measure what the researcher actually did with the interviews or how the researcher arrived at her conclusions. According to Bryman and Burgess (2002), the analysis is unclear as it is not objective: in other words, the process of the interview data analysis is frequently unclear. O'Cathain et al. (2008) found in health service research that interview results alone sometimes cannot fully describe a situation unless there are other quantitative results to support them. This concern is increasingly being addressed by researchers who adopt interview or observation research methods that there exist areas of transparency when applying these methods.

In my research, I found the advantages of using in-depth individual interviews can be summarized as allowing me to access participants' perspectives on personal perceptions, experiences, feelings, life stories, as well as enabling me to tackle sensitive topics in depth. Individual interviews also allowed me to understand the

participants' context. For example, my research was about the participants' English learning experience in the UK, and interviews conducted in the UK University was the best way to gain the target information. A limitation of using in-depth individual interviews is that they were time consuming and only a restricted sample could be accessed. What I learnt from interview research was that this approach was very demanding on the interviewer as I needed to be able to set up a rapport, ask questions that triggered responses, be a good listener, and to have the flexibility to change the topic order following the participants' own stories.

Self-completed Likert-Scaled questionnaire survey

To date, the most common data collection instrument adopted in LLS research is written and online questionnaires (Gao, 2004). Student- completed, summative rating scales surveys are believed to be one of the most frequently adopted research methods in the LLS study field due to their advantages of cost-effectiveness and allowing both researchers and participants to gain a quick understanding of the topic. Thus, questionnaires are used in a wide range of LLS studies cross-culturally and internationally. For example, Gu and Johnson (1996) used a vocabulary -learning questionnaire for Chinese tertiary students; Hayashi (1999) used a questionnaire to study Japanese tertiary students' reading strategy use; Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001) also developed a questionnaire to investigate the learners' second language writing strategies. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that SILL has been widely

used by LLS researchers in North American (e.g. Ehrman and Oxford, 1989; Nykios and Oxford, 1993) after which, it increasingly spread to the Asia-Pacific region (e.g. Lin 1999; Ma 1999; Peacock and Ho 2003). SILL also has its various uses in contextualized research, so questionnaire surveys are widely used in every aspect of language learning research (Gao, 2004).

The benefits of using questionnaire in my study were: it was the best way to save time and money to collect data from a large number of participants in a very short time (Gillham, 2008); it seemed the best way to get enough participants to allow a statistical analysis of the results (Pen, 2012). However, the limitation of using questionnaire was that the analytical results were standardized, static and universal, so might not cover all the dimensions of a learner's strategy use, and did not allow deep insights into what they do (Gao, 2004). As mentioned in the literature review, there are other problems with using questionnaires in LLS research. Gao (2004) identified five major problems with questionnaire use in LLS research: diversity versus standardization; universal versus contextual; how often is often; depth against width; dynamic versus static. Moreover, according to Cohen and Macaro (2007), generally, self-report questionnaire surveys have the following three potential problems: firstly, learners may not recognise or interpret accurately the description of the strategy in each item; secondly, they may choose a strategy they do not use very often or claim to use strategies they do not use; thirdly, they may fail to remember the strategies they have used in the past; finally they may give what they think as the best answers

instead of giving the true answers.

In my research, the difficulties I encountered were ,firstly, my research demanded rich data sources and mixed ways of data collecting, which was very time-consuming. Secondly, this research dealt with both textual and numerical data, the analysis of which also was time-consuming, requiring me to have the ability not only to be familiar with these forms of inquiry but also know how to analyze and integrate the data using qualitative and quantitative techniques.

3.1.5 Overall relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology in my research

Cohen, et al (2011:3) suggests that ontology, epistemology and methodology give rise to ways of thinking about methods and data collection. Firstly, ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions, then epistemological assumptions give rise to methodological considerations, and finally, methodological considerations give rise to the instrumentation and data collection methods. Table 3.2 illustrates the overall connection between the qualitative research methods and the underlying ontological and epistemological foundations of in this study.

Ontology orientation	Constructionism
Epistemology orientation	Interpretivism
Methodological orientation	Qualitative research
Research tools	Interviews/ Likert-scaled self-completed questionnaire

Table 3.2: Overall connection between ontology, epistemology and methodology in this research

I conducted my study under constructivist and interpretive paradigms, which are normally related to a qualitative approach, to best answer the research questions. It is important to note that this study prioritises the qualitative component and I essentially identify myself as an interpretive researcher.

This study under the guideline of interpretive research can be summarized with the following features, according to Bergman (2008) and Creswell (2003):

- The centrality of a natural setting-the data was collected when the participants were situated in an authentic UK university in an English speaking environment.

- The centrality of participants' meanings—this study focused essentially on asking about the participants' views and thinking of the research topic. For example, they could express their views freely as the interviews and survey

questionnaires used mother tongue, not English to ensure comprehensibility as well.

- The capacity to describe the complexity of students' perceptions about their changing LLS use under the changing English speaking environment.

- The importance of using multiple data collection tools - the data collected included semi-structured individual interview and contextualized Likert-Scaled questionnaire.

- The explicit focus on inductive and exploratory research approaches.

3.1.6 Validity of qualitative research

Validity is an important check on the efficacy of the research. As pointed out, qualitative research should be conducted under the following principles to ensure its validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992): a) data should be collected in a natural setting, b) data should be socially and culturally situated, c) the researcher should come from the researched world, d) as we live in an interpreted world, it is crucial to understand participants' understandings of the world, in other words, human beings use complex instruments to understand other humans' lives, e) the research should be based on a holistic understanding, f) the researcher, not only the research tool, is key to the research, g) data collected are descriptive, h) data should be analyzed inductively rather than simply according to some priori categories, i) data should be interpreted based on the respondents' understanding rather than the researchers' understanding, j) reporting and seeing the situation should be through the

eyes' of the participants without bias, k) it is essential to grasp the respondents' meaning and intention.

Compared to validity in quantitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four key criteria of validity in qualitative research: a) credibility (replacing the concept of internal validity in quantitative research), b) transferability (replacing the concept of external validity in quantitative research), c) dependability (replacing the concept of reliability in quantitative research), d) confirmability (replacing objectivity in quantitative research).

3.1.6.1 The role of the researcher

Maxwell (1992) argues that the researcher needs to be cautious and bear in mind the notion of authenticity when doing qualitative research to ensure validity. Moreover, as suggested by Mishler (1990), 'understanding' is a more suitable term than 'validity' in qualitative research, since we, as researchers, are also part of the researched world so we cannot be totally objective about the research. It is crucial for the researcher to be as honest and accurate as possible in recording their understanding of people's views. The key to ensuring validity in qualitative research is the ability to understand the meanings from the data collected and to draw inferences based on the data analysis.

Maxwell (1992) gives his notion of 'understanding' from five perspectives to better interpret 'validity' in the qualitative research:

a) descriptive validity is the ability to keep the research true and accurate to make sure that the data collected is not made up, distorted or selective; the researcher needs to stick to what actually happened be objective to the data in the research. In this respect, validity can be seen as reliability.

b) Interpretive validity is the ability to catch the meanings, interpretations, intentions, terms given by the researched person or group, so the researcher needs to understand what to the data given by the participants means to them as the subjects in this respect, validity can be thought as fidelity.

c) Theoretical validity: theory here is assumed to be explanation, it refers to the researchers' ability to explain the phenomena.

d) Generalizability is the ability to generalize within specific communities, groups, circumstances or situations (internal validity), and the ability to generalize beyond or to outsider situations, communities or circumstances (external validity). In qualitative research, internal validity has greater significance than external validity since qualitative research is context bounded and in-depth. The theory generated may be useful in understanding similar situations or groups.

e) Evaluative validity is the ability to evaluate and judge the research although the researchers' own evaluation criteria may intrude.

In sum, the level of validity in qualitative research is largely determined by how far the researcher can understand the actual data. Validity in qualitative research also relies on the purpose of the participants, the researchers, and effective data collection

instruments properly chosen to achieve these purposes.

3.1.6.2 Validity in interviews

In interviews, one problem is bias. When conducting an interview, the interviewer should aim to avoid bias as much as possible to achieve greater validity. Bias may be caused by the characteristics of the researcher, the characteristics of the interviewees, the content of the questions, more specifically, bias may be caused by: a) a tendency for the interviewer to regard the interviewees as in her/his own image, c) a tendency of the interviewer to seek the answers that can support the preliminary ideas, d) interviewers' misperception about what the interviewees say, e) interviewees misunderstanding about what is being asked (Cohen et al., 2011).

Other factors such as race, gender, religion, status, social class and age in certain situations might lead to bias in the interview. However, Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) argue that since interviews are interpersonal human interactions, it is inevitable that the interviewer and interviewees may influence each other, and therefore the data. Another issue to be noted is to avoid leading questions. A leading question is the one that makes assumptions about the respondents. Leading questions influence interviewees' responses. For example, in my study, I avoided asking questions such as 'do you like or dislike life in the UK?' This assumes the interviewees' attitudes towards the life in the UK are either like or dislike. I needed to ask open question like how do you feel about life in the UK? to allow the students to answers based on their

true feelings to get a more rounded answer.

In line with the above discussion, I conducted my interviews under the following principles to improve validity. I needed to establish trust with the interviewees and provide a friendly atmosphere for the interview to avoid being seen as an authority. I needed to clearly inform the interviewees about the purpose, form and structure of the interviews to make sure the participants were clear about each stage. The terminology needed to be clear and familiar to the respondents as well as context and material referred to. The participants were allowed to take their time and respond in their own ways. As the interviewer, I tried to be empathic and sensitive by using active listening skills and being sensitive to how things were expressed. Non-verbal communication such as polite gesture and eye contact was also involved, and I was alert to some aspects in the interview which could be of significance to the respondents or which they might be sensitive about. When conducting the interview, as the interviewer, I always tried to keep to the point and stick to the matter in hand while not to be direct. I tried to address the targeted areas, while checking the validity and consistency of the questions to each interviewee by being well-organised with a check-list of key issues.

3.1.7 Reliability in qualitative/interview research

Reliability refers to 'the consistency of a measure of a concept' (Bryman, 2012). According to Seale (1999), central to ensuring reliability is the examination of its

trustworthiness.

Bias is also an important factor that may undermine reliability in interviews. Oppenheim (1992) suggest several causes of bias that can influence reliability in interviews: a) biased sampling, sometimes chosen by the researcher without strictly adhering to sampling requirements, b) poor conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, c) changes to the way the question is expressed, d) biased probing and poor prompting, e) poor management and use of supporting material, f) selective data reporting, g) poor handling of difficult interviews.

As suggested by Cohen et al. (2011), one way of improving reliability is to follow a highly constructed schedule where each interview follows the same form of words in the questions. For example, in the attitudinal questions, changes in wording, emphasis and context may undermine reliability since exactly the same question will not have been put to each respondent. Alterations to the wording, recording, rapport or procedures will lead to poor reliability. It is essential to train the interviewer to improve reliability. Silverman (1993) claims that it is important for each respondent to understand the questions in the same way. According to his suggestion, careful interview piloting interviewer training and a highly structured interview with closed questions can enhance the reliability. However, Silverman (1993) also points out that open-ended questions allow the respondents to demonstrate their unique way of looking at the world according to their understanding and situation. Open-ended

questions with different formats are suitable for specific participants. My interviews used both closed questions - to enhance validity and reliability - and open-ended questions to explore individual view-points.

However, as discussed in section 3.1.3.2, reliability in qualitative interview research is always problematic since the data collected via interview is based on what people say and there can be many problems with what people say they think. It can be argued that people's answers to the interview questions may not truly reveal the event. Conscious or unconscious bias is always possible. Moreover, just as human beings use different and complex ways to understand other human's life experiences, different researchers' interpretations of the results of interview answers may be different. In all, data reliability is an in-built problem of qualitative interview research. Thus, the use of multiple methods of gathering data is an important strategy to try to mitigate such potential bias.

3.1.8 Validity and reliability in questionnaire surveys

Reliability in questionnaires refers to the ability to repeat the use of the same questionnaire with similar groups at other times and get similar results indicating that the questions are appropriate and relevant to similar cohorts. The reliability of questionnaires is reduced by ambiguous questions or very long questions. Reliability in questionnaire can be addressed if the questions are worded in clear simple sentences concerning one topic. Validity in questionnaire refers to two points,

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according to Belson (1986). The first point is that respondents should complete the questionnaire accurately, honestly and correctly. The second point is that those 'who fail to return their questionnaire would have given the same distribution of answers as did the returnees.' As illustrated by Cohen et al (2011), one issue central to reliability and validity in questionnaire surveys is sampling. The sample size should not be too small, unrepresentative or skewed, as this would distort the data. Compared with interviews, one advantage of questionnaires is they tend to be more reliable. Questionnaires can be more honest if they are anonymous.

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 Selection of the participants

The group of Warwick University MA students, newly-arrived from China, who started their course in October, 2014 were the main population from which this project's sample was drawn. Convenience sampling can be described as 'choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained ' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; p.155). The advantage of choosing MA students from Warwick University is that the I was studying in the target university, thus, the respondents would l be available and easy to access.   Moreover, Warwick University has features in common with many other universities in that it has international students and staff and contains a large number of Chinese students studying a variety of degrees and courses and a lot of student

organisations and groups are on campus especially for Chinese students.   Since this is a study of the shifts in Chinese students' LLS use, it was most appropriate to choose participants who were newly-arrived MA students. Patton (2005: 243) refers to a purposeful sampling approach as 'maximum variation sampling' to 'purposefully pick up a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interests'. The choice of participants according to the maximum variation will help the researcher get the broadest range of strategic English learning approaches used by a group of newly-arrived postgraduate learners from China studying in a UK speaking environment. Therefore, newly-arrived MA Chinese students from different Masters courses, with different levels of language proficiency, male and female, and living in different types of accommodation would be selected. Such a selection framework would help to minimize the danger of biased sampling.

I selected the participants according to the following criteria: firstly, all the participants were native Chinese speakers - Mandarin and Cantonese were their only first languages. Secondly, all the participants were 2014-2015 Master students in Warwick University. Thirdly, none of them had lived outside the area of China before they came the UK, I was able to capture the more distinctive experience and shifts once they were moving to a totally different language environment. A final criteria for participant selection was that participants were of different genders and from different disciplinary backgrounds.   The rationale here was I would get a broad range of experience.

Contacting the research participants

The initial access to the newly-arrived 2014-2015 Chinese Master students for this research was through the help of a part-time Warwick University Chinese international assistant who gave some support sessions and suggestions every year to the newly-arrived Chinese Master students about how to improve their English language skills and quickly adapt to UK postgraduate study. One month before I started my first stage of data collection, I found and talked to this lady about my research and my aims and she was very willing to help me. She sent messages to every 2014-2015 newly-arrived Chinese Master student she knew. She asked them to think about participating in my study. If anyone expressed their willingness and interest in participating in my study, she recommended them to me with their contact information, then I contacted these students directly. In order to build a friendly and positive relationship of trust, when I first contacted with participants for the first stage data collection in November, 2014, through Wechat - currently the most widely used chatting app by Chinese people - I introduced myself and gave my current occupation (i.e. I was a Phd. student from the Centre for Education Studies). I explained the purpose and significance of my research in simple terms, for example, I was interested in the challenges newly-arrived Chinese students facie in adapting to study in the UK, how they practice or improve their English in an English medium country. When I met them for the first time, I provided my business-card and explained my position in more detail. Moreover, in order to set up a friendly relationship with the

participants, I made sure that there were mutual benefits for those who participated in my study by offering them extra help, such as giving suggestions or help whenever they found difficulties in their studies or adapting to the life in the UK. Anyone who participated in my study received a reward. The ethical issues for my use of incentives to encourage participants had to be commensurate with the good sense and avoid choices which in themselves had undesirable effects such as offering cigarettes. I gave the respondents a small amount of money to thank them for their participation, this is discussed in the ethical considerations section 3.2.6. 1 provided the participants, whether interviewees or questionnaire survey respondents with a printed copy (see appendix 1) or electronic version informing them about the aim of study and their own rights and requirements for their participating in the study, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time (see detailed ethical concerns in section 3.2.6).

The first stage of data collection was a semi-structured retrospective interview (see the interview questions in appendix 2), with each of 8 newly arrived 2014-2015 Chinese Master students during November. At the end of the interview, apart from the answering my interview questions, I also obtained basic information such as the participants' name and their Wechat name, other contact information such as email address and mobile number in case of any problem in contacting them via Wechat.

For the second stage of data collection, a deeper semi-structured retrospective interview was carried out. 16 Chinese Master students (from 2014-2015 academic

year) participated during June and July, 2015. Eight of them were the same participants who had participated in the first stage of data collection. Eight new participants formed the new group. I obtained access to these eight new participants mainly through recommendations from the first eight participants. Another way to contact the new participants was through the recommendations of my friend, a member of Warwick University Chinese society, which has the largest number of Chinese student members. The last way to find new participants was through some social events and communication with new people, I talked to the students about my research and they expressed their willingness to participate in my study. The reason for increasing the number of participants was to get wider understanding, new issues emerging from interviews with participants in the new groups could also help to ensure the research results were as rich as possible.

The last stage data collection involved an online questionnaire survey of around 200 2014-2015 Chinese Masters students. The first way to access the target participants was through email. I used the advanced Warwick people search to find the participants by name and basic information with their email addresses and the course information. The second way to get participants was through Wechat, an app which contains the largest number of Chinese students in Warwick University. There were several Wechat groups specifically for 2014-2015 UK Chinese Master students and I became a member of these groups. I sent my questionnaire link to these groups with a brief introduction to my research topic and my polite request to complete the

questionnaire survey. In order to encourage more students to complete the questionnaire, anyone who finished the questionnaire got 5 CNY (Chinese Yuan) as a small reward through online money transfer. The third way to access participants was to ask the help of my friends who were 2014-2015 Chinese Master students, as they had easiest access to the most of the target participants, such as their classmates, roommates.

3.2.2 Institutional context of the study

The research was conducted within the University of Warwick. The University of Warwick gained university status in 1965. Currently, it is 51st a in the world ranking of universities, with international features and English is assumed to be the medium for pursuing academic studies. The university is formed of four major faculties: Social sciences, Arts, Medicine and Science, under which there are twenty-nine academic departments, and over fifty research centres and institutions. In October 2014, the total number of students was 23570, among which were 9317 postgraduate students and 8608 international students. The international students came from over 120 different countries. Warwick University also contains a large number of Chinese students undergoing both undergraduate and postgraduate study. Moreover, the university and halls of residence provide a variety of social, cultural and sports activities, to enrich the students' lives and study experiences. Thus, Warwick University has features in common with many other universities in that it is international and contains a large number of Chinese students who are studying a

variety of degrees courses, and a lot of student organisations and groups are provided on campus especially for Chinese students.

3.2.3 An overview of the stages of the data collection

Since the LLSs used by Chinese students studying in the UK may change over time, it was helpful to obtain data on learners' strategy use at three stages: beginning-sojourn, late mid-sojourn and end of-sojourn (see details in Table 3.3). All the data was collected during the 2014-2015 postgraduate academic year. I would see each round of data collection as episodes enabling a deepening understanding.

The first stage/set (beginning-sojourn) of data involved a number of one-to-one/face-to-face retrospective semi-structured interviews conducted during October to November, 2014 when the newly-arrived Chinese students had just begun their postgraduate study in the UK. Eight randomly selected newly-arrived Chinese MA students across different subjects participated in this stage, during which the researcher aimed to get a general understanding of how they felt about life in the UK and what problems they encountered as well as what language learning strategies they used at that time.

Based on the analysis and the results of the first stage data collection, a more insightful form of data collection - semi-structured retrospective in-depth face to face/ one to one interviews - were conducted in the second stage (late mid- sojourn) during

May-June/2015 when the participants had experienced most of their Master study life in the UK. I conducted in-depth individual interviews with the same 8 participants interviewed at stage one of the research aiming to get more insights into individual's LLS use. I aimed to understand the 8 participants' development process of their language experiences and to discover any changes in their language learning strategies compared to their previous language learning experiences on their arrival in the UK (the first set of interview data). I also interviewed another 8 new participants to get a wider understanding. In sum, the interviews of these 16 participants in this 2nd stage aimed to identify the overall shifts in terms of their language strategy use after they had experienced the academic, language and sociocultural challenges during their study in the UK. This would capture the participants' language strategic management and efforts to overcome the sociocultural challenges and understanding the participants' developing LLS use and the causes for the changes with regard to their identity development. The most frequently mentioned LLSs were used to generate the items in the questionnaire survey.

The final stage (ending-sojourn) of data collection was a large scale quantitative questionnaire survey conducted mainly during August- September, 2015 when the participants had experienced nearly one year's living and studying in the UK. Based on the results of the first and second sets of data collection and analysis, a final modified and contextualized five-point Likert-Scaled questionnaire model particularly aimed to investigate Chinese students studying abroad in Warwick University was

generated by the researcher to obtain data from a potentially greater number of respondents (approximately 200) to generalize the patterns of the learners' LLS use based on frequencies measured through the questionnaire. The questionnaire had both an online and a paper version. I sent the paper and online questionnaire to Warwick University MA Chinese students where I studied since it was easier and more convenient to get access to these participants.

Stages of data collection	Purpose	Methods used	Number of participants
First stage: first semester of their Master's studies (November 2014)	To gain a general understanding of what language problems they had	Individual retrospective semi-structured interview	8
Second stage: last semesters of their Master's studies (May- June 2015)	Capturing the participants' language strategic management and efforts to overcome the sociocultural challenges; Understanding the participants' developing LLS use and the causes for the changes with regard to their identity development;	In-depth individual retrospective semi-structured interview	16 (8 new)

Last stage: dissertation period, end of their Master's degree courses (August- September 2015)	To generalize patterns of current UK University Chinese Master students' English learning strategy use	Self-report questionnaire survey	200 including interviewees

Table 3.3: The research stages in my research

The participants' identities would be kept anonymous, I allocated pseudonyms to refer

to the interviewees and their profiles are shown in Table 3.4:

Group	Name	Gender	Age	Course attended
This group was interviewed in both the first and second research stages	Xin	Female	22	Leadership and Management in Education
	Yu	Female	22	Economics
	Jun	Female	22	Accounting and Finance
	Susan	Female	22	English Language teaching
	Bo	Male	22	English Language teaching
	Jia	Male	22	Supply Chain
	Bing	Female	25	Education studies
	Xia	Male	22	Politics and International studies

This group was interviewed in the second stage	Lulu	Female	25	Education studies
	Hui	Female	22	Food security
	Xiao	Male	23	Computer science
	Meng	Female	22	Supply Chain
	Tao	Female	22	Education studies
	Ying	Female	23	Accounting and Finance
	Yue	Female	23	Supply Chain
	Doris	Female	22	Sociology

Table 3.4: Basic information for the interviewees

As shown in the above table, 16 participants' English language learning experiences were investigated in this study, 4 males and 12 females. Their ages were between 22 and 25. All were unknown to the researcher before the research started came from different departments doing 11 different courses.

3.2.4 The first stage/ second stage interview

In preparing the interview questions, as suggested by Bryman (2012), the primary questions that I generated were based on the guideline 'what about this thing that is puzzling me?' The puzzlement can be stimulated by the literature about the research topic, personal experience, discussions with supervisors, friends, and colleagues, the thoughts that emerged when situated in the UK English speaking environment. The formulation of the research questions should not be too specific to allow alternative perspectives of inquiry that may emerge during the interview. Meanwhile, I had to

ask 'what do I need to know in order to answer each of the research questions that I'm interested in?' (Bryman, 2012) Gradually, an order of interview questions was generated on the basis of the above interview principle. The interview guide was prepared to formulate a certain order of research topics to ensure the questions asked went reasonably well, but I was prepared to change the question order during the actual interviews. I designed a way of interviewing (or asking questions) to answer my research questions, but tried to avoid making questions too specific and used comprehensible or relevant language for the interview participants. In this research, the interviews were all conducted in Chinese to allow the participants - whose first language is Chinese - to understand the questions more precisely and to express their ideas more freely and easily. I did not ask leading questions (Bryman, 2012).

Moreover, I made sure I was familiar with the context in which the participants studied and lived in order to better understand the participants' responses. The overall social context identified in this research is a UK University, where the researcher and participants live and study in the same social context, namely, the University of Warwick. I used a good quality recording machine and microphone because all the interview data had to be transcribed from the recording. I use an Iphone to record, because it has the best quality of recording and is easiest way to operate as far as I know. I made sure I was thoroughly familiar with the operation of the equipment before beginning my interviews. I needed to find an interview place as quiet as possible to ensure little or no outside noise would reduce the recording quality. The

interview place is better to be private to ensure the interviewees do not have to worry about being interrupted or overheard, so I recommended the places such as interviewees' accommodation, library, park, café, and the interviewees chose place based on their convenience. I prepared myself to be a good interviewer. Kvale (1996) suggests that a good interviewer must first be a good listener and active or alert during the interview; a good listener needs the ability to distinguish and pick up what is really important point and avoid asking pointless questions.   Secondly, he or she has to be flexible. Thirdly, according to Bryman (2012), he or she has to be non-judgemental which means 'try not to indicate agreement or disagreement with the interviewees.' I made sure I did not make judgements about the respondents' views or opinions, which could influence later answers. Finally, as Cohen and Macaro (2007) suggest, 'strategy use is not a fixed attribute of individuals,' language learners' strategy use will keep changing under a variety of different conditions, such as different tasks, different learning conditions, I always paid attention to the variable and dynamic nature of strategy use when conducting the interviews. I first undertook some pilot interviews to gain some experiences and to learn how to ensure the interview flowed well and I was prepared to deal with unexpected issues that may arise during the interview, since they can be very demanding for first-time interviewers. Some qualities proposed by Kvale (1996) and Bryman (2012) that helped me to be a good interviewer are summarized as follows:

- be knowledgeable (be thoroughly familiar) with the topics of the interview.

- be able to construct or steer the interview to answer the research questions.

- be gentle to the interviewees and allow them enough time to think.

- be patient with pauses, ask questions in a clear, simple easy way.

- be critical and prepared to deal with inconsistencies in the interviewees' responses.

- be able to interpret or to understand the meanings of the interviewees' responses, but without 'imposing meanings on them.'

I also needed to balance the interview that neither talking too much nor too little, so as not make the interviewees passive but make them feel they are talking along the 'right lines'. I needed to be attentive and sensitive to what was said, to know what the participants wanted to contribute, to ensure the participants that their answers would treated confidentially. Bearing all the above issues in mind, I started the field work.

The data collection first started with a small group of interviewees. At this stage, I was aiming to get a general understanding of the current English learning situations of Chinese Master students studying in the UK, how they felt about the life in the UK, what language problems they encountered, the current English language learning strategies used by the newly- arrived Chinese students. I chose to conduct individual semi-structured interviews.   Since there was no prior data, individual semi-structured interviews helped me to find out the current situation of Chinese Master students' English learning experience at first hand through one- to-one in-depth conversation. Based on the sampling criteria (see detailed sampling strategy in section 3.2.1), 8

newly-arrived Chinese Master students studying different subjects at Warwick university were interviewed at this first stage. First stage interviews were all face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews. The students were all studying and living in the University of Warwick during October and November, 2014.

Before the interview, I developed an interview guide (see appendix 2). I made appointments with the participants, discussed with them the time and the places to meet. The interviews were carried out in quiet places based on the participants' convenience - the library, campus café, or at home, park wherever it was convenient for them. During the course of the interview, I first sent the interviewees a brief introduction to my research and its purpose h as well as consent forms attached to my business card (see appendix 1). I introduced myself, as a final year PhD student from the Centre for Educational Studies. Since this was the first meeting, I tried to create a relaxed atmosphere, to make myself a good interviewer by using friendly and polite expressions/gestures, such as smiling, nodding my head, giving simple and positive respond like 'yes, right, interesting' in Chinese to relax the interviewees so they felt free to speak more about their true feelings. All the interview languages were conducted according to the participants' choices, and they all chose Mandarin to allow them to express their ideas more easily and clearly. I conducted the individual semi-structured interview using the interview guide (see appendix 2) while giving the interviewees the flexibility to express their ideas according to their own situations. The average length of each interview was about 45 minutes. Interview time and

lengths are shown in Table 3.5:

Participants	Date	Total duration
Xin	27/10/2014	50 minutes
Yu	31/10/2014	55 minutes
Jun	7/11/2014	40 minutes
Susan	12/11/2014	42 minutes
Bo	18/11/2014	38 minutes
Jia	22/11/2014	36 minutes
Bing	26/11/2014	48 minutes
Xia	30/11/2014	52 minutes

Table 3.5: First stage interview schedule and length of interview

In the second stage data collection, I aimed to see the shifts in language learning strategies and tried to find out how and why the Chinese students change or develop their language learning strategies, what are the social and cultural influencing factors leading to these changes? I spent 2 months on the first stage data analysis, based on the result of the first stage data collection, I conducted the second stage interview when the students were approaching the end of their Master study. There were 16 interviewees to be interviewed in this stage, 8 of them were old participants interviewed in the first stage, other 8 were new participants, they were also Chinese Master students studying in the UK for the first year. All the interviews were

individual semi-structured interview under the interview guide (see appendix 3). 15

interviews were face-to- face interviews, 1 is online interview since the participant

was living in another city at that moment. All the interviews were conducted in

Mandarin. The average length of each interview was about at least one hour. The

second stage interview time and length are shown in the following Table 3.6:

Participants	Dates	Total duration	Participants
Xin	15/5/2015	1:10:00	First round participants
Yu	3/5/2015	1:08:00	
Jun	7/5/2015	1:23:00	
Susan	17/5/2015	56 minutes	
Bo	18/5/2015	1:05:00	
Jia	4/6/2015	1:09:00	
Bing	9/6/2015	57 minutes	
Xia	23/6/2015	1:06:00	
LuLu	6/5/2015	1:15:00	Added participants
Hui	6/6/2015	1:12:00	
Xiao	10/6/2015	1:22:00	
Meng	28/5/2015	57 minutes	
Tao	25/6/2015	1:25:00	
Ying	19/5/2015	59 minutes	
Yue	28/5/2015	1:26:00	

| Doris | 24/6/2015 | 1:02:00 | |

Table 3.6: Second stage interview schedule and length of the interview

In order to test out the interview results on a larger sample and broaden my research, I gave a questionnaire survey to 200 respondents in my final research stage to ensure the results had greater transparency as well as being more replicated and generalized.

3.2.5 Final stage five-point (Likert-scaled) self-completion questionnaire survey

The final data collected was 200 questionnaire surveys. Compared to the interview, the self-completed questionnaire had the following advantages:

- Cheaper. Interviews can be expensive. When there is a large sample to investigate, questionnaires are much cheaper in time and money. 200 participants were involved in the questionnaire survey, almost 190 online. Compared with the interviews which involved the cost of travel and telephone, there were no huge cost in the questionnaire survey except for a little financial rewards to the participants.

- Quicker. Interviews are usually more expensive in terms of the time they take up. It would take a long time to conduct individual interviews with a sample of over a hundred people. However, 200 questionnaires can be sent out through the internet or in paper form at the same time. It only took three minutes on average for each participant to finish my questionnaire.

- No interviewer effect. As discussed in sections 3.1.4.3 and 3.1.6.2, the interviewer's gender, ethnicity or social background may cause bias to the

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answers given by the respondents. The questionnaires are all completed by the respondents themselves, and so interviewer effects are eliminated. Sudman and Bradburn (1982) also suggest that 'questionnaires work better than personal interviews when a question carries the possibility of such bias.' Moreover, as Tourangeau and Smith (1996) point out, for sensitive issues such as sexual partners, drug use or abortion, compared with interview, self-completed questionnaires can help to reduce anxiety and the respondents tend to report more. Respondents don't face the problems of the researcher asking the questions in different ways or orders. However, the questionnaire in my research did not entirely avoid researcher effects since the respondents knew basic information about the researcher at the beginning of the questionnaire form, which could cause a different response to an anonymous questionnaire.

- Convenience. Compared with interview, the questionnaire is more convenient for respondents since they can answer the questions whenever and wherever they want and at any speed they want to go at. (Bryman, 2012)

3.2.5.1 Questionnaire design

Based on the results of the first and second stages' data analysis, I sorted out the 18 English learning strategies most frequently used by the interviewees and 1 current English learning difficulty most frequently mentioned by the interviewees. I put all these 19 items in my questionnaire (see appendix 4). Each statement objectively

describes one specific aspect of the students' English learning. The 19 items all developed from the first and second stage interview data analysis. I used a five point scale: 1. Never or almost never true of me, 2. Usually not true of me, 3. Somewhat true of me, 4. Usually true of me 5. Always or almost always true of me, as the choice of answers to each statement to investigate the students' opinions or feelings about a particular issue. However, the inherent problem of the points in Likert-Scaled questionnaires should also be noted. The scale points cannot be precisely defined or the 'distance' between each point measured. Ambiguity in the questionnaire items' wording can cause further interpretation problems for learners with different understandings of how usual is usually in my questionnaire. As Gao (2004: 7) states,

'The vagueness of wording has been another persistent problem in using questionnaires in LLS research such that different interpretations of instructions such as often and usually may have caused the learners to produce different answers to the questionnaire at different times.'

Gu, Wen and Wu (1995) recommend other research methods, for example interview or observation, be used to corroborate the findings from a questionnaire survey to overcome such problems in local research contexts.

Moreover, I ensured each item expressed one single idea and was worded in a straightforward way and easy to understand (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). Apart from the

19 five-point scaled items, there were 2 open profile questions concerning the respondents' subjects and how long they had been in the UK, to find any correlation between these two factors and their strategy use. According to Cohen et al. (2011), the respondents may be unwilling to think and write answers if there are too many open questions, however, the questionnaire may lack coverage or authenticity if only closed questions are used. Therefore, my questionnaire ended with an optional open question asking the respondents to share any English learning strategies that may not have been mentioned in the questionnaire to ensure authenticity (see appendix 4). According to Nemoto & Beglar (2014), items should be written in 'a language that the respondents understand well or that is their native language.' I ensured the respondents immediately and accurately understood the meaning of each item expressed in mother tongue Chinese language instead of English. A poor understanding of the meaning of an item can lead to inaccurate responses that will reduce validity and reliability. The questionnaire was designed in Chinese to allow the Chinese students to easily understand it and all the questions are laid out on one page to ensure the respondents found them easy and quick to answer.

3.2.5.2 Piloting the questionnaire

Piloting the questionnaire had several functions, principally to increase its validity and reliability and the practicality (Oppenheim, 1992). As suggested by Cohen et al. (2011), there is a need to pilot questionnaires to refine the contents, length and wording, etc. to make the questionnaire appropriate to the targeted respondents. I

conducted 3 pilot questionnaire surveys and made amendments according to the respondents' suggestions to ensure each item was clearly worded and the respondents were satisfied with the layout as well as to ensure the online link worked well. More specifically, I piloted my questionnaire according to the following guidelines: to check the clarity of the questionnaire instructions and items, to check the time taken for the respondents to complete the questionnaire was within three minutes to ensure the respondents kept their concentration and interest when completing the questionnaire, to check readability levels for the target respondents and avoid difficulties in wording. I also needed feedback on the layout, type of question and format (e.g. open questions, rating scale) in order to delete irrelevant and redundant wording, and identify omissions and finally to check all the items were understandable by the respondents, identify any over complex items.

3.2.5.3 Returns

The respondents were all 2014-2015 Chinese Master students studying in the UK (see details for sampling strategy in section 3.2.1). I sent the questionnaire link through Chinese friends' recommendations, I used Warwick University's advanced people search to get to find the 2014-2015 Chinese Masters' students email addresses and politely invited them to complete my questionnaire survey. I also sent my questionnaire link to Warwick Chinese Master's students' online chat groups. To encourage more responses, every respondent could get 5 RMB as a reward. 197 returns came from the online questionnaire survey, 3 returns on paper. I sent out 500

online questionnaires, so the return rate was around 40%, and I sent out 5 paper questionnaires, so the return rate was 60%. In total, I sent 505 questionnaires out and got 200 back. The total return rate was 39.6%.

3.2.6 Ethical considerations

The ethical issues in my research were based on the BERA' (2011) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.

- Voluntary Informed Consent

Before the research got underway, I had voluntary informed consent from the participants to ensure they understood and agreed to participate in the study without duress. Moreover, I ensured all the participants were clear about the research process in which they were to be engaged, including why their participation was necessary, how it would be used and to whom it would be reported as well as that their participation and interactions were being monitored and analysed only for research purposes. An informed consent form was provided for the participants (see appendix 1).

- Right to withdraw

I recognized and informed all the participants they had the right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time. If this situation happened, I must examine my own actions to assess whether I had contributed to the respondents withdrawal and whether I needed to make changes to my approach to persuade the participant to re-engage. Moreover, in most cases, the appropriate course of action

would be for me to accept the participants' decision to withdraw and I needed to be careful of any decision to persuade a participant to re-engage.

- Incentives

My use of incentives to encourage participants had to be commensurate with the good sense and must avoid choices which in themselves had undesirable effects such as offering cigarettes. The incentive in my research was financial reward and it would not cause health problems.

- Privacy

The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data was considered the norm for the conduct of the research. I recognized the participants' entitlement to privacy and informed them of their rights to confidentiality and anonymity, that information provided by them would in no way reveal their identity and that that no information provided by the participants would be shared with anyone else without the participants' permission. Conversely, I also recognized the participants' rights to be identified with any publication of their original contributions if they wished.

I complied with the legal requirements about the storage and use of personal data as set down by the Data Protection Act (1998) that in essence, the participants are entitled to know how and why their personal data is being stored and to what purpose and, to whom it may be made available. Furthermore, I ensured the data was kept securely and that any publication in the future on the Internet did not directly or indirectly lead to a breach of the agreed confidentiality and anonymity.

- Other issues for the interview and questionnaire research

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Before carrying out the interviews, permission was collected for recording the participants' voices. During the course of the interviews, I asked if it was acceptable to continue with the present issue every now and again, which provided an opportunity for the interviewees to ask to be released from the interview if they felt uncomfortable. For both the questionnaire and the interview data, all the participants had been given a written explanation of the research purpose and the assurance of confidentiality prior to the start of the research.

Chapter 4 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Data analysis for the interview data

In this section, I will describe how I analysed the interview data. I will explain why I chose thematic analysis as the method to analyse my interview data. The thematic analysis (TA) was conducted using Braun and Clark's (2006, 2013) systematic guidelines. I present a detailed description of the process of the data analysis.

4.1.1 An introduction to qualitative analysis methods

There many different kinds of qualitative data analysis methods. I briefly introduce four qualitative analytic methods: Thematic Analysis (TA), Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Grounded Theory (GT) and Pattern-based Discourse Analysis (DA).

Thematic Analysis (TA) is seen as a flexible foundational method in qualitative analysis. This is a method used for identifying themes and patterns across the data base with regard to the research questions. This method is possibly the most widely used in qualitative data analysis, but was not 'branded' as a specific data analysis method until recently (Braun and Clark, 2006; 2013).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is seen as an 'experiential and

interpretive' method. This method is an increasingly popular approach in areas such as clinical, health and counselling psychology. This method was developed by the British psychologist, Jonathan Smith and colleagues. It focuses on 'how people make sense of their lived experience'. This method is more suitable for individual case analysis, and to generalize patterns or themes within a small group of participants (Smith et al., 2009).

Grounded Theory (GT) is seen as an 'inductive yet theorised' method. This method is a very popular qualitative data analysing method especially in the US and has the longest history. This method was developed by the US sociologists, Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). GT has evolved dramatically ever since, with different kinds of GT theories on offer. This method focuses on 'building theory from data' and, since it originated within sociology, this method focuses on understanding social activities. The analysis is conducted around 'key categories (similar to themes)' (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1997).

Pattern-based Discourse Analysis (DA) is seen an approach 'looking as what language does' (Braun and Clark, 2013). It is, broadly speaking, a data analysis method which focuses on the patterns in language use in relation to the 'social production of reality' (ibid). This method aims to understand how 'accounts of objectives and events are constructed in particular ways' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

4.1.2 Applying Thematic Analysis (TA) in my interview data analysis

Briefly, Thematic Analysis is a method of analysing data to identity themes and report patterns. Thematic Analysis is widely used in interpreting various kinds of research topics (Boyatzis, 1998). The following section explains why I chose TA to analyse my interview data.

Compared with the other above three data analysis methods, namely IPA, Grounded theory and Discourse Analysis, Thematic analysis appears to be the most suitable and applicable method for analysing my interview data. The main advantage of TA is flexibility. In contrast to Grounded theory or IPA or other methods, Thematic Analysis is not theoretically bounded; it can be used to analyse different kinds of qualitative data without referring to any pre-existing theoretical framework (Braun and Clark, 2006). All these different methods more or less overlap with thematic analysis. However, TA does not require detailed technological or theoretical knowledge and is quick and easy to learn and carry out, so it was more accessible and feasible for me, early in my qualitative research career. Moreover, TA (Thematic Analysis) is appropriate for me to manage and organize large data sets 'without losing context' through highlighting differences and similarities across the whole data corpus (Braun and Clark, 2013). TA was important in my study since themes could be generalized both in a 'bottom-up' (data-driven) way and in a 'top-down' (theory-driven) way (Braun and Clark, 2013). My research explored Chinese students' English learning experiences when they study in the UK. The two stage interview data were analysed

to answer my three provisional research questions, while new themes could be identified based on what was found in the data. Coding was also carried out within the 'hybrid or inductive and deductive' way in the TA in my study (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006: 80). Overall, TA offered me the chance to practice basic data analysis and coding skills, which could serve me well to apply using other analytical methods in future.

According to Braun and Clark (2013: 180) the strengths and weaknesses of what TA offers in my study can be summarized as follows:

- Flexibility in all aspects of my research, the theoretical framework, sample size, ways of data collection, and research questions.

- Accessibility to beginners in qualitative research, who have limited experience, because it is quick and easy to learn and carry out.

- A limitation of TA is that since it is a basic data-handling method without a specific theoretical framework as guidance, it is probably hard to interpret the data at a high level.

4.1.2.1 Understanding the theme

Before I started the process of the interview data analysis, I first familiarized myself with the concept of theme. According to Braun and Clark (2006), a theme in qualitative data analysis should be something key to answering the research question and which can suggest patterns in the data set. It should be noted that we cannot

decide what counts as a theme in terms of proportion. It is not the case that if something occupies over 50% in the data set, it should be considered as a theme, and that something occupying less than 50%, should not be considered a theme. Nor should a theme only be decided by what is mentioned more frequently or given more attention by the interviewees, rather than something that is less spoken about. A theme may occupy a large or small space in some individual interview transcripts, even less in others. It should be kept in mind that a theme may occupy relatively little space in the data. Despite the presence of quantifiable measurements, the guidelines for deciding what count as a theme in my interview data analysing is whether it captures something important that works towards answering my overall research questions.

There exist four types of themes in TA, which were all inductive: theoretical deductive, semantic and latent themes. Themes can be identified in two general ways. One is bottom-up, which makes inductive themes. This is a data driven way whereby themes are identified on the basis of the data themselves (similar to grounded theory) (Patton, 1990), with no pre-existing researchers' theoretical interest to respond to. As suggested by Braun and Clark (2006), inductive analysis is a 'process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or the researchers' analytical preconceptions.' In contrast, theoretical deductive themes are identified in an opposite way from that driven by the researcher's pre-existing theoretical stance; it is more theory-driven. Instead of working on the description of the overall data set, this top-down from of analysis focuses more on the detailed data in some particular

aspects. Whether the researcher chooses the bottom-up or top-down approach depends on how and why she intends to code the data. In my research, I coded for some pre-existing specific questions, while new themes could evolve from the coding process. Apart from the above two primary theme identifying ways, Boyatzis (1998) suggests themes can also be identified based on different levels: at a semantic explicit level or at a latent interpretive level. Semantic explicit level refers to identifying themes through looking at the surface meaning of the data; the researcher does not need to analyse anything which goes beyond the transcript of the participants' utterances. As Frith & Gleeson (2004) point out, semantic themes are often based on ideas from the related literature. Semantic themes can be relatively simply developed though summarizing and interpreting the surface meaning of the semantic content (Patton, 1990). By contrast, the latent level refers to the researchers identifying themes through making assumptions and exploring the underlying ideas. The analytical process goes beyond description and the semantic content; ideas are formulated through the researchers' deeper interpretation of the data. When identifying latent themes, researchers normally explore the features that give particular form or meaning to the data organisation. In all, themes can be developed in different ways or dimensions. I identified the themes in my study within mixed dimensions and ways, both at the surface and latent levels, both data-driven and theory driven.

4.1.3 Conducting the Thematic Analysis under Braun and Clark's (2013) six steps guidelines

In this section, I give a detailed description of how I analysed my data to conduct TA step by step, according to Braun and Clark's (2006, 2013) systematic instructions. The six steps are:

1. I familiarised myself with the data.

2. I began to code the data.

3. By searching for candidate themes.

4. Reviewing and revising the candidate themes.

5. Analysing and defining or naming the themes.

6. Writing up the report.

The whole procedure for conducting systematic TA can be both 'linear' and 'recursive'. 'Linear' refers to each stage playing a vital role so that every following stage can only be conducted based on the results of the previous stage; however, the process is also 'recursive' as the researcher always needs to move back to check and modify the previous results according to the later results (Marton, 1997: 100). Accordingly, the 'map' of the systematic thematic analysis in my study, according to the system developed by Howitt and Cramer (2011: 336), is shown in the following Figure 3:

```
┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Familiarisation  │  ⟹  │ Data coding      │  ⟹  │ Searching        for │
│ with the data    │      │                  │      │ candidate themes     │
└──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────────┘
                                                              ⇕
┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Writing    the   │  ⟺  │ Defining   the   │  ⟺  │ Revising         and │
│ report           │      │ themes           │      │ reviewing the themes │
└──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────────┘
```
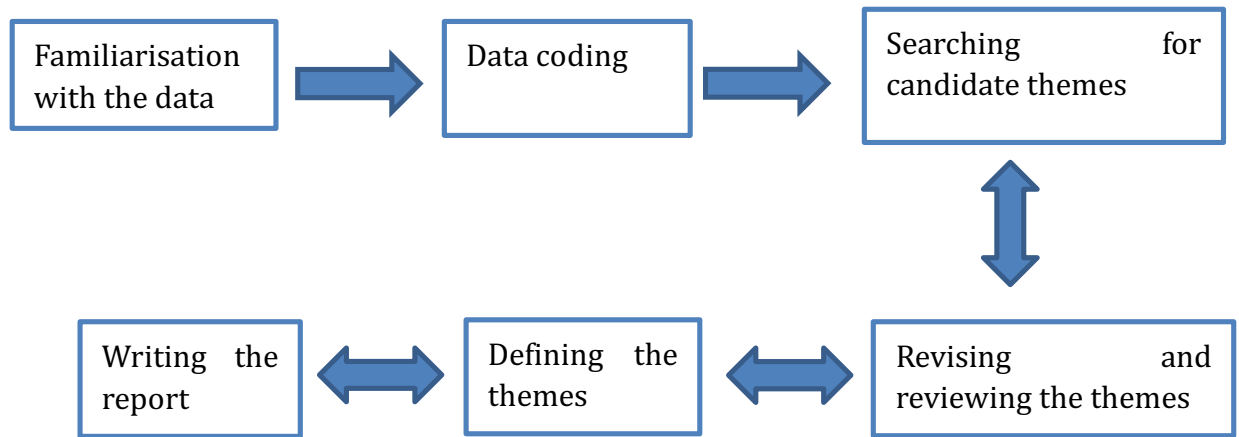
Figure 3: Map of the systematic thematic analysis

4.1.3.1 Step one: familiarisation with the data

The aim of this step is to get an initial overall understanding of my data set and begin to be aware of what might be relevant to my research questions.

Transcription: preparation for the audio verbal data analysis

All the interviews were conducted in Chinese and then transcribed. Since the interviews were all conducted in Chinese, the transcription are all in Chinese (for a sample of the interview transcriptions, see appendix 5).

Transcription is an important part of the research using audio verbal data. Despite the limitations of the manual transcribing process, which may be time-consuming and boring, transcription is a good way to become familiar with the data (Riessman, 1993). Some researchers even think that it should be a 'key phase of data analysis' when conducting interpretive qualitative research (Bird, 2005: 227). According to Braun and Clark (2006) there is no one way to conduct TA, just as there is no one way to

process transcriptions. But researchers should meet the basic requirements of being rigorous in and maintain an 'orthographic' transcript as a record. The importance of making a true and accurate orthographic transcript is that it contains the all the information; any amendments could change the meaning of the data (Edwards, 1993). As Braun and Clark (2013) suggests, transcription is not merely a technical concern. In the process of transcribing, the researcher needs to pay attention to how and what is translated/transcribed from audio sounds into a written context. According to Braun and Clark (2013), a good transcript records all verbal utterances from all the interviewees into the written work. When transcribing, my aim was to transcribe what was uttered as clearly and completely as possible. The whole point of the audio data was to help me capture how the interviewees' meanings through how they expressed themselves. Nothing in their speech was corrected or edited. When conducting the actual transcription, I played very short segments (normally 2-3 seconds) of the recording, then typed what I heard word by word, guided by my notation system. I needed to rewind very often to avoid missing anything. Since as suggested by Braun and Clark (2013: 163), very simple errors in transcription can dramatically change the meaning of the data, I always went back to double check what I had transcribed. In order to ensure the accuracy of the data, I kept in mind to avoid listening to the meaning of the utterances, only to the sounds, thus, ensuring I did not change anything I heard and I used my knowledge of the language system to make sense of what I heard in order to write it down. After I finished with one interviewees' complete transcription. I went back to check my transcribing in full against the

original verbal recording again to ensure accuracy.

When the transcriptions were completed, the initial stage of data familiarization was also covered. To get a more thorough familiarization with the data set, I re-read the textual data to develop a general sense of it. During this process, I started to find out about what I was interested in. Reading the textual data did not just simply involve looking at the surface meaning of the words, but reading analytically and critically, thinking about what the data meant and how far the data could answer my research questions. For example, when I read one participants' answer about describing one aspect of his/her life in the UK, I thought about how this participant made sense of her situation and why. I tried to engage with the data, to develop an analytical sensibility to read and understand the data beyond its surface structure and aspects.

4.1.3.2 Step two: data coding

When I had completed the familiarization with the data, I generated an initial idea of what was in the data and what might be interesting. Then I moved on to the second stage: data coding. Coding refers to the process of identifying the features or aspects of the raw data which appear to be interesting to the researcher and may relate to the research questions (Braun and Clark, 2006; 2013). Coding is an important process in analysing the data since the researchers need to organise the data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005).

A hybrid of inductive and deductive coding

Inductive coding refers to coding based on the data; this is a data-driven method. Inductive coding is normally conducted at a semantic and explicit level. The codes are all processed from visible semantic words, which never go beyond what has been written down according to what the participants said (Braun and Clark, 2006). For example, my research explored Chinese Master students' language learning strategies when they studied in the UK. Terms such as 'using the dictionary', 'communicate with native speaker', 'watching English programmes', were explicitly related to my research topic and needed to be coded.

Apart from coding inductively, I coded deductively as well. As a Braun and Clark (2006) suggest, in contrast to the latent semantic codes, the 'underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations or ideologies' that can invoke the researchers' pre-existing literature background to identify the 'implicit' codes within the data should not be ignored. Deductive coding is a researcher-driven or theory-driven method at an interpretive level, which requires the researcher to code by understanding and exploring the implicit meaning the data. Deductive codes are generated based on the researchers' pre-existing framework and conceptions. Deductive data coding goes beyond what has been transcribed; the codes are processed with researcher's specific questions in mind. For example, in my research, when the participants mentioned 'to communicate with native speakers', or 'to imitate the British accent', I tried to find the reasons why they mentioned this. To

communicate with the native speakers might help them to acquire native-speaker expressions or practise useful new vocabulary that they fund hard to learn from the dictionary alone. I might refer to the role of 'context' in influencing the participants' English learning strategies based on the literature review. According to Braun and Clark (2013: 207) no two analysts will code in the exactly the same way - the resultant codes based on the same data set will be somewhat different. If only inductive approach is used to perform data coding, this may lead to low reliability since the resultant codes might be somewhat different if coded by another researcher. Likewise, it was inappropriate to merely apply the deductive approach alone to coding in my study. As supported by Boyatzis (1998: 16) it is possible to simultaneously code inductively and deductively. I decide to apply a hybrid of inductive and deductive coding in my study, with the expectation that the two levels could benefit each other, and ensure a higher level of reliability of the resultant codes. Moreover, the combination of inductive coding and deductive helped me to get a full and better understanding of the participants' dynamic strategies use based on both data and theory.

Conducting the complete coding

This section gives a detailed description of how I systematically processed the coding. After discussion with my supervisor and colleagues, I chose to code manually which was more convenient for me. The simply technique was to use coloured pens and highlighters and 'post- it' notes to mark different bits of data. The motto for my

coding was inclusivity (Braun and Clark, 2013), I needed to pay full and equal attention to each of the data set. I coded everything that might be potentially relevant to my research interests. It was much easier to delete codes than go back to recode the data later if I noticed something was missing. I coded under the guidelines of my four provisional research questions. I conducted the coding from a sociocultural perspective, addressing the utterances that captured aspects which might be relevant or reflect the Chinese Masers students' English learning strategies, the social and cultural elements that might influence their strategy use, and how they developed their LLSs in the changing contextual realities. More specifically, a good code could capture the essence of what interested me and be informative enough to reflect what was stated in the data since the candidate themes were initially developed from the codes. Good codes also make sense without the data. I tried to ensure that each code was distinct in some way. If there were too much overlap or similarities between the codes, I considered developing a broader code to reflect a more general issue. The key points for the coding process are summarized as follows (Braun and Clark, 2006; Bryman, 2001)

- Code for the potential themes as far as possible

- Code inclusively - all the actual data should be coded

- In coding the individual transcription, it should be noted that extracts can be coded under several different themes.

- Note that 'no data is without contradiction', inconsistencies across the data exist, but to eventually satisfy the thematic 'map' requires producing an

'overall conceptualisation of the data pattern, and relationships between them.'

With all this in mind, the process of coding was simply, firstly identify the codes, and then match them with data extracts related to those codes, and finally, collate them under each code. The process continued in this iterative way throughout the whole data analysis procedure. For example, I identified the code 'influencing social factors' in the following two extracts:

Extract 1:

Compared with writing in China, I find *the tutors* in the UK pay more attention to the logic in my writing…… I noted this from the writing workshop and *the tutor's* feedback…… It was suggested I present my ideas with evidence to support them. The teacher didn't stress the sentence structure or grammar as I happened in China, but wanted to see more examples which can support the argument in my writing. The *teacher* mainly focuses on the content of my writing. If I can make my ideas reasonably well understood, I can get positive feedback. (Transcript, Xia)

Extract 2:

My dissertation *supervisor* told me the problem with my writing is the sentences are too long. He suggested I try to write sentences that were simple and clear. I took his advice, and changed to making sentences shorter and clearer. (Transcript, Meng)

In extract 1, I underlined the word 'tutor 'teacher' as the influencing social factors, in extract 2 I underlined the word 'supervisors' as the influencing social factors, later 'tutor/teacher/supervisor' were located under the code 'influencing social factors'.

Table 4.1 Gives a sample of the initial coding of participant's transcripts in relation to the research questions.

RQ: What influences the participants' particular patterns of LLSs use in the UK?		
Transcript extract	Interpretation	Code
If I come to a new word, I will look it up in the dictionary, to understand the new word in Chinese.	The participant learns English by himself, maintaining a traditional way of English learning.	English learning tools / material resource
If I don't understand something by myself in class, I will ask the teacher after class, the teacher will explain me the word or the sentence in another simply way.	The participant can receive help from the teacher.	teachers / agents
In daily life, if I'm not sure what the native speaker says, I will tell them my understanding to see if it is right, If I understand them incorrectly, I will ask them explain to me again in a simple way.	The participant adopts a new way of English learning by positively interacting with native English speakers and gaining feedback from them to improve his/her English.	English speakers / agents

I attend our school's Volunteer programme, I learn a lot about English culture and I can learn a lot of English.	The participant can practice English through attending English societies and activities.	English-medium environment.

Table 4.1: Coding example

4.1.3.3 Step three: searching for candidate themes

After all the data had been initially coded, I moved on to the next stage, searching for themes. In this stage, I sorted out a long list of different codes into candidate themes. As discussed earlier, a theme needs to 'capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun and Clark, 2006: 82). To identify the themes or patterns in the data, I collated and reviewed the relevant codes, aiming to identify the overlaps or similarities between them. It should be noted that themes were not decided by numbers. Themes do not have to occupy a large portion within the codes or the data (Buetow, 2010). The basic line of determining what the theme were, was by deciding whether the pattern or theme revealed something meaningful or relevant to answer my research questions. In this sense, theme searching is a selective process, focusing on answering the research questions, so does not need to cover all the codes or everything in the data. In my study, some initial codes constituted main themes, others subthemes. At this stage, there were still some themes that I did not know where they should belong, so I created a set of 'miscellaneous' themes in case I

needed them to fit in with some main themes or subthemes at a later stage. I developed overarching themes as well as subthemes within them to give a broad and diverse thematic 'map.'

4.1.3.4 Step four: revising and reviewing the themes

When I had finished with candidate theme search, I moved on to revise and review the themes because as candidate themes are different and diverse, they might not fit the coded data well. Possible problems are that some themes might contradict each other, other themes might be too broad and contain big issues which need to be broken down into several separate distinct themes, while yet other themes may lack enough data support. All these problematic themes may not be the real themes. The aim at this stage is to ensure the quality of the themes, to refine and revise theme so that they are faithful to the coded data. Patton's (1990) criterion for a suitable theme is that it should have 'internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity,' which means a good theme's meaning should be coherent within the content of the data, while themes should be distinctive and identifiable with each other.

I checked and revised the candidate themes according to the following two criteria, as proposed by Howitt and Cramer (2011: 340); Braun and Clark (2006; 2013)

- If the candidate theme has insufficient collated data to support the identified themes, this theme should be modified or discarded.

- If the candidate theme is not coherent or does not seem to accurately capture

the meaning of the collated data or is not in relation to the research questions, this theme should be reanalysed and reorganised.

- If the collated data within the candidate theme indicate a new distinctive theme, this theme should be split up to another new theme.

- If two candidate themes overlap with each other, they should be reformed to create another broader theme in which they can work together.

With these four criteria in mind, I reviewed the themes in two steps. Firstly, I went back to check each of the potential themes with its related coded and collated data. After I had ensured all the themes were coherent with the coded data and distinct from one another, and related to the research questions in some way. I moved on to the second step, to check the themes within the whole data set. The purpose was to add any codes that supported the themes and which had been missed in the previous stage.

4.1.3.5 Step five: defining the theme

When I was satisfied with the identified themes, I defined and named the themes. In this process, I tried to find the 'essence' of each theme and to define what the theme captured. A named and defined theme should cover the scope and the content in a couple of sentences (Braun and Clark, 2006). I integrated the existing literature in the process of naming and defining the themes. It should be noted in my research that some themes are large and complex. I need to develop sub-themes within those themes to demonstrate structures and hierarchies with respect to the meaning of the

content.

4.1.3.6 Step six: writing the report

After I had a set of the defined themes, the final process was to write up the report. In the process of writing, I needed to ensure the themes and the data in my writing were logical, concise and coherent. I needed to provide enough evidence (i.e. extracts or examples within the data) to support the themes. The best extracts or examples are clear and easily identifiable.

4.1.4. Conclusion

In this section, I have given a detailed discussion about how I analysed the interview data, adopting the thematic analysis (TA) using Braun and Clark's (2006, 2013) systematic guidelines. My research is an interpretive study, so the core issue across the whole data analysis procedure was to interpret to understand the participants' English learning experiences within its social context. Data was moved from the descriptive level to interpretive level through the analysis process.

4.2 Findings of the first stage interview

As previously explained in Methodology chapter, the data was collected at three stages: 8 Warwick University Chinese Master students were interviewed at beginning sojourn of their postgraduate study in the first stage data collection; 16 Warwick University Chinese Master students were interviewed during the late middle-sojourn

of their study in the second stage data collection; 200 Warwick Chinese MA students were invited to participate in the questionnaire survey during the end of their MA study in the third stage data collection.

This section will begin with an analysis of the participants' feelings about their English learning immediately on their arrival or one/two weeks after their arrival in the UK. The reasons behind the participants' particular learning experiences at that point will be presented. I will also focus on the strategies the participants used early in their courses, while exploring the mediating factors, and how those mediating factors affected the strategies the learners chose.

4.2.1 Participants' language challenges and difficulties

The data gathered at this stage mainly reflected the language difficulties the participants perceived after their arrival in the UK. Despite their high scores of 6.5-7.5 in the IELTS test, seven out of the eight participants claimed to have had a hard time adapting to English language use in the UK. Mainland Chinese students are trained to get high scores on the test; however, their English competence in real communication is doubtful (Guo, 2006). Most of the participants claimed to have encountered language problems to some degree at this stage.

One of the biggest language challenges they reported facing in the UK was listening and speaking due to a lack of vocabulary, unfamiliarity with the British accent, having

no idea about the meaning of many native expressions and the lack of understanding of the British cultural background. Yu mentioned she could only understand 30%-40% of what her teachers said in class, 'the teacher talks too fast for a long time with some professional words in that field, he often uses slang, and it is very hard for me to understand.' (Transcription, Yu) Jun also felt embarrassed since she could not understand native speakers, even some simple sentences of basic communication:

I remember when I was shopping, the waitress talked to me, but I could not understand, she repeated many times, I still did not understand. The situation like this often happened when I had just come, in the first month. This made me very embarrassed. (Transcript, Jun)

Xin criticized the English testing system. She complained that despite her hard work in getting a good score in the IELTS, the high score could not ensure she would have fluent communication with native speakers. This phenomenon is referred to as the 'washback' effect of the English Test on the Chinese students who had learnt English under a test-oriented English education system in China (Liu, 2012), which did not fit them for real-life communication in the UK.

Apart from this, Chinese students are taught through American English accent in China (Liu, 2012). They reported that they needed to adapt to the British accent as well after their arrival in the UK, as Bo stated, 'The only problem was the accent, I think I can have better communication with the native speakers once I have become used to the British accent' (Transcript, Bo).

Most of the participants complained that they could only have basic communication with English speakers due to their poor language ability and culture shock. Few areas

of common interest and different understandings of humor were also suggested to

prevent the participants from having more in depth communication with English

speakers:

It depends on the person who I'm talking to. The reason why I speak less with native speakers is we do not share the same interest in topics. The things they find funny are not the same things as I do. I do not feel happy or enjoy it. (Transcript, Xia)

I hope to have deeper communication with native speakers, but the problem is, I have no idea about what to say, I do not know their culture and their lifestyle, apart from simple greetings, we do not have further communication. (Transcript, Jia)

4.2.1.1 Dissatisfaction with English learning

From the first stage of the data analysis, some of the participants expressed their

disillusionment with the English learning they were experiencing during their study in

the UK. They expected to practice English everywhere with native speakers, which

they felt would help them to improve their English to a standard level of fluency

automatically. However, the following reasons lead to their dissatisfactions with their

opportunities to practice English: insufficient English ability, insufficient knowledge

of English language and culture, inadequate number of native British students around,

different participants' agency.

Unexpected large numbers of Chinese students around

Five of the participants (Jia, Bai, Yu, Xin, Jun) mentioned there were too many

Chinese students in their classes, so it was more common for all the Chinese students to gather in one group to do their presentation or discussion in Chinese first, so leading them to get less chance to practice or learn English. The following extract illustrates Jun and Xin's dissatisfaction with the large numbers of Chinese students in their classes:

I did not expect 80% of the students in my class would be Chinese. This is a big problem. Except for the teacher and several other International students speaking in English, I almost always use Chinese to communicate with my Chinese classmates. I feel a little disappointed since I do not have many opportunities to practice English in class. (Transcript, Jun)

The reason why I choose to study in the UK as well as my subject is I did not expect so many Chinese students to be around. This does not mean I do not like to communicate with Chinese students, but I thought the biggest difference between studying at home and in the UK would be to have the advantage of communicating with English speakers all the time, to improve my English very quickly. But the reality is, there are too many Chinese students in my class, I do not see a big difference compared to studying in China. (Transcript, Xin)

Apart from the large numbers of Chinese students in class, the participants (Xin, Bai, Jun, Yu, Susan) also mentioned that their roommates and friends around were also mostly Chinese students. The abundant Chinese students appeared to hinder the participants' from practicing English as well in social interactions outside the classroom. Yu's description of her housemates and Bai's statements about her friends and her social interaction supported this point:

My housemates are all Chinese Masters students. It's very convenient for us talk in Chinese in our day to day lives. But the problem is, apart from class, I normally spend

most of my time staying at home for entertainment, cooking and studying, so I get fewer and fewer opportunities to practice English even outside the classroom. (Transcript, Yu)

The main ways I get to find friends is through my classmates, my roommates and the people I meet for social activities in the school. Most of them are Chinese - it is very easy for me to make a lot of Chinese friends. I hope to make friends with native students to improve my English, but if there are too many Chinese and very few native speakers or other international students around, I will tend to play or go shopping with my Chinese friends since we can say everything in Chinese, it is much easier for communication. We can understand each other's humor and each other's thoughts very easily. (Transcript, Bai)

As suggested by these statements, most of the participants maintain a strong network with their co-nationals. Though they were willing to practice English in real communication to be good English learners (Rubin, 1975), the large numbers of Chinese students and the few native-speaker students around led them to have few chances to make English speaking friends in their daily lives and social interaction. Due to their language levels and culture barriers, these participants at this stage were finding it difficult to share their personal and emotional concerns with students from other countries.

Moreover, some participants reported that the large numbers of Chinese students made it easy to form an 'isolated' Chinese social circle in the UK university because they tended to do everything within this group, interact only with other Chinese students for the convenience of easy communication. The use of English or other countries' students' involvement within this group would be seen as 'weird' and be 'excluded', Jackson (2008) claims that they regard this as 'an intrusion or challenge to

their in-group affiliation.' It is suggested that the large numbers of Chinese students around, to some extent, constrained the participants' opportunities to practice speaking English in every respect. Xin and Jia agreed with this situation and expressed their feelings,

It seems that Chinese students like to sit together in class and play together after class. I find this situation also occurs with other countries' students. I hope to mix more with British students and other international students both in class and after class so that I can learn native expressions and about different cultures. But the situation is, I feel 'isolated' and weird if I am not involved in the Chinese group since students prefer to stay with their co-nationals, so I choose to follow the mainstream. (Transcript, Xin)

When we have discussions in class, I'm happy to discuss with the Chinese students because I can express my thoughts very clearly and easily in Chinese. I remember once, an Indian student sat with us, the others were all Chinese, when we had discussion; she was not willing to talk, we did not want to talk much either, maybe because we both felt strange talking in English. I also noticed that she did not feel very involved in our group. It is better to have all the Chinese in one group next time… (Transcript, Jia)

4.2.1.2 The role of agency

Even though the participants encountered language difficulties, showing their disillusionment about their language learning experiences, to some degree, all of them claimed that they still had a positive attitude towards improving their English proficiency at this stage. They expressed their thoughts about different ways to change the difficult situation and to solve the language problem. Different learners' agency in adapting to the current changing English learning environment are suggested below in the findings.

Learners' strategy use is goal-oriented (Dörnyei, 2005b). Bai sorted out several factors that might influence her English learning and made a plan to improve her English systematically. This metacognitive learning strategy was developed with the clear goal of speaking fluent English with standard pronunciation like a native speaker during her study period in the UK. Compared to Bai's strong willingness to spend more time seeking opportunities to practice English, Xia reported he paid less attention to language practice since his requirement of English learning was not as high as that of Bai. This suggests that will and the exercise of personal ability (Gao, 2010b) influenced the learner's agency, while their strategy use reveals the role of agency in the language learning process. Bai showed a creative ability in attempting to overcome the contextual constraints in her language learning by setting plans for each stage of her language learning (ibid):

My motto is 'breakthrough myself, make English speaker friends as much as possible.' In term 1, due to the pressures of my academic study and adapting to the new life here, I won't spend too much time on language speaking practice; I plan to focus on improving my listening in term 1. In term 2, I plan to make English speaking friends, to attend more seminars, to attend more English speaking activities……I plan to focus on speaking, to try to organize my sentences with fewer grammatical mistakes……. For term 3, I plan to improve my writing through the dissertation. (Transcript, Bai)

Different person's characteristics will lead to different learner agency, which influences the learner's choice of language strategy. Susan said she was outgoing and talkative, she did not feel embarrassed about making mistakes speaking English and she had made English speaking friends. She claimed she was able to sustain a

supportive social network through managing her relationships with English speakers. On the other hand, Yu explained she was quiet and afraid of making mistakes when speaking English, so that she did not like to talk too much. People who are less confident speaking are more reluctant and nervous about talking (Dörney, 2005b). Yu claimed it was difficult to have access to English speakers. Different learners' capacities lead to different level of the learners' satisfaction with the contextual learning resources (Giddens, 1984). It is suggested Yu was more dissatisfied with her English environment than Susan.

4.2.2 Findings on the mediating factors

This section discusses how the different mediating factors in the UK University context influenced the participants' changing language strategy use.

4.2.2.1 The impact of mediating social agents: peers

The findings at this first stage suggest that peers influenced the participants' strategy use to some extent. Jun reported she had adopted a series of useful English learning strategies gleaned from her Chinese classmates and Chinese friends who had lived in the UK for a long time. They shared their English learning experience and methods with Jun, which Jun found worked perfectly well in the UK. For instance, Jun adopted an affective strategy like 'do not panic if you cannot understand what somebody says in English', and 'encouraged herself to talk more with native speakers':

One of my Chinese friends has lived in the UK for at least four years. I told her about

my depression when I could not understand other people talking in English. I also told her I lacked confidence when I talked to native speakers, being afraid they would be critical of my poor English, so I dared not speak English very often. But she told me, it was very common for everyone whose first language was not English, she also had a hard time improving her English when she first came to the UK. She told me, nobody would be critical of my English since I was a second language learner. If I could not understand somebody she told me I could ask him/her to repeat it again. She told me the best and most effective way to improve my English was to be confident and speak more with English speakers...... I know she can speak very fluent English now, so I would like to follow her advice, and I find it is really helpful and useful……
(Transcript, Jun)

The above extracts suggest how Jun's Chinese friends encouraged and give advice to help her to learn English well, which meant Jun's motivation increased as well. Jun also claimed that she adopted her reading strategy according to her Chinese classmates' suggestion, 'to capture the essence of an article by reading the abstract first':

I also find my Chinese classmates who have lived here for very long time, are better at reading than me. They tell me, the quickest to capture the key content of an article is to carefully read the abstract first - the abstract gives for the essence for each part - then go in detail to the section I want to know in more detail. (Transcript, Jun)

Jia explained his social strategy 'If I cannot understand somebody talking, I will ask him/her to say it again, slowly or use simple words' based on his frequent interaction with a native-speaker flat-mate.

My flat-mate is very kind and patient. Every time I cannot understand him, he will say it again, slowly, or he will explain it in simpler words. I find it is a good way to improve the quality of our conversations. I try to ask other people to say things again if I do not understand immediately, and they are very pleased to do this. (Transcript, Jia)

Yu reported her friend recommended she attend in-sessional classes to improve her English. Warwick University's in-sessional classes were particularly designed to help international students improve their English ability. In-sessional language classes are made up of academic writing, reading and pronunciation classes. Yu attended the pronunciation class that she was interested in. Informed by her friend, Yu found various ways and opportunities such as events and societies to practice English on the university's website. Yu's 'Online searching for language improvement activities' language learning strategy is partially mediated by the application of technology, together with the integration of peer influence. Jun also developed another strategy - to attend the in-sessional language classes - from by her friends recommendation:

My friend also has language problem. She told me our school's in-sessional language classes are helpful, and sent me this programme's application link as well. I did not know our school website provided such abundant supportive information until I attended the pronunciation class and found it useful. Ever since then, I search on our school's website first for anything I want……. (Transcript, Yu)

Jun's statements also support this point. She installed Ted Talks software, recommended by her roommate, to learn English. This suggests how peers influenced Jun's technological LLS use.

As reported by the participants, all of them had developed cognitive strategies 'paying attention to native speakers' talking in English to learn native expressions' through their interaction with the British peers:

I'm confused about how can I politely start a conversation with British people if I need their help or how to make a request. I'm struggling with my expressions and wording, so I do know whether I use 'can I ' or 'may I ' as a start to be appropriate. But once, I had lunch with my British friends, I noticed they normally started with 'Would you mind….. or could you please….., or could you do me a favour……' to politely express their requests. I learnt those expressions immediately and used them later on very frequently in my daily life. (Transcript, Jun)

Moreover, it is suggested from the data that two of the participants' had increasing motivations to learn English, mediated by their peers. As expressed by Jun and Yu, they attentively noticed that, some of their classmates and friends who were second language learners in English (including Chinese students and other international students) could speak better English than them, and this drove them to learn English better because they did not want to drop too far behind their peer groups in their English speaking ability.

When I find other Chinese or international students around me can speak fluent English, I will push myself to practice English more. We are all learning English as a second language, I want to speak English as perfectly as them and I believe I can…… (Transcript, Jun)

4.2.2.2 The impact of the mediating social agents: teachers and tutors

Since these interviews were conducted upon or within one month since the participants' had started study in the UK, the participants reported they had not yet had frequent interaction with teachers. This first stage data suggests the teacher and tutor's slight influence on the participants strategy use.

4.2.2.3 Impacts of material resources

From the first stage interview, six out of the eight participants said that they were provided with abundant English learning resources in the UK University. The convenient technology, artefacts (such as road sings) encouraged the participants to adopt various flexible English learning strategies.

Material learning resources such as road signs and food name helped the participants quickly learn a new word or expression. For instance, Susan claimed she liked to pay attention to road signs, as even if she was not familiar with the words or expressions on the road sings, she could guess their meaning according to the surrounding situation. Bo and Xia claimed they would not learn new words by rote learning, namely reciting in the way they normally did in China. Instead they guessed and understood the meaning of word automatically through relating it to the real things they already knew in Chinese. Bo mentioned 'I know what salmon is in Chinese, and when I wanted to buy some in the UK, I saw the English word for it, so I learned it immediately; it is most common way that I learn new words now.' (Transcription, Bo) Xia supported with this, saying:

Some word concepts I would never have known if I had not come to the UK. For example, I never used the word for 'currency' or 'trolley' in China, but I learned *trolley* simply for use in the UK, and I can remember it very easily; it's natural to know an English expression if I need it. (Transcript, Xia)

Application of technology

The technology-mediated English learning resources were used by the majority of the participants. All of reported they used an electronic dictionary as an English learning tool. This suggests that Electronic dictionaries played an essential role in their English learning and the participants often needed to check the Chinese meaning to understand a new English word. As Jia said, 'If I come across a new word in class, I will first use my electronic dictionary to check the Chinese meaning by myself first.' (Transcription, Jia) This suggests the participant's use of a metacognitive language learning strategy.

The participants reported the use of other technology-mediated English learning materials, namely, English music, English radio stations, the BBC news app, English movies and TV programmes that helped the them develop the their cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as by imitating the pronunciation they heard (Wang, 2012), learning vocabulary and native expressions when watching TV programmes, improving their listening through listening to the radio.

4.2.2.4 Impact of shifting motivational discourses

Shifts from exam-motivated to self-motivated

The findings of the first stage data suggest that most of the participants had shifted their English learning motivation from being examination oriented to 'self-originating' (Gao, 2010b: 92). The participants reported most of the their motivation to learn

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English in the Chinese mainland was because English had been a compulsory academic subject throughout their study, so they were required to learn English well to pass an examination or get a higher grade to complete their studies. For example, in Chinese universities, undergraduate students of all subjects are required to pass the CET 4 (College English Test, level 4) to obtain a Bachelor degree. However, after their arrival in the UK, they a gradually more dynamic picture emerged of their changing English learning motivation. The most obvious change was learning English becoming increasingly more self-motivated after they became aware of the instrumental and cultural value of learning English while living and studying in the UK (Gao, 2010b). The shifts in their learning motivation were mediated by the changing context; since they were no longer required to learn English as a compulsory subject or pass a specific English examination, they became motivated to learn English well in order to be more positively involved in the life and study in the UK.

Compared to the English learning environment in China, most of the participants expressed the view that the UK was a better place to learn and practice English. Studying in a UK University provided them with a favourable environment to acquire and use English for real communication. In China, the examination-oriented English teaching made the students experience more one-way English whereby they passively learnt a lot through memorizing and reciting English words or grammar, but had fewer opportunities to apply what they had learned in real situations (Zhao, 2012; Liu & Carney, 2012). In this sense, students may tend to become demotivated to learn

English due to the imbalance between input and output. Bo claimed he became more motived and interested in learning English after his arrival in the UK. The positive feedback from interaction with native speakers and the real application of English in his daily life encouraged him to practice English more actively and his confidence in learning English also increased in this way:

It is totally different from how I learned English in China. In China, the mark is the only measure for my English proficiency. Honestly speaking, I do not see it is a good way to test our English ability. Even I can get a high mark in the test, I'm still not sure whether I'm a good English learner or not. I'm still concerned about whether what I have learnt is useful or not because I do not have any opportunities to test my skills in a real situation. After I come to the UK, I was very excited because I could practice my English everywhere. When I had just landed in the UK, I immediately used English in a real conversation with a UK immigration officer, yes, it is not like merely learn English in class. Although there is no examination now, I still want to learn English and I really enjoy this feeling. (Transcript, Bo)

Xin explained the reason why she had learnt English in China was to pass the test, e.g. CET and IELTS. But after her arrival in the UK, she learned English motivated by herself.

The shift in motivation led to a shift in English learning strategies as well. Susan mentioned she no longer forced herself to memorize or recite words or grammar as she did to pass the examinations in China. Instead, she picked up words or good expressions based on her own interests when she interacted with native speakers or listened to other people talking in the UK. This indicates Susan has changed her cognitive language learning strategy to social and metacognitive language learning

strategy mediated by the change in context.

Xia and Jia reported they motivated themselves to learn English well, partially influenced by cultural incentives. Language conveys culture (Banjaluka, 2010.) Xia appreciated British culture, he was interested in British tennis and British historical buildings. He motivated himself to learn English well to better understand the above two interests:

I love watching tennis competitions, but I cannot understand the commentators, which is really annoying, so I'm in urgent need of improving my English. (Transcript, Xia)

Jia noted the importance of a better understanding of a country's culture when he wanted to make friends with people from this country. He motivated himself to learn English to understand British culture so that he could have deeper communication with the native students:

I need to be good at English, I want to practice English more so that I can better understand British culture, to adopt their way of thinking and their way of talking, to help me make more friends here. (Transcript, Jia)

Another participant, Bai, explained the most important reason that drove her to spend a lot of time and energy learning English was that it would be instrumental for her job in the future. She had had a couple of years of work experience before she came to study in the UK.　She knew good English language ability could help to her to find a better job, while fluent English was pivotal in assisting her working competence:

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I used to teach English in an international school in China. Any job interviewers' first impression of me in this area is based on my English ability. If I cannot speak a very fluent English with a good accent, they will doubt my work ability and even my other professional skills. It is unfair for people who cannot speak English well. So, I want to learn standard British English here (Transcript, Bai).

Apart from the instrumental value of learning English for finding a job, Jun found good English ability was instrumental to surviving and succeeding in the UK. She was particularly motivated to learn English as the following description shows:

English is used everywhere. My study is all conducted in English. The supermarket, the shops, the restaurants are all in English……in all, I need to do every thing in English, if my English is poor, I will find life is hard here. I need to study English to adapt my life and be happy here. (Transcript, Jun)

Susan admitted the reason she forced herself to learn English well was because she wanted to maintain face before her classmates or friends who can speak English very well:

Maybe I have a strong sense of self-esteem. I feel embarrassed and uncomfortable if I cannot speak English as perfectly as others. Especially when we have presentations, I do not want to lose face in public due to my poor English. (Transcript, Susan)

Apart from the extrinsic instrumental value of learning English, participants such as Bo and Susan reported they maintained their intrinsic motivation to explore English learning strategies after their arrival in the UK. They maintained their inherent interest in English. Bo loved the English language, saying 'the reason I choose ELT (English

as Foreign Language Teaching) is I love English, I can have a lot of fun learning English' (Transcript, Bo). Susan also regarded learning English as a hobby, she said 'I love watching English movies, listening to English music, I feel happy and interesting when I speak in English' (Transcript, Susan).

4.2.3 Summary of the salient strategies of the first stage

In the first stage interviews, the participants' references to their language learning strategy use were coded as 'compulsory' and 'voluntary' or 'other'. Compulsory strategies referred to the strategies that the participants were passively required to use according to the teachers' instructions. Most of the compulsory strategies reported by the participants were examination-oriented strategies and they were adopted before the participants' came to study in the UK. such as rote learning strategies. Despite maintaining the use of the compulsory strategies they had been taught in China, the data suggests that the participants developed a serious of new dynamic language learning strategies by adapting to the changing context and the strategies that were actively used by the participants themselves to meet their own needs were classified as voluntary strategies. The relevant voluntary strategies are shown in Table 4.2:

Category	Strategy items	Counts
New Strategies (developed	Pay attention to native speakers' use of English	4
	Try to find every possible way to practice English	5
	Listen to the radio	1

in the UK)	Talk to English speakers	8
	Encourage myself to speak more in English	3
	Try to learn about British culture	3
	Guess the meanings of words	6
	Relate the meaning of the word to existing things I know about	4
	Notice and correct English mistakes when talking to native speakers	4
	Start a conversation in English	8
	Ask the speakers to speak slowly if I do not understand	7
	If can not think of an English word, use simple word or phrase that means the same thing	7
	Attend English social activities	8
	Set plans and goals for English study	2
	Search for supportive English classes on the school website	5
Old strategies (developed in China)	Talk to myself	2
	Look up new words in the dictionary	8
	Surf English websites	8
	Memorize words by rote	5
	Watch English movies/TV programmes	8
	Listen to English songs	3

Table 4.2: Strategies reported in the first stage interview

As shown in Table 4.2, the participants reported that they actively created various new strategies in response to the changing context of learning while maintaining some of the old strategies they used in China which had been essential for learning English.

4.2.4 Conclusion

In brief, the participants interviewed at this first stage (on or one/two weeks after they started study in the UK), had experienced increasing exposure to the English learning environment and were encouraged to adopt a serious of learning strategies positively mediated by the change in their social resources. Peers as social agents and motivational discourses were shown to have the most fundamental influence on the participants' English learning. On the other hand, the participants faced great challenges in their language learning due to their limited language ability and the constraints of their English learning environment. In the next chapter, I will explore more influencing factors that mediated the participants' strategies, and how the participants attempted to solve their language learning problems as they neared the end of their Masters study in the UK University. A summative thematic map of the first stage findings is shown in the Figure 4 below:
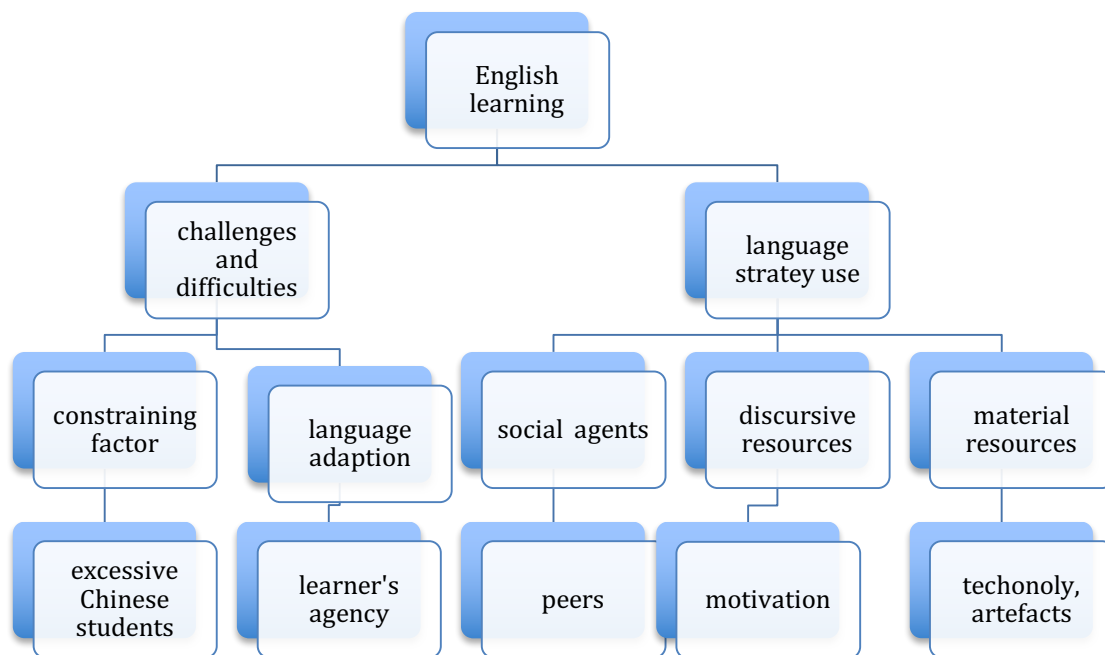
Figure 4: A summative thematic map of the first stage findings

4.3 Findings of the second stage interview

This section presents findings from an expanded group of 16 interviewees (see details in section 3.2.4) to ensure the research results are as rich as possible, focusing on what had changed for interviewees since their initial perceptions shortly after arriving in UK, whether they still used the same LLSs or had developed a new set of LLSs or reactivated old ones, and what were the factors that had led to those changes,

4.3.1 Academic study through the medium of English

All the participants suggested during the second interview that their academic study had had a great influence on their English learning experience. They reported that academic study through the medium of English had encouraged them to adopt a series of new language learning strategies; their English proficiency had improved through

their use of English for their academic study, while the pressure of their academic studies had impeded them from investing more time in learning English per se, as a separate activity from their academic subject studies.

4.3.1.1 Increased vocabulary

Nine out of the sixteen participants reported that their vocabulary had increased through their academic study because they had spent most of their time on acquiring academic knowledge by learning new words in class as well as through their reading and writing. Bai, for example, reported her vocabulary repertoire had been enlarged mainly through academic study:

That is amazing! My English vocabulary began increasing after I spent most of my time in my academic study …… I have to learn and use new words both in reading, writing or speaking very often in my academic study. (Transcript, Bai)

Three of the sixteen participants reported they had new English word learning strategies. Instead of learning new words by rote memorisation, which they mainly used in China. The participants reported various new ways of acquiring new words in their current academic study in the UK. As Doris reported, she learnt new academic words through tutors repeatedly mentioning them in class:

I'm learning sociology; some of the key words in this area like 'anthropology' will be mentioned many times in class. 'Anthropology' would be very hard for me to remember only through rote memory, but as the tutor mentions words like this repeatedly in class, I can understand them and gradually become familiar with them quite unconsciously. This is the main way I learn academic words. It is an easy and effective way to learn some complex words and ideas in sociology. (Transcript, Doris)

Sure, my vocabulary repertoire is enlarged every time I study in a new area. I learn new words when I read the relevant books and articles. (Transcription, Lulu)

Hui claimed that she would write down any new words she learnt in class in her notebook. Then she added those new words to her YouDao e-dictionary, an app installed in her phone. She would review those words every now and then and tried to practice them in context to retain vocabulary:

I write down the words I want to learn in my notebook in class. Words may come from PPT given in the lecture or wherever. After class, I add these words to my laptop. I installed YouDao e-dictionary in my phone, so every time I find a new word, I make a record of it, so it's always to review. (Transcript, Hui)

But Hui reported she did not use this strategy every day during the academic year due to the high time pressures of her academic subject studies. As a result, her vocabulary had not increased as much as she hoped.

4.3.1.2 Academic writing in English

The participants reported that the primary means of assessment in their MA study was through academic writing. Although the participants were studying different subjects, they all claimed that most of their assignments involved writing essays. The main assessment mode in MA study was writing term essays and a final dissertation rather than the examinations or multiple choice test as they were used to in China. 12 out of

the 16 participants responded effectively to the change in the mode of assessment by applying a new set of LLSs such as using simple words and short sentences in writing; learning and imitating the writing styles of English native speakers work in order to achieve their goals of successfully completing their MA learning tasks. Consequently, their English proficiency improved through the frequent English academic needs and practices.

All the participants reported that they had improved their academic writing ability through numerous amounts of practice. They claimed their writing speeds got faster and faster in terms of the amount they were able to produce, as the following extracts explain:

In term one, I could only write 300 to 400 words maximum per day, but now I'm writing up my dissertation, I can produce 800 to 1000 words per day. (Transcript, Jun)

The obvious change in my writing is my writing speed is getting faster. Once I'm familiar with the writing style here, I won't spend so much time struggling to find the right way to express my ideas, how to organise the sentences, how to choose the words. If I've read enough literature about the topic I'm going to write about, I can finish with my writing within two or three days. (Transcript, Bo)

The most frequent writing strategy reported by the participants was to write using simple sentences or words to ensure the clarity of the message rather than use complex sentences or unfamiliar words that could cause misunderstandings. Yu, Xin, Meng and Bo adopted this writing strategy as recommended or required by their supervisors:

I was trained to write complex sentences with sophisticated words to get high marks in IELTS in China. But after I come to study in the UK, my supervisor told me not to write in long sentences. He also told me the most important thing in my writing was to express my ideas as clearly as possible. So I put clarity as the priority in my academic writing. Instead of using complex sentences, I prefer to write simple sentences to ensure my idea was clearly expressed. (Transcript, Yu)

In China, we were encouraged to write complex sentences with sophisticated structures. If the students write complex and long sentences, they will be perceived to be good at English. But after I came to study here, I found the teachers only wanted to know the meaning of my writing - writing which can be easily understood is seen as good writing. I remember my supervisor was not satisfied with my writing; he told me he could not understand most of my complex sentence structures, even I could not understand myself. But after I split the sentences into simpler ones to ensure I could express myself as clearly as possible, my supervisor was satisfied then. (Transcript, Xin)

The above extracts suggest the participants changed their writing strategy due to the different writing requirements. The participants claimed they were used to writing complex sentences that did not express their meanings clearly when they learnt English in China, but after they came to study in the UK, they changed to focus more on how to express their meaning as clearly as possible rather than focusing on sentence structures. Yu claimed that she adjusted her writing strategy according to the different requirements of her course tutors. She explained that she would not use a same word repeatedly but instead, tried to find other, similar expressions in her writing. This also suggests the participants' supervisors had an important role in influencing their students' writing strategies.

Another new writing strategy reported by the participants was paraphrasing, which

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was frequently used, particularly when the participants had just started practising academic writing. Most of the participants claimed they were confronted with writing problems related to a lack of vocabulary and unfamiliarity with the UK Master's academic writing style when they first began submitting academic writing to their subject tutors. The main way of the participants tackled academic writing about a particular topic was first to search related articles in English, then paraphrase the relevant content. They claimed that paraphrasing was an easy way to begin academic writing as the following extracts illustrate:

Academic writing is a big problem for me. I'm always confused about how I can improve my academic writing. I find my Chinese classmates who came to study in the UK, had the same problem for the first year. They recommend paraphrasing as a good and easy way for UK MA study beginners. So how I organise my writing is first to find relevant English articles or books, then find the content I need, and finally paraphrase them into my writing. (Transcription, Jia)

When I wrote an essay for the first time, I had no idea about how to write, I was in chaos. At that time, I would normally have made an outline, then to write it mostly by paraphrasing the literature. The reason why I chose paraphrasing as the main way of writing was it was much easier for me to do it. (Transcription, Hui)

The above extract also suggests how peers influenced Jia's use of his writing strategy. Apart from paraphrasing, two participants who were particularly weak in English reported that they would find some relevant literature in Chinese and translate the ideas into English, at the early stage of their academic writing：

Since English is not my first language, in most cases, I would first write in Chinese, then translate my ideas into English. Since some of the words that pop up in my mind are Chinese, I do not know the English meanings, so I would be stuck by no knowing

those words if I wrote directly in English. So, it is better to organise my idea in Chinese first, then to translate and check the English meaning of the Chinese words in the dictionary. I can think and organise my ideas fluently in Chinese, but find it very hard in English. (Transcript, Yu)

The ideas that pop into my head are in Chinese, I translate them into English in my writing. (Transcript, Jia)

Xiao majored in computer science, also explained his difficulties in writing reports as

follows:

I'm good at carrying out projects or running experiments, but I'm very weak at writing in English, I do not even know how to express my ideas, which is why I chose to study computer science. But our MA programme still requires us to write reports. I remember the first time I wrote a report, I organised my ideas in Chinese, then translated them into English. (Transcription, Xiao)

But as they had undertaken writing about academic subjects many times in the second

stage interviews, towards the middle end of their courses, 4 out of the 16 participants

reported that they had changed to summarising ideas and trying to write using their

own words rather than translating or paraphrasing. They claimed this change had

happened during the middle or later stages of their MA course writing, when they had

become more familiar with English language use. Hui described her changed writing

experience as follows:

After I had practised my academic work writing many times, I found paraphrasing was not the best way to present my ideas, as I could not fully and clearly express what I meant through paraphrasing. At the same time, when I went back to read my writing, the content seemed incoherent and disorganised, to some extent. Then I gradually changed to summarising the ideas in my mind, then wrote them down in my own words, even if the sentences were easy and simple. I'm becoming more satisfied with

my writing now. In any event, the tutor encouraged me to write in this way, as shown from the feedback to my assignments, and I can get high marks as well. (Transcription, Hui)

The above extracts also illustrate how Hui exercised her agency in improving her writing strategies to overcome the writing problems she herself identified, and the role of the UK MA's tutors' feedback in mediating her academic English writing strategy.

Bai expressed a positive attitude towards academic writing. She claimed that she learnt the native way of expressing her ideas and corrected her grammar mistakes from having her work proofread. As they used English as a second language, the participants reported that proofreading by native speakers could help them to learn standard native English expressions. As Bai stated:

I found proofreading very helpful for improving my academic writing ability. I found a native speaker to help me with proofreading. We carried out proofreading face to face, so that he could tell me about my language mistakes immediately. He pointed out my language mistakes very carefully; the main problem was I expressed ideas in a Chinese way that he could not understand, so, he showed me how to express my ideas in a British way, so I was able learn a lot from his proofreading. He also paid attention to my grammar mistakes and typed his corrections and sent the document back to me, so it was straightforward for me to understand. (Transcription, Bai)

Xin reported that the way she improved her academic writing was to learn and imitate the writing style in other people's work here. She learned about how they organised their ideas, how they managed to present their thoughts, how they chose the vocabulary to use, how they make their arguments and how they arranged the structures etc.

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One of my classmate's writing is perfect, he can get high mark every time. So, I ask him to send some of his writing to me. I learned the structures, his feedbacks and how he went about choosing the words to use, all from his work. (Transcription, Xin)

Lulu and Tao also shared the same writing strategy. Lulu claimed the way people presented their arguments in English was different from what was presented in Chinese. The participants claimed that in Chinese argumentation, examples and facts are displayed first, while ideas and opinion come at the end. But in English writing, it was better to outline the argument briefly at the beginning. Once they had become familiar with the writing style here, they were able to make big progress in their academic subject writing. The following extracts illustrate how individuals exercised their agencies by adopting this writing strategy:

The way I improve my academic writing is I learn and imitate other people's writing. I remember when I first began writing essays, it was pretty hard for me to produce one thousand word for almost two weeks, but now I can write one thousand words within a day if I'm familiar with the target topic. Once I became aware of the writing style here, I was able to write very quickly. The problem was not with my ideas or knowledge, but about how to present my thoughts in the right way. (Transcription, Tao)

I spent some time adapting to the academic writing style here. I know academic writing is different from oral communication. There are some rules in British academic writing. The UK university teachers have requirements about how to start the argument, how to end with the conclusion, how to use conjunction words. I also find Chinese people and British people think in different ways. For example, some ideas that need to be stressed in Chinese writing are maybe regarded as not so important in British writing. The conception of writing is different. Right now, I'm in the British academic writing system, I need to understand more about what is emphasized in this writing system, and try to meet the requirements. (Transcription, Lulu)

Jun and Xia reported that the key issue in academic writing was to present ideas logically and in a reasoned way, to make sure every argument was supported with enough evidence. Jun developed this writing strategy influenced by her assignment marks, while Xia adopted this strategy according to the tutor's feedback and suggestion, as illustrated below:

The most influential factor that drives me to explore how to write properly is I want to get high marks for my assignments. I tried several ways on my own to find a good way to present my writing. In term one, I wrote a series of complex things but my assignment mark was very low. Since I've now practiced writing many times, I find if I can construct my writing logically, to make the whole layout clear, so that the tutor can easily understand, so my assignment marks have become higher. In my writing, I carefully choose the correct conjunction words to present my ideas in a logical way; at the same time, I insert data or figures to support my argument. (Transcript, Jun)

Compared with writing in China, I find the tutors in the UK pay more attention to the logic in my writing…… I noted this from the writing workshop and the tutor's feedback…… It was suggested I present my ideas with evidence to support them. The teacher didn't stress the sentence structure or grammar as I happened in China, but wanted to see more examples which can support the argument in my writing. The teacher mainly focuses on the content of my writing. If I can make my ideas reasonably well understood, I can get positive feedback. (Transcript, Xia)

The above statements show how the participants changed the focus of their academic writing from complex ideas, sentence structures or grammar to being logical, giving examples and evidence and offering rational arguments. Moreover, in the absence of direct advice from her tutor, Jun's statement suggests her strong agency in exploring effective ways to write high scoring assignments.

Three out of the sixteen participants reported that they learnt and improved their academic writing skills through attending academic writing classes or the writing workshops provided by their school or the department. Academic writing classes are professionally designed to support the students to help them improve their academic writing ability from every aspect. Warwick's academic writing programme is Warwick's central enterprise in writing education for all Warwick students, and teach academic writing in a variety of formats including courses, workshops and individual tutorial advice, aiming at Undergraduates, Masters and Research students, where students can learn academic writing systematically as described in the following extracts:

Academic writing in UK MA study is different from IELTS writing and I find it very difficult. But our department is very supportive. It provides us with workshops particularly for helping international students to improve their writing skills and it is free to attend. The workshop is good since it is particularly designed to help students who are studying sociology. International students from different countries attend this workshop. The teacher is professional, and focuses on the typical mistakes international students tend to make in their academic writing. He taught us about the layout and the structure, etc.. It is an effective way for me to improve my writing ability in a very short time and I can avoid making some basic mistakes and learn things like how to cite references in the correct way. (Transcription, Doris)

The academic writing programme is really helpful. I learned about the academic requirements and standards, stages of writing, planning and outlines, constructing the text, how to develop the argument, ethics in writing and research referencing etc.. from our school's academic writing classes. (Transcript, Yue)

Despite the positive responses about successfully adapting to UK academic writing at Master's level given by most of the participants, Jia expressed his worries in finding

the appropriate way to sort out his academic writing:

I'm still confused about how to write properly. In China, I recited the sentences and writing models given by the teacher and used them in my writing. But in the UK, the teacher doesn't give me any material like that. I cannot ask the teacher to teach me how to write sentence by sentence. I have no idea about how to improve my writing effectively. (Transcript, Jia)

The above extract suggests the different ways of teaching and learning English writing in UK and China lead to Jia having difficulty in adapting to the writing process in the UK. Compared to how he was taught in China, his UK MA education focused more on encouraging the students' independent learning. Moreover, Jia and Yu reported, in China, the teachers were language teachers and the students were assessed on their language skills, but UK subject tutors assessed the students' ability to demonstrate their understanding of academic topics and arguments/views through their writing, so the goals were different in UK and China as well as the pedagogy. Meanwhile, Jia's statement suggests that he had not been able so fast to successfully exercise his agency and adopt effective writing strategies for his study in the UK.

In summary, in the second stage interviews, the participants had experienced a more independent learning style in the UK and learnt that they needed to develop appropriate writing strategies by themselves to best fit the writing requirements. As the situations are quite different, Chinese learners of English as a second language in UK would find the pedagogy more similar to learning how to express ideas etc. than learning English in China - learning by doing. There is no best universal writing

strategy that works perfectly for everyone, but different individuals use different writing strategies based on their needs. The different writing strategies adopted by the participants' were mainly influenced by their supervisors' advice, tutor's feedback, successful peer writing examples, suggestions from peers, school academic writing supporting programmes, native speaker feedback, and the participants' different levels of agencies.

4.3.1.3 Academic reading in English

Half of the participants during this second stage interview reported that they needed to find and select the relevant resources themselves in order to complete their assignments. Eight out of the sixteen participants reported that their reading ability had improved during their study period. They claimed that the main reasons that lead to the improvement in their reading ability were their increased vocabulary and background information, familiarity with English journal structures and English sentence structures.

Four out of the sixteen participants reported that they had difficulty and had to spend long hours finding themes or ideas from the reading material, particularly in the first term of their Master studies. The main reasons that the participants had difficulty understanding the main ideas in one paper, for example, as reported by the participants, were their lack of the relevant vocabulary and relevant background

information, and unfamiliarity with the article structure. Jun described this difficulty.

I was upset about my reading ability during the first term of study. I could only read one paper per day. I needed to check the meaning of new words in the dictionary, one by one, at that time. I thought I would not understand the whole article if I could not understand each of word in it. (Transcript, Jun)

However, Jun reported that she updated her reading strategy through guessing the meaning of new words according to the context or skipping the new word if it did not affect Jun's understanding of the whole article. By doing this, Jun's reading ability and reading speed improved. Xin also adopted this strategy, as she said:

I don't check the meaning of every new word when I read; it depends whether the new word is important or not. If the word is fundamental to the understanding of an idea in my reading which I think is important, I will check its meaning in the dictionary. Otherwise, I will ignore it. (Transcript, Xin)

Six out the sixteen of participants reported in second stage interview that they improved their reading ability by extracting the key information or main idea from the reading resources once they were familiar with how the author constructed the layout of the article. Jun reported that her reading strategy was first to carefully read the abstract, which gave the essence of the whole article, then she would turn to the conclusion, which gave the limitation of the topic. She valued an article mainly according to these two parts. Finally, if she wanted to know something in specific, she would look for details. She claimed that her reading skills had been improved through this method:

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After I practised reading several times, I found an effective way of catching the main idea. I find abstract gives the essence of the whole article, and the conclusion gives its limitations. I think those two parts are the most important. I will decide whether I need to read the main body of the article based on the abstract. This is a good way for me to select key information in a very short time. (Transcript, Jun)

Xia, Bo Jun and Bai all reported that the strategy that had adopted for reading academic articles was to extract the general idea from the abstract or introduction, before scanning for specific information from the whole article. As Bai said:

I won't read the whole article, I will focus on the conclusion and introduction or the first sentence in each paragraph, as they normally give the main ideas. (Transcript, Bai)

Bai reported that she became better at understanding when reading articles when she was more familiar with the background culture. She described her reading experiences as follows:

Once I read an article about the law related to protecting teenagers. The law was different from what I knew about in China. It was very hard for me to understand the case studied in that article at first, but after I gradually came to know more about British law and culture from living the UK, I was able to better understand the case. (Transcript, Bai)

The above extract suggests that studying in the UK can provide the participants with a favourable environment where they can learn about the culture, which can assist in improving their reading ability. Bo also mentioned his reading strategy that if he needed to read articles about one area, he would first familiarise himself with

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background information in that area. This would help him to better understand the relevant articles more quickly.

Bai, Bo and Xia mentioned that when they learnt more specific vocabulary in the relevant area, they felt it was much easier to read papers. Bai explained:

My reading speed is slow mainly due to a lack of the relevant vocabulary. But as I become more and more familiar with the relevant vocabulary, I do not need to check words in the dictionary, so my academic reading gets much easier and faster. (Transcript, Bai)

Bo mentioned his ability to understand whole sentences improved once he became familiar with the sentence structures used in British academic writing. In summary, all the participants claimed that they had succeeded in finding the appropriate reading strategies to improve their understanding and ability to select useful information in academic reading.

4.3.2 The role of technology

Three out of the sixteen participants reported they often used English based social networks (such as Facebook) to communicate with English speakers, as Lulu reported:

I use Facebook everyday and this is a good way to share my feelings with other English-speaking friends. I also find this is a fun way to practice my English. (Transcript, Lulu)

4.3.3 A summary of the changes in the use of LLS reported by the participants in second stage interview

In this section, I summarise the LLS and the sociocultural factors that had influenced the change and development of interviewees' LLS use reported in the second stage interview.

In summary, participants shared the same view that they had increased their vocabulary through their academic study. Members reported more new ways of acquiring new words for their current academic study in the UK, such as learning new academic words through their tutors repeatedly use of them in class, writing down the new words in a notebook and added the new words to an e-dictionary, then reviewing the new words every now and then and trying to practice them in the appropriate context to retain them.

As for their LLS use, most of the members shared similar academic writing strategies such as write using simple sentences or words to prioritise the clarity of the message rather than using complex sentences or unfamiliar words that could cause misunderstandings and learning about and imitating the writing styles used in native English speakers' work. However, some members shared writing strategies such as presenting their idea logically and in a well-reasoned way, trying to support every argument with sufficient evidence, while some members shared different strategies such as summarising their ideas and trying to write using their own words instead of

translating or paraphrasing.

As for their English learning development mode, members shared almost the same English learning development pathway, in that they gradually moved away from the more common or general strategies such as translation as they had more practice and experience of UK academic study, and they changed to focus more on their own independent learning and developing the different suitable LLS by themselves to best meet their own needs.

As for the factors mediating the interviewees' LLS use, members reported that their tutor's/supervisor's feedback or suggestions had mediated their adoption of a variety of new academic writing strategies. Members also reported that they developed new LLS to meet the different assessment mode (from that in China) used in MA study. Members revealed their own agency in regulating their LLS use and their ability to take control of their English acquisition at different levels. And they reported that native speakers had played a supportive role in mediating their English learning. However, some members reported peer support had a valuable role, while some members suggested technology had a greater role in mediating their use of English in their academic courses.

4.4 Findings for the third stage questionnaire survey

The final stage of this research study involved a questionnaire survey of Chinese students studying Masters degrees at the University of Warwick. The previous findings regarding English language learning experience and the language learning strategies employed were gleaned from 24 interviews (8 for the first stage interview and 16 for the second stage interview), and represented the views of 16 students in total. Consequently, the applicability of those findings to a larger group could not be claimed. Thus I asked 200 Chinese Master students from Warwick University to participate in the questionnaire survey to see whether they shared the opinions of the interviewees. The aim of this part of the research was to test the main results and findings from the previous stages of the study on a wider scale, trying to generate patterns and draw conclusions.

The questionnaire was based on the findings of the first and second stage interviews about the language learning strategies most frequently reported by the interviewees (such as writing simple sentences or words to ensure clarity rather than using complex sentences or unfamiliar words that may cause misunderstanding etc.) and the language learning adjustments / developments (such as the interviewees improving their reading ability by extracting key information or main ideas from the reading resources once they were familiar with how the author constructed the layout of articles), which were frequently mentioned by the interviewees. These were summarized / simplified / integrated and finally generated 19 items for my questionnaire survey. I designed the

questionnaire using a series of Likert Scale attitude statements (see sample questionnaire in appendix 4).

The data measurement for the Likert Scale questionnaire in my study was to look at the most popular option chosen by the 200 respondents. As Boone and Deborah (2012) illustrate, a Likert Scale questionnaire can be used to measure people's attitudes, and the extent to which they felt particular statements applied to them. The five options used as responses to each item were: 1) never or almost never true of me; 2) usually not true of me; 3) somewhat true of me; 4) usually true of me; 5) always or almost always true of me. Therefore, I regarded participants who chose the first two options (1, 2) as showing a negative attitude or disagreement, while participants who chose options 3, 4, 5 indicated agreement or a positive attitude. The questionnaire was originally designed and employed in its Chinese version and items translated into English in the reporting of the results for the benefit of English readers.

4.4.1 Results and findings

I will analyse and categorize the results for each item into sections, giving the percentage of respondents who expressed agreement and the percentage of respondents who expressed disagreement to each item. 100% = 200 respondents in all cases. (Detailed results for each question can be found in appendix 6.)

The items will be analysed into the following two categories: mediating sociocultural factors with sub-sections on social agents, technology and academic study; and individual language learning adjustments with sub-sections on language learning development and shifting learning motivation. These categories were present a larger scale picture of what the participants' English learning looked like and what factors had influenced their English learning.

4.4.1.1 Mediating sociocultural factors

This section will present the sociocultural factors which appeared to influence the Chinese students' language learning and LLS use when they were studying in the UK.

Social agents

Table 4.3 Percentage (%) of participants' responses of LLS use and social agents

Item	Mediating Social agents	% of respondents disagreeing with the statement	% of respondents agreeing with the statement
6. If I cannot understand what someone is saying in English, I will ask him/her to speak slowly or to say it again, or ask him/her to use simple words or sentences.	English speaker	**12%**	**88%**
7. I learn English through communicating with English speakers and I note and correct my English mistakes from the feedback from his/her responses.	English speaker's feedback	**13%**	**87%**

8. I practise my English through attending English societies or activities.	English speaker	**57%**	**43%**
9. If I don't know how to say something in English, I will seek help from my Chinese classmates or friends who have lived in the UK for many years.	Peers	**46%**	**54%**
10. I learn native English words or expressions from real daily communication (such as ordering food in a restaurant/ paying the bill etc.).	Native speaker	**9%**	**91%**
13. I learn and practise English through travelling in the UK or in European countries.	English speaker	**26%**	**74%**
16. I improve my English through imitating native accents (this refers to pronunciation and rhythm/ intonation.	Native speaker	**17%**	**83%**

It appears from Table 4.3 that social agents such as native speakers had played an important role in mediating the participants' LLS use. Among all the results above, item 10 got the highest level of agreement (91%), indicating that almost all of the participants found it useful to improve their English through daily communication with native speakers. Most of the participants also found it helpful to improve their English speaking ability through correcting their speaking mistakes from English speakers' feedback, imitating native accents from the native speaker, and practising English through travelling in English speaking countries. And most of the participants

noticed they could improve their listening/understanding ability by asking the English speaker to speak slowly or to say it again, or ask him/her to use simple words or sentences. However, as shown in Table 4.3, more than half of the participants did not practise their English through attending English societies or activities. Meanwhile, there was close to an equal division of agreement and disagreement about whether it was useful to seek help from co-national peers to solve their speaking difficulties.

The overall findings above suggested that the Chinese students regarded direct access to native speakers/ English speakers as a valuable resource for them to practise and improve their English in the UK. It is worth noting that findings from the previous interviews suggested some Chinese students still complained they had limited access to native speakers (including native peers and other native speakers), they had hoped to have more opportunities and to be provided with a more favourable environment to communicate with native speakers.

Technology

Table 4.4 Percentage (%) of participants' responses of language learning and technology

Item	Mediating material resources	% of respondents disagreeing with the statement	% of respondents agreeing with the statement
3. I normally use English based social networks (such as Facebook) to communicate with English speakers.	Technology	**38%**	**62%**
4. I watch British/American TV programmes, movies or listen to English radio stations to improve my English proficiency.	Technology	**21%**	**79%**

Table 4.4 suggests that technology, as one kind of social material resources, had also made a positive contribution to the participants' English learning. Owing to the convenience of technology, participants could learn and practise with English speakers indirectly. It can be inferred from this that a majority of the Chinese students preferred to watch English TV programmes and films rather than use English based social networks to improve English. As reported by the interviewees previously, Chinese students were restricted in the use of Facebook in China. However, 69% of the participants in this survey confirmed they used Facebook in the UK, indicating the advanced technology in the UK had empowered an increasing number of Chinese students to adopt a variety of new English learning strategies.

Academic study

Table 4.5 Percentage (%) of participants' responses of language learning and academic study

Item	Contextual realities	% of respondents disagreeing with the statement	% of respondents agreeing with the statement
5. I mainly practise and improve my English through academic studies in school (such as reading the literature, attending lectures, writing essays, giving presentations, having group discussions).	Academic study	12%	88%
14 I improve my English through attending in-sessional language classes or academic writing classes, etc.	Academic study	31.5%	68.5%

It can be seen from Table 4.5 that academic study, as one kind of context, had also positively influenced the participants' language learning. As shown in Table 4.5, a majority of the participants thought they could benefit more in improving their English proficiency from academic study in their subject, rather than by attending a specific language class. This could be partly explained from the interview findings, which show that academic study had provided ways for the students to practise English such as reading literature, writing essays and giving presentations. In order to successfully obtain the degree, students were highly motivated to spend their time in course study. In this sense academic study was part and parcel of developing their English proficiency which in tun could help them to achieve better results in course

assessment.

4.4.1.2 Individual language learning adjustment

This section will present what English learning adjustments the Chinese students had made when they studied in the UK, concerning their English learning developments/ difficulties/motivation.

Language learning difficulties and development

Table 4.6 Percentage (%) of participants' responses of language learning development

Item	Language learning outcome	*% of respondents disagreeing with the statement*	*% of respondents agreeing with the statement*
1. If I'm familiar with the English article's structure, my reading speed will increase significantly.	Reading development	**11%**	**89%**
2. I prefer to use simple words and short sentences in my writing.	Writing development	**14%**	**86%**
11. If I come across a new word when I'm chatting or reading, I will try to guess its meaning according to the context.	Increasing vocabulary	**3.5%**	**96.5%**

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12. If a new word appears frequently in my daily life, I will check the meaning of this word and remember it automatically.	Increasing vocabulary	**26%**	**74%**
19. I cannot have in-depth discussions in English due to my limited English ability.	Speaking outcome	**35.5%**	**64.5%**

As shown in Table 4.6, most of the respondents thought they had made progress in English learning after one year study in the UK. It is worth noting that item 11 got the highest agreement (96.5%), indicating the most English learning progress had been made was learning a new word through guess meaning in relation to a situated context. As reported by the interviewees in the previous two research stages, if they came across a new word when chatting or reading, they checked its meaning in the dictionary immediately, otherwise they could not understand the whole sentence. However, when they became more practised users of English, they changed to guessing the new word in relation to the context, and their reading speed and understanding ability improved consequently. Other significant areas of progress these Chinese students had made were increased reading speed (once they were familiar with the article's structure) and increased vocabulary as they were exposed to an English context and simplified writing style.

According to the findings from the previous interviews, Chinese students were trained to write complex sentences and use sophisticated words in China, regardless of the

meaning and clarity. But after their one year study in the UK, 86% of the participants in this survey reported that they changed to use simple words and short sentences to ensure clarity in writing.

It should be noticed that even though Chinese students had made progress in faster reading, clearer writing and enlarged vocabulary repertoire, they still had speaking difficulties after one year's study in the UK. More than half of the participants thought they could not conduct in-depth discussion in English.

Shifting learning motivation

Table 4.7 Percentage (%) of participants' responses of language learning and motivation

Item	Shifting motivation	% of respondents disagreeing with the statement	% of respondents agreeing with the statement
15 If I get a positive response when interacting with an English speaker, I will be more motivated to practice English.	Increased motivation	**7%**	**93%**
17. I won't be able to create a favourable environment for practising English by myself: I need external forces to push me to practice English.	Decreased motivation	**30.5%**	**69.5%**

18 Compared with learning English in China, I haven't set specific times for learning English since I've been in the UK.	Decreased motivation	**10.5%**	**89.5%**

As can be seen from Table 4.7, English speaker's positive response/feedback played an important role in motivating these Chinese students to practise English. More than half of the students claimed they would be less motivated to practise English if they had not been pushed from outside. Most of the students were now less likely to set specific time for learning English. In all, students learning motivation kept changing over the year.

4.4.2 Summary

From the questionnaire findings, one is able to examine the various factors that influenced the students' English learning developments. These are the sociocultural factors (including communication with English speakers, the application of technology and the practice of academic study) and the individual cognitive factor of increasing learning motivation. The outcomes of the questionnaire survey support the interview findings in that the social agents, particularly English/native speakers, had a strong positive influence on participants' English learning. The results also support the interview findings by showing that the material resource of technology and the contextual realities of academic study had played an important role in Chinese students' English learning.

In fact, 18 out of the 19 items backed up the interview data (see section 4.2.2 and section 4.3.1) by showing, firstly, that a range of LLS were frequently used. Secondly, participants' description of their experiences showed enduring challenges. This was again consistent with interview findings in that interviewees mentioned their dissatisfaction with some aspects of the progress and the recurring challenges they faced (see section 4.2.1.1). Of course, many of the issues discussed in the interviews were not able to be traced or compared to the questionnaire data. For example, the interviews give us a rich description of dynamic changes in terms of LLS use, this is impossible to capture in the questionnaire data. One item created a little tension with the interview data. Item 8 in the questionnaire showed a minority seemed to take part in English societies or activities, a higher proportion of interviewees mentioned this.

Shortcomings

The questionnaire survey was conducted in the final stage, but still has left several questions unanswered. Interesting emerging findings such as why on a wider scale of Chinese students did not like to practise English through attending English societies/activities cannot be explained. It is worth conducting follow up interviews in future research. In the following chapter, I will discuss, in the light of the previous research literature, possible explanations as to why the participants adopted these LLSs or valued particular English learning experiences.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This interpretive study has explored the shifts in the language learning strategies used by a group of Chinese students during their Masters study at a UK university. It attempted to understand the dynamics of the shifts and the development of the language learning strategies (LLS) used by these students from a sociocultural perspective. An interpretive approach was used in this research. The data was collected at three stages (interviews for the first and second stage, a questionnaire survey for the third stage) over the time span of their one year MA academic study in the UK; all the participants were Chinese Masters students studying at the University of Warwick. The first and second stage interview findings were analysed using thematic analysis to explore the participants' LLS use and how this changed and developed during their period of study abroad. The findings of the third stage questionnaire survey given to 200 students were interpreted quantitatively and used to support and extend the salient findings from the first and second stage interviews to a wider group.

In this Chapter, I will specifically answer the following four provisional research questions in my study based on my findings and in comparison with the related literature.

Research Questions:

RQ1: What English learning adjustments and developments do Chinese students make during their study in the UK?

RQ2. What language learning strategies do Chinese students studying in the UK use as they attempt to improve their English proficiency?

RQ3. How does the use of these strategies by Chinese students change and develop during their period of study abroad in UK?

RQ4: What social and cultural factors influence their changing experiences and their changing use of language learning strategies?

As the answers to these three questions are interrelated, I will construct my discussion in the following way. I will pick out the significant social and cultural factors which affected the participants' LLS development (in answer to RQ 4), discuss the Chinese participants' English learning experience and specific language learning strategies, and how the use of these strategies changed and developed under the influence of these factors (in answer to RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3). In summary, it appears from my findings that the participants' language learning strategies were mainly influenced by the following social mediating agents: peers, teachers and tutors and other native speakers; social material resource - technology; socio-contextual realities - assessment mode and its interaction with learner agency. I will elaborate how each of these factors played a role in the participants' LLS adoption and development to capture the dynamic nature of the participants' LLS use mediated by these sociocultural factors.

5.2 Mediating agents: peers

The findings from the first and second stage interviews suggest the importance of peer influence on the participants' strategy use and their English learning experiences directly and indirectly. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), the teacher has the dominant role in EFL teaching in Chinese schools: teachers in China are seen as authoritative in that they are the only source of knowledge that could be trusted (Siemon, 2010; Carson & Nelson, 1996). Gao (2010b) also pointed out that Chinese students have spent most of their education with teachers in Mainland Chinese schools. Due to the teacher-dominated EFL teaching style in China, Chinese students tend to get few opportunities to interact with peers in their English learning. However, after their arrival in the UK, due to the change in the social context, peers emerged as an important mediating agent on the participants' LLS choices and their English learning.

As shown in my first stage (beginning of the academic year) findings, peers appeared to play a constraining role in the development of the participants' English learning, particularly on their arrival in the UK. The unexpectedly large numbers of Chinese students around and the scarcity of native peers led to the participants' dissatisfaction with their English learning. Xiong's study (2005) also found that Chinese students constituted the dominant group, and were seen as introverts and less competent English speakers in UK Universities. As shown in the first stage findings, the participants expressed their disillusionment with learning English because they

expected to practice English everywhere with native speakers to improve their English ability. However, most of the participants maintained a strong network with their co-nationals since their classmates and roommates and friends were mostly Chinese. Though they were willing to practice English in real communication to be good English learners (Rubin, 1975), the large numbers of Chinese students and the scarcity of native students around, led them to have little chance of making English speaking friends in their daily lives and social interaction. Moreover, the abundance of Chinese students around made it easy to form an 'isolated' Chinese social circle within the UK university, such that they tended to do everything within this group, speaking only Chinese for the convenience of easy communication. The use of English or other countries' students' involvement in this group would be seen as 'weird' and be 'excluded', as explained by Jackson (2008), and regarded as 'an intrusion or challenge to their in-group affiliation.' Obviously, having large numbers of Chinese students around, to some extent, constrained the participants' development of English through practice.

Meanwhile, apart from the constraining influence of their co-national peers, due to their English language levels and the cultural barrier, the participants at the first interviews expressed how they found it difficult to share their personal and emotional issues with students from other countries. This phenomenon was also agreed with by 64.5% of the participants in the questionnaire survey as, due to their limited English skills, they could not have in-depth conversations with English speakers. Dornyei

(2005b) argued that 'those who were less proficient or confident in their oral skills were more nervous and reluctant to speak to someone who is more fluent.' Therefore, Chinese students, as non-native English speakers, had their enthusiasm for socializing with their native peers undermined. Gu's (2011) study showed that the majority of Chinese learners' personal lives during their study abroad tended to be coloured by a feeling of being 'a guest' and not belonging to the host environment due to the different cultures and values. Gao (2010b) pointed out that it made Chinese students uncomfortable if their native peers had a particular image of Mainland Chinese students in mind, which could undermine the Chinese students' motivation to communicate with local peers as well as their wish for dynamic strategic English practice. However, as Gao (2010b) argued 'none of the Mainland Chinese students were able to be reborn with the variety of social and cultural experience unique to their local counterparts,' and some researchers have suggested that international students could apply cultural strategies to deal with these cultural and value difficulties. Ward et al. (2009:100) encouraged the 'learners to set goals that were socio-emotional in nature, for example, to make friends from other cultures'. As mentioned in the literature review, through building relationships with other peers across cultures, learners could enhance their cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication skills and also undergo personal change (Ward et al., 2009). Ting-Toomey (2005: 229) claims that 'the more help the newcomers receive during the initial cultural adaption stages, the more positive are their perceptions of their new environment.' Ward et al. (2009) found International learners tended to seek

assistance or intensify their relationships with the host nationals to better adapt to the change in social context. The participants in my research reported they did change to gradually develop an active relationship with native or other countries' peers, as can be seen from the evidence from the second set of interviews.

As the participants became more involved in their study in the UK, almost all of them reported that they had managed to actively develop their relationships with peers from different nations. The changing role of peers, from constraining to supporting participants' strategic language learning, was clearly suggested from my findings. The participants' multinational social network, including interaction with co-national peers, native peers and other international peers, changed to positively influencing their strategic language learning as they became more involved in the interaction with these peers. For example, Jun deployed a series of useful English learning strategies gleaned from her Chinese classmates and friends who had lived in the UK for a long time. Affective strategies like 'do not panic' if she could not understand somebody in English and to encourage herself to talk more to native speakers and the reading strategy of reading the abstract first to capture the essence of the whole article, were advised by her Chinese classmates and friends and all worked well in Jun's English study in the UK. The development of Jun's affective strategies can be explained by Pen's (2012: 138) view that 'if learners become more open-minded and try not to be afraid of being nervous, they will be more likely to engage in social practice.' Through frequent communication with non-Chinese flat-mates, participants like Jia

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developed the social strategy that if he could not understand somebody talking in English, he would ask him/her to say it again, slowly or change the message into simple words. Through interaction with native peers, all the participants developed the cognitive strategy of paying attention to native speakers' speech in order to learn native English expressions. Jun and Yu developed the social strategy of attending in-sessional language classes to improve their English, as recommended by their friends. Some technology-mediated LLSs such as online searches for language improvement activities and installing Ted Talks software to practice English were also adopted and integrated from the recommendations of the participants' friends. Moreover, 54% of the participants in my questionnaire survey adopted the strategy that if they did not know how to say something in English, they would ask help from their Chinese classmates or friends who had lived in the UK for many years, which also illustrated co-national peers' supporting role in the participants' strategic language learning. Such peer support in learners' strategy use also align with Pen's (2012) study of Taiwanese/ Chinese LLS development during their study in a UK University; the participants changed their thinking and language learning behaviour when they engaged in social interaction with native speaker classmates. Parks and Raymond (2004) also pointed out that peers can play an important role in shaping second language learners' learning. Harjar (2015) found that peers (mainly international students) formed trust and advice networks with the participants when they were in the middle of their MA study in the UK, and their strategic language learning was found to be influenced by peers at the linguistic, intercultural and

academic levels.

Moreover, the findings from my both two sets of interviews also suggested that apart from positive peer influence in advising and internalizing participants' LLS use, some participants' learning motivation increased under peer influence. Yu and Jun noticed that some of their classmates and friends who were also second language learners in English spoke better English, so these people drove them to learn English better since they did not want to lag behind their peers' levels of English ability. When Jun's friends encouraged her to learn English, her motivation increased. This finding is in line with Gao's (2010b) study where one or two participants experienced a change in motivation and beliefs about English learning through interacting with their peers. One participant in Gao's study (Luonan) became more interested in learning English as result of her interaction with local students in Hong Kong who could not speak Putonghua. Her friends - like Jun's - also gave her valuable encouragement to read English more.

5.3 Mediating agents: teachers and tutors

As shown in the data from the second set, late-middle of academic year interviews, when the participants said they spent most of their time in academic study, teachers and tutors appeared to play important roles in influencing and shaping their LLS use. More specifically, participants' strategy uses were mainly mediated by their

teachers'/supervisors'/tutors' feedback and advice.

According to my interview findings, some participants (Jia, Xiao, Hui, Doris, Yue) on their arrival in the UK reported that they maintained strategies learned in China such as memorisation, translation, and learning grammar rules, mainly due to their teachers' instruction in China. According to Jun, Jia and Xin's, Chinese EFL teachers normally considered memorisation an essential skill and students were required to memorise new vocabulary or new grammar rules after class, which would be tested in a later class. As discussed in the literature review, the teacher-centred mode of EFL teaching is very formal in China, and dominates schools at all levels (Siemon, 2010). In Chinese classrooms, teachers' talk and give explanations about grammar rules and new vocabulary through translation based on the text-books, as the mainstream EFL teaching style; however, teachers did not seeks the students' opinions about what they had learnt (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996:184; Liu & Cheng, 2009; Song, 2010). Consequently, as a result of such teacher instructions and beliefs in China, students' beliefs about learning English simply amounted to memorising large amounts of vocabulary and grammar rules, using classical mnemonic strategies such as making word lists, oral repetition and visual repetition and were widely used by Chinese students. Chinese students' English learning beliefs were characterized by grammar, translation and memorization with little practice devoted to the developments of other skills such as the analytical and critical evaluation of what was learnt (Hu, 2002: 93). But apart from the mainstream findings about the EFL teaching style in China, Gao's (2005: 23)

study found that in some IELTS pre schools (supplementary schools specialised in teaching English aiming to help students get high IELTS scores) teachers did offer alternative ways, other than rote memory strategies, to improve the students' English, such as to encouraging them to read anything they were interested in English via the Internet or elsewhere.

As the participants began to study English in the UK University, they reported their English learning beliefs and choices of LLS shifted under the influence of their teachers'/ supervisors'/tutors' feedback and advice. As the findings show, the participants regarded the teachers less as authorities than they used to do in China; instead, the teachers' role in the UK University changed, to become the learners' facilitator or coordinator, in the participants' views (Cohen, 2014: 160-162). This can be explained by the great difference in conceptualization between the Chinese and the UK Universities that, while Chinese education regards teachers as the ultimate authorities, Western education is more student oriented (Zhao, 2012; Liu & Carney, 2012; Liu, 2013: 140). In China, the participants were simply asked to obey the teachers' instructions so that they universally adopted the same LLS, namely, memorization, translation and grammar learning. However, according to the participants, in the UK, teachers/ tutors/ supervisors see students as different creative individuals that they give suggestions and encouragement to so that the students develop their own LLS based on their own needs. Under such changing teaching beliefs, the participants said they reconceptualised their English learning beliefs and

developed a variety of LLS from the explicit and implicit feedback/advice provided by their teachers/ supervisors/tutors. Yu, Xin and Bo adopted the writing strategy of writing simple sentences or words to ensure clarity rather than using complex sentences or unfamiliar words that may cause misunderstandings, as recommended by their dissertation supervisors. 86% of the respondents to my questionnaire survey said that they preferred to use simple words and short sentences in their writing. Yu claimed she adjusted her writing strategy according to her teacher's advice, that she didn't use the same word repeatedly but searched for similar words instead in her writing. Jun, Xia, Tao found the teachers' feedback about their assignment valued their own thoughts and opinions, so, in order to get high marks, they changed to reading critically and thinking independently. Jun and Xia also developed the writing strategy of presenting their ideas logically and in a reasoned way with evidence to support their argument according to the teachers' feedback and suggestions. Hui also changed and summarized her ideas and tried to write using her own words in English directly instead of translating from Chinese, as encouraged by the teachers' feedback. Gao's (2006: 63) study also found that the participants in a UK language school were advised by their English teachers to forget their own language and think in English. Teachers/supervisors who were seen as credible and valid resources, seemed to be the most prominent set of individuals (compared to other individuals such as family members, peers) that appear to be able to affect the learners' self-concept in their English learning through providing explicit or implicit feedback (Cohen, 2011: 133; Oxford, 1996).

Moreover, most of the interviewees reported that tutors paid close attention to their different needs, valued their opinions and answers, and left plenty of time for discussion. The participants also reported that UK tutors allowed and encouraged them to develop their own learning styles to meet their own needs. As a result, these participants had developed new ways of perceiving and thinking about their English learning within the student-centred teaching beliefs (Lantolf, 2006). For example, Jun, Hui, Bo reported their way of learning English was no longer to simply follow the teachers' instruction, but stressed private study. They appeared to be flexible and adaptable to the new educational system and had gained confidence in their ability to learn. They appeared to value themselves more, and what they had learnt and to make their own efforts to achieve academic goals as well as improve their language skills in the new contexts. Liu (2013: 140) and Byrnes's (2002: 45) call for teachers to accept the learners 'creatively expressing personal meanings or applying their own strategies and styles when using the L2' instead of training their grammatical/translation/ memorization skills and ability to pass the examinations, seems to have been answered by the UK teachers and tutors, who focused much more on the learners' own ability to make acceptable choices and develop their own effective LLS by utilising the rich resources around them (Byrnes, 2002:45).

However, Cohen (2014: 133) argued that not all feedback works equally in affecting the learners' learning beliefs. Cohen's (2014:133-137) study of feedback and appraisal from significant others agreed that teachers were the most prominent group of

individuals in influencing foreign language learners' self-concept formation, but its potential effect could vary depending on the learners' attitudes/ perception of particular teachers and their relationship with them as to whether the learner respected this feedback, whether given directly or indirectly (Bouchey & Harter, 2005). Cohen's (2014:137) study suggests that 'different forms of feedback from different resources may affect the learner's self-concept in different ways', but unfortunately, the details about how these factors played different roles in mediating the learners' L2 learning beliefs is beyond the scope of this study, but would be worth investigating in future research.

Despite the teachers/supervisors/ tutors' positive effect on the participants' language learning, some participants (Bai, Yu, Meng, Jun, Jia) complained about several difficulties in interacting with the teachers in class. Yu reported that she did not have enough opportunities to practice English in class since she was in a group where nearly all the students were Chinese. She had hoped the teacher could notice this problem and mix the students up more to avoid them all using the same mother tongue in discussion. Jia and Meng reported that they sometimes simply read the PPT (PowerPoint) during their presentation, and the teachers only commented on the content based on the PPT, not on the speaking skills of the presenters, so they could hardly correct their pronunciation and intonation if the teachers or native speakers did not give them feedback. Bai, Jun, Yu reported that they dared not ask questions in class, so they did not have very frequent discussion with teachers, therefore had fewer

opportunities to interact with the teachers or to speak and practice their English. The reasons why the Chinese students remained a silent group in the UK class, as discussed in the literature review, were lack of language skills and the different learning culture. Liu (2013: 133) also echoed one reason for the 'embarrassingly silent' Chinese students in class was because they could not express themselves in the new language very clearly. Another cultural reason was Chinese education was historically based on Confucian philosophy, which emphasizes the hierarchy and obedience, so that any disagreement would be seen as showing disrespect for teachers, consequently, the social norm in Chinese culture means students are more likely to prioritise harmony rather than question and challenge in class (Ryan, 2010).

5.4 Mediating agents: other native/English speakers

Apart from the prominent role of teachers' feedback in influencing the participants' learning beliefs, other native/English speakers in the UK also played significant roles in influencing the participants' LLS use towards applying more social strategies. During the participants' sojourn in the UK, the native speakers around were regarded as a valuable authentic learning source who provided the participants with a serious of native expressions that they could never learn from an English textbook in China. Susan reported that instead of using cognitive strategies to force herself to memorize or to recite new words or new phrases, she changed to using the social strategy of picking up words or useful expressions based on her own interests when she

interacted with native speakers or listened to other people talking in English in the UK. 91% of the participants in the questionnaire survey also reported that they learnt native English words or expressions from real daily communication with native speakers (such as when ordering food in a restaurant/ paying bills etc.). Native speakers in the TL (Target Language) environments acted as models for the L2 learners (Hajar, 2015: 277). Participants such as Lulu, Xin and Tao reported that they learnt and imitated the writing style and the use of language of native people's work. For example, Lulu learnt the different ways of presenting arguments after she had read native speakers' writing. In Chinese writing, examples and facts are displayed first, while ideas and opinions were concluded at the end, but in British writing, a brief argument is presented at the beginning, followed by elaborations and examples. Bai found it was a good way to learn the native way of expressing her ideas and corrected her grammar mistakes from the proofreading done by native speakers. 87% of the respondents to the questionnaire survey reported that they learnt English through communicating with English speakers and they noticed/corrected their English mistakes from the feedback on their spoken English. Pen's (2012: 131) study pointed out that even through communication or asking English speakers to correct errors was a good way to improve English, the efficiency of this social strategy seemed to depend on relationship between the language learner and the interlocutor. Therefore, building up a friendly social network with the English speakers was a prerequisite for this to happen. Pen's study (2012: 128) also found the frequency of using the social strategy of asking help from English speakers increased during their

study in the UK as the information was useful. Moreover, Bo reported positive feedback from his interaction with native speakers had encouraged him to practice English more. Gao's (2006: 63) study also showed that supportive English speakers were important for facilitating changes inL2 learners' strategy going 'towards more regular uses of social and interactive strategies in Britain.'

Although my study found supportive roles of native speakers in mediating the participants' social strategy use in my study, Norton (2001) and Pen (2012: 129-131) suggest different L2 learners might have different feelings about talking to native or non-native speakers. Norton (2001: 166-167) found one of her participants (male) felt uncomfortable when speaking to native speakers since this participant's meaning in the TL context could not be clearly understood by native speakers. Pen (2012: 136-137) found females were more sensitive to or had better language proficiency than males, which might make females feel more comfortable talking with the natives speakers than males do. He also pointed out that apart from poor language skills, unfamiliarity with the topics the native speakers talked about due to lack of knowledge about the host cultural and social issues also made some participants find it difficult to interact with native speakers. This could also partly explain why 64.5% of the respondents in my questionnaire survey reported that they could not have a deep discussion with English speakers. Some of the interviewees expressed concerns about communicating with native speakers. Jia, Jun and Bai frequently mentioned they could only at times have a superficial chat with local people such as when

shopping or one-day local interest visits. Lulu and Xin said their interaction with native students was only in order to work on academic tasks, nothing beyond that. Some interviewees hoped to have deep and frequent communication with the local people, but the reality, as reported, was that opportunities to have in-depth communication with native speakers were rare due to language concerns and the different cultural backgrounds.

5.5 The role of technology and other material resources

As shown in the findings, all the participants were provided with abundant English learning resources in the UK University; the convenient technology and artifacts around had encouraged them to adopt various new flexible English learning strategies. As Palfreyman (2006) pointed out, language learning resources or materials can empower learners to adopt a variety of new strategies. Material learning resources such as signs and food packaging can help students quickly learn new words or expressions. For instance, Susan reported she liked to pay attention to road signs, because even if she was not familiar with a word or expression on the road sings, she could guess their meaning according to the surrounding situation. Bo and Xia wouldn't learn new words by rote learning; instead, they guessed and understood the meaning of a new English word through relating it to the real things that they already knew in Chinese. For example, Bo learnt the new word *salmon* when he wanted to buy some in the UK.

Technology-mediated English learning resources were used by the majority of the participants. All of the interviewees reported they used an electronic dictionary as an English learning tool. Electronic dictionaries play an essential role in English learning; participants always needed to check the Chinese meaning to understand the new English word. For example, Jia liked to check the Chinese meaning himself first using his electronic dictionary every time he came across a new English word in class. Hui would add the new words in YouDao e-dictionary where she could review them at any time and tried to practice them in a real context. However, Hui did not continue this strategy every day due to the high pressure of academic study.

Other technology-mediated English learning materials, namely, English music, English radio stations, BBC news app, English movies and TV programs helped the participants develop their cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as imitating pronunciation (Pen, 2012), learning vocabulary and native expressions when watching TV programmes, improving listening through listening to the radio. 79% of the participants in my questionnaire survey reported they watched British/American TV programmes, movies or listened to English radio stations to improve their English proficiency. 62% of the participants in my questionnaire survey reported that they normally used English-based social networks such as Facebook to communicate with English speakers. Online communication also provided the participants with experience of developing writing skills (Pen, 2012). The reason why the participants

commonly adopted technology-mediated English learning strategies could be partly explained by the lack of opportunity for practicing English with English native speakers in everyday life in an EFL environment (Huang & Van Naerssen, 1987; Wu, 2008). As Su (2012: 213) further explained, in real-time communication, people might get tired or not be patient enough or willing to repeat what they say again and again to the L2 learners, therefore alternative learning approaches such as reading English magazines or using modern technology were also good ways for the participants to practice English.   She found a group of Taiwanese learners in the UK University in her study often used English language learning magazines, CD-ROMs and English films as the main sources of their English exposure. Another reason why participants commonly adopted technology-mediated English learning strategies, as suggested by Gao (2010b: 106) and Hajar (2015: 268), was because UK universities provided better English learning resources and advanced technologies than the L2 learners' home countries, which encouraged and facilitated the participants' strategy use in a more favorable English learning environment. Hajar (2015: 268) in his study found the Arab participants in a UK University had increasingly incorporated a variety of modern technologies to improve their language proficiency as well as their academic studies, by watching British programmes, using electronic dictionaries, Dropbox, Medley Desktop, SkyDrive and Mindjet. Gao (2010b: 106) in his study found the participants 'actively attempted to increase their exposure to English and adopt flexible learning approaches,' however, Gao's (2010b) participants found it difficult to maintain their use of learning material resources frequently to improve their English

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as they were occupied with their academic studies.

5.6 The role of the change in assessment mode

Findings from the second stage/set of interviews suggest that the change in the means of assessment had influenced the interviewees' LLS use, particularly their writing and reading strategies. In these interviews, all the participants reported that the main assessment mode in the MA study in the UK University was writing essays or dissertations rather than the examinations with multiple choice answers that they were familiar with from their previous Chinese Universities. As argued by Donato and MacCormick (1994), the assessment mode has a big influence on the language learner's strategy use in the classroom. Gao (2006) had a similar view as the participants in his research agreed that assessment methods had a great impact on their choices of strategy use.

In China, the assessment of students' English ability is mainly done through examinations. Gao (2006) and Shohamy (2000) described how the standard exams were seen as the 'authoritative' means of demonstrating the students' English proficiency in China. Senior middle school students' English ability is assessed by the university entrance exams (Zhao, 2005; Cheng, 2008:16-7; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006:10). Undergraduate Students English ability is assessed by CET-4 (College English Test Band 4) (Zhao, 2012; Liu & Carney, 2012). The test of English as a foreign language

(TOEFL), Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and College English Test (CET) examinations (Wu, 2006) are other examinations used to assess Chinese Students' English proficiency. Due to the examination assessment mode in China, Chinese students generally adopt memorization and repetition strategies (Gao, 2010b) to remember vocabulary and grammar rules, and use translation to understand meaning (Hu, 2002).

The participants in this study mostly responded positively to the change of assessment mode in the new context, where they were now expected to write essays or dissertations rather than answer multiple choice questions. This finding in my study is mostly in line with Gao's (2006, 2010b) longitudinal study of Chinese students' LLS use in a UK University and Hong Kong University. He found that the change of assessment, from exam-oriented assessment to course assessment in English meant the participants replaced examination-led strategies such as memorization and repetition or translation in order to meet the new assessment requirements. However, the findings from my study suggest that several participants still used one writing strategy that they had frequently used in China, namely, translation. Several participants reported that since they were weak in English, they translated Chinese literature references or ideas into English at an early stage in their academic writing. Liu's (2013) study of Chinese students' English learning experiences in the UK also found that Chinese students relied greatly on translation on their arrival in the UK, even the students with high English proficiency. She found that Chinese students

regarded translation as a support to 'overcome the great barrier of language before them' (ibid.). It was quite common for Chinese students who encountered language difficulties at the beginning to use translation to help them express themselves, read English articles and keep up with the rest of the class. However, Liu (2013) also noted that as the participants made progress in English, they used translation less and tried to think and understand directly in English more.

Meanwhile, the findings from my second stage/step (late middle of academic year) interview suggested that most interviewees appeared to gradually move away from the translation or memorization strategies as they reported in my first stage (beginning of the academic year) interview and develop a variety of new strategies to cope with the new form of assessment during their academic study in the UK. Postgraduate students in the UK are usually assessed by 'means of written assignments and sometimes by collaborative group work' (Hajar, 2015). Thus good academic writing ability plays an important role in UK postgraduate study. In order to successfully complete their Master studies and get high scores on the written assignments, the interviewees in my second stage (late middle of the academic year) interview appeared to focus on learning how to produce effective academic writing and develop new writing strategies. Bo and Xin claimed that they changed to focus more on how to express a sentence's meaning as clearly as possible rather than on the sentence structures per se, to meet the new writing requirements. Instead of high examination scores, participants reported they found that it was more useful to enlarge their

breadth of knowledge in a related area in order to ensure that the content of their writing was rich and meaningful, and the increased knowledge could help them to be 'employed in their future careers' and so meet a dominant long-term career goal (Hajar, 2015). Findings about participants paying more attention to meaning and content in their academic writing can be partly explained by the change of language goals. As the participants reacted by developing the appropriate writing strategies in response to the new mode of assessment that they experienced in their UK postgraduate study, they were also, in essence, 'shaped by their changing language goals' (Jiang and Sharpling, 2011). Gao also (2010b) found that his participants' investment of more time developing strategies to practice English well not only helped meet the current assessment mode as a short-term goal, but the new skills and strategies were also necessary for employment after graduation or for applying for further study abroad as, longer-term goals.

Apart from writing strategies, new reading strategies were also developed by the participants to adapt to the different assessment method. Students' reading abilities are assessed by test in China (Pang, 2008). The main format for testing reading comprehension is multiple choice from which students select the one correct answer to each question, making students adopt test-oriented reading strategies to help them pass the exams and get high scores (Guo, 2006; Cheng, 2008). However, students may not have to fully understand the text since their task is to tick the answers and hand in the paper (Cheng and Gao, 2002; Liu, 2012). Liu's (2012) study found that students

were quite unable to fully understand the article in a reading test in China.

Findings from the second stage's interviews suggest that reading assessment in the UK is closely related to the coursework essays and their MA dissertations. Instead of passing a reading test as in China, the reading objective in UK postgraduate study is to find and select the relevant literature resources to complete assignments. Therefore, the interviewees had to focus on understanding the ideas and content of articles to help them gain knowledge through reading, so they had to read around the topic as much wide as possible. Students were required to read enough of the relevant literature to think critically (Liu, 2012). Critical thinking refers to 'not just passively accepting what you hear or read, but instead actively questioning and assessing' and is an important academic writing/reading requirement in UK higher education, so this assessment criteria also influenced the participants' strategy use (Bailey, 2011; Jiang and Sharpling, 2011; Hajar, 2015). UK Master's reading requirement of reading a large amount of literature to select different ideas about one topic caused the participants to change their reading strategies to adopt new ones. Liu's study (2012) of the development of UK Chinese MA students' reading strategies found that Chinese students used a word by word text-based reading strategy in China, but this strategy was found to be inadequate for academic reading in the UK. As the academic reading requirement changed, students had to read extensively and to develop their own ideas. In order to finish the large number of reading tasks, they used reading strategies such as focusing on the key points, scanning and searching for references. The findings in

my study also suggested that the participants deployed reading strategies that helped them locate the key points and quickly understand an article. Linked to Liu's (ibid.) reading strategies mentioned above, interviewee Jun's reading strategy was first to read the abstract to catch the essence of the whole article and read the conclusion to see its limitations. Xia, Bo, Jun and Bai extracted the main ideas from the abstract and introduction, before looking for detailed and more specific information, as their reading strategy.

Liu (2012) described the importance of background knowledge in critical reading. Students had large numbers of reading tasks in their coursework study in order to acquire enough background information, which then enabled them to compare and evaluate their thinking about other related works. The findings from my study also suggest background knowledge is another important factor that leads to the improvement of the reader's understanding. Bai reported that she better understood articles once she was more familiar with the background culture. In order to be more efficient in critical reading, Bo's reading strategy was that if he needed to read articles about one area, he would first familiarize himself with the background information in that area.

The change of reading requirement also influenced the participants' English vocabulary learning strategies. Instead of learning new words by rote memory or checking the meaning directly in the dictionary as in China for their academic studies,

the second stage's interviewees used a new vocabulary learning strategy - guessing the new word's meaning according to the context or skipping the new word if it did not affect the participants' understanding of the whole article. This strategy helped the interviewees improve their reading speed, so that they could read more relevant articles and think more critically. Moreover, this strategy was the highest common in my third stage questionnaire survey; the data showed that if 96.5% of the 200 participants came across a new word when they are chatting or reading, they tried to guess its meaning according to the context when they studied in the UK, suggesting that guessing the new word's meaning according to context was very common among the Chinese students as a means of English vocabulary learning. Gao (2003) and Hajar (2015) also found in their research that all the participants claimed they had started 'using the context to guess the meaning of the new vocabulary,' Mainly due to the way reading was assessed in UK, the participants reported less rote learning in the new context when they had made more progress in their academic reading.

5.7 Understanding agency as a complex and dynamic system regulating the learner's strategy use

Based on my literature review and findings, the learners' strategic language learning was not only influenced by social agents such as peers, teachers, tutors, native speakers or other contextual realities such as the assessment mode or material resources or technologies available, but also determined by the learners' own agency,

namely, their capability, exercise of power and willingness to adopt different LLSs in response to the change of context (Gao, 2010B; Ahearn, 2001; Mercer, 2012; Gkonou, 2015; Harjar, 2015). Recent studies suggest that language learner agency should be seen as a constantly fluid system; the direction of change in this system cannot be ascribed to any single variable alone (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011: 37). Learners' (agency) capacity to act was not only mediated by sociocultural, contextual and interpersonal factors but also influenced by an individual's various cognitive, physical, motivational and affective capacities (Mercer, 2012; Bandura, 1986), as well as the 'temporal and spatial dimensions' associated with those factors (Gkonou, 2015:197; Sealey, 2004: 11). I will discuss learner agency as a personal and socially constructed dynamic complex system, which echoes Lantolf and Pavlenko's (2001:155) call for 'a more complex view of second language learners as agents.' Based on the findings of my study, I consider learner agency is not only dynamically shaped by a single monolithic variable, but also mediated by various contextual, intrapersonal and sociocultural factors across time and space (Gkonou, 2015; Lantolf, 2013) to understand how far learner agency plays a significant role in the effectiveness of second language learning, specifically, how people make choices, self-regulate and take control of their LLS use and thereby achieve their language goals (Stanfield, 2014:173; Duff, 2012; Gkonou, 2015:195). The following sections illustrate and exemplify learner agency from a holistic perspective:

5.7.1 Understanding how dynamic learner agency is oriented by changing goals/motivation

As shown in the findings, most of the participants did not maintain a fixed degree of agency throughout their entire study in the UK; their level of agency kept changing to meet the goals and motives brought about by the new social context (Hajar, 2015; Mercer, 2012). Different learner's agency in adapting to their UK English learning environment are discussed in this section.

The first stage (begin of the academic year) findings show that despite the language difficulties the participants encountered on their arrival in the UK, nearly all of them appeared to have a positive attitude toward improving their English proficiency from the first set of interviews. They proactively thought of different ways to overcome difficult situations and solve their language problems. This echoes Gkonou's (2015: 197) statement that learner agency should not be merely viewed as a reaction to the context, but also as a proactive action, a positively adopted LLS due to the change of English learning context. Participants exercised their agency at different levels according to their different goals and motives for learning English. Learners' motives or goals were crucial in determining their strategy use (Dörnyei 2005b; Gillette, 1994; Oxord, 2003) as they tended to deploy a particular LLS to achieve certain goals (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). Bai sorted out several factors that might influence her English learning and made a plan to systematically improve her English. This metacognitive learning strategy was developed with the clear goal of speaking fluent

English with standard pronunciation like a native speaker during her study in the UK. Bai demonstrated creative ability in her attempts to overcome the contextual constraints affecting her language learning by setting plans for each stage of her language development. While Bai was strongly motivated to spend more time seeking opportunities to practice English, Xia exercise relatively little agency in initiating language practice due to his weaker motivation to practice English, and no clear goal for his English development nor any plans about how to practice his English systematically. This suggests different goals led to different motivation and exercise of power (Gao, 2010b; Lantolf, 2000) thereby leading to different levels of learner agency, meanwhile their strategy use revealed the role of agency in their language learning process. This finding can be further explained by Huang's (2011: 230) argument that apart from learner agency arising from engagement with the social world, learner agency entailing action often seemed to be due to deliberate human choice (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). Learner agenda and agency were thus closely related. *Agenda* in Huang's (2011: 242) study refers to 'things to do', 'a personally relevant and meaningful agenda might lead to the exercise of agency, which in return might lead to greater autonomy,' learner agenda and agency might be influenced by the learners' vision of future development, such as their general conceptions of English learning or their career plans. Bai in my study gave the most important reason why she maintained high autonomy and strong agency in English learning: she had had a couple years of work experience before she came to study in the UK, so she knew good English ability was pivotal to her work competence and to help her find a

better job in the future. Bai's deeper concept of English learning in relation to her future career development led to her strong ability to take control of her English learning.

As discussed above, goals play a determining role in shaping learner agency. Learners actively construct their own learning conditions, re-structure activities, or select particular actions through learner agency, ultimately, to meet their objectives or pursue their goals (Lantolf & Genung, 2002; Nardi, 1996; Duff, 2012; Stanfield, 2014). My study found that during the participants' entire study in the UK, the changed context led to the participants changing goals/ motives, thereby to changes in their, agency which in turn, influenced their LLS choice. Some participants (Xia, Jia, Bo) reported a relatively weaker ability to take control of their language learning on arrival in the UK since they had not set clear goals for learning English, so they had no idea how to actively learn English in the new context. However, after the participants became more involved in life in the UK, they changed and were more able to take control of their language learning process. Nearly all of the participants enhanced their agency as they realized the importance of the instrumental value of learning English; for example, Jun found good English ability was instrumental to surviving and succeeding in life in the UK. One of the biggest reasons for the participants more actively spending time and energy to find effective LLS strategies to improve their English was to succeed in their academic studies. In order to successfully get their MA degrees in the UK, participants had to be able to develop a

variety of effective reading and writing strategies to meet the assessment criteria (see details in section 5.6).

Another important reason for the participants' enhanced agency was the goal of succeeding in their social life in the UK. Jun's reason for wishing to learn English was to maintain face in front of her friends who could speak fluent English. Participants (Jia, Susan, Xia, Xin, Bo) noticed the importance of knowing a county's culture if they wanted to make friends from that country, thus, they were proactive in developing the LLS of learning and understanding British history and culture in order to have more in-depth communication with native speaker students. This is in line with Wu et al. (2009) finding that participant Alice proactively rehearsed in advance what she wanted to say to her flat-mates in case she 'could not keep up' during the conversation, which shows how Alice exercised her agency to maintain successful social interaction with English speakers. Gao's (2010b) finding that it was beneficial for students to create or sustain a more favorable social network with both non-local and local students to support their language learning, because better language ability could further support a satisfactory social life during their study abroad. Norton (2000: 113) pointed out that learners tend to exercise their power in the TL (target language) environment when they explore 'access to social networks that will give them the opportunities to practice their English in safe and supportive environment'. Learners in the TL environment who responsibly and proactively seek opportunities to communicate with the native speakers to practice English, also improved agency their

in this way (Pen, 2012).

The third reason reported by participants leading to their enhanced agency in improving their English was pursuing their future goal of getting a better job. When the participants approached the end of their MA studies, they began to consider their future career. Some participants (Bai, Jun, Hui, Lulu) suggested that they would have job opportunities in the UK if they could speak fluent/ native-like English, so for this reason, they conscientiously and actively developed their LLS to improve their English by imitating native accents (by which they refer to pronunciation and intonation). These findings echo those of Huang (2011: 232) and Gao (2010b: 111) that a meaningful concrete agenda with a specific goal can lead to a higher learner agency; once the learners understand their own learning English needs, they will be more able to utilize social resources to assist their strategic language learning. Moreover, as Parks and Raymond (2004) point out 'Active involvement in a specific social context may be essential in helping the individual become more aware of his or her needs which may constrain or facilitate the use of various strategies.'

As shown from the second interview findings, as the participants approached the dissertation stage of their MA study, some interviewees (Bo, Xiao, Hui, Tao, Yue) appeared to shift their high agency to more a moderate level, mainly due the high pressure of dissertation writing which impeded them from investing more time for specific English skills improvement. Some participants (Bo, Yu, Doris, Lulu) also

gave another reason for their changed level of agency directed towards English improvement revealed in their motivation changing from high to moderate was because they were already situated in an authentic English environment so they did not allocate time to learning English compared with learning English in China. This point was agreed by 89.5% of the respondents to the third stage questionnaire survey when comparing learning English in China and they UK, that they didn't allocate time to learning English after coming to the UK. This finding seems to partly align with Hajar's (2015) finding that participants in the fourth stage of his research were 'highly to moderate agentic, essentially at an academic level through dealing with securities regarding collecting and analyzing data, in addition to demonstrating effective time-management skills by starting work on their dissertation early and allowing sufficient time to revise their work.'

5.7.2 Understanding agency through learner identity

Identity simply refers to 'our sense of who we are and our relationship to the world' (Kanno, 2003:3). The findings in my study suggest a development in the learner's identity; they gradually changed from being a language learner to being a language user (Pen, 2012). The interviewees appeared to become more capable of taking control of their language learning process as they became independent language users. After the interviewees' academic study in the UK, as mediated by the change in assessment procedures, their peers, teachers and tutors and other material resources, they described how they had transformed themselves from rote learner exam-takers to

independent thinkers and thoughtful writers. This echoes Wu et al. (2009) and Pen's (2012) findings about Chinese learners studying in the UK evolving into independent academic researchers. With this identity transformation, most interviewees reported they no longer saw learning English as simply obeying teachers' instructions like reciting words or passively learning English as they had been told to in China, to learn English to pass the examinations. Participants (Bo, Xia, Jun, Bai) said they were more independent in their language learning, analyzing their own needs and developing suitable strategies on their own initiative. This development can be further explained within Dörnyei (2005b, 2009), Dörnyei & Ushioda's (2009) Motivational L2 Self System, which describes the learner's inner pursuit of the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self. For example, several interviewees (Bo, Bai, Ying) reported that their original aim of learning English was to pass the exams or get high marks - which can be seen as their ought-to L2 selves - gradually changed so their inner pursuits of learning English to a higher level was because they hoped to get their writing published or their English ideas recognized as they became more fluent in English, which can seen as their ideal L2 self. Apart from their academic study, the participants appeared to have transformed their everyday identity in their daily social lives. They changed their identity aspirations from ought-to L2 selves whereby learning English was to survive and maintain daily basic communication in the UK, to becoming their ideal L2 self and using English as a native speaker (to have meaningful conversations with native speakers and acquire a standard British accent). Their identity change was underpinned by the change in their inner pursuit, from ought-to L2 self to ideal L2

self, which led to the changing level of learner agency as well as their LLS choices. In order to become their ideal L2 selves, the interviewees needed to become more capable of upgrading and developing a variety of comprehensive LLS strategies.

In addition, different person's personalities affect their ability to take control of their language development, which influenced the learners' choices of language strategy use, to some extent. Susan was outgoing and talkative; she said she did not feel embarrassed about making mistakes when speaking English and that she had made English speaking friends. She was able to sustain a supportive social network through managing her relationships with English speakers. On the other hand, Yu was quiet, she was afraid of making mistakes when speaking English so that she did not like to talk very much. People who are less confident in oral speaking tend to be more reluctant and nervous of talking (Dörney, 2005b). Yu found it difficult to access English speakers. Different learner's capacity to take control of their language learning will lead to different levels of learner satisfaction in utilizing the contextual learning resources (Giddens, 1984). Yu was more dissatisfied with her English environment than Susan.

Overall, the construction of learner's identity in second language learning research has been found to be influenced by various factors - self-perception, conceptions about language learning, competencies, talents, personalities, beliefs and values, external images, inner pursuits and cultural belongings, career directions, social

settings (Huang, 2011:231, Gao et al., 2002; Murray and Kojima, 2007).

5.7.3 Understanding agency through the learner's reflective thinking

As shown in the findings, the interviewees reflective thinking about the effectiveness of the LLS adopted in their English learning composed an important part of their language learning agency. Bai, Jun, Yu in the first and second set of interviews constantly paid close attention to evaluating and analyzing how different LLS worked during their study in the UK. For example, Bai closely examine the effect of her different writing strategies. She found proofreading was the most effective writing strategy for improving her writing ability, which she used very frequently. Jun thought about different writing strategies in relation to the different marks for her assignments, and writing strategies, such as presenting her ideas logically and well reasoned with supporting evidence was developed based on her constantly reflective thinking about how to get high scores in her writing. The interviewees were also able to examine and evaluate the surrounding environment and whether it benefited or constrained their English studies. For example, some were more concerned about the classroom environment, and felt the large number of Chinese students around would constrain their exposure to the English environment, so impeding their English learning. Instead, they evaluated other social occasions where more native speakers around would be helpful for practising their English. For example, Bai went to church, since she found compared with other environments offering English speaking opportunities, church was the most suitable and comfortable place for her to practice her English. As Parks

and Raymond (2004: 386) point out, 'a social context is not merely a neutral container. Active involvement in a specific context may be essential in helping the individual become aware of his or her needs, and may constrain or facilitate the use of various strategies'. Participants' reflective thinking about which environment worked best for improving their English reflected how they exercised their learning agency. Gao (2013: 229) explains: 'language learners constantly evaluate contextual and structural conditions before committing or recommitting themselves in the pursuit of the ultimate visions such as taking control of the learning process, which helps them become aware of the various constraints and enable themselves within a particular context.' Some of the participants in the second stage interviews critically reviewed their whole English learning experience during their study time in the UK, what progress they had made or what problems they still faced, then set goals and/or made action plans for their future study. For example, Lulu said when she reflexively evaluated what progress she had made, she found that she had not improved her English ability significantly since she spent much of her time on her academic study whilst making less effort to practice spoken English. Xin pointed out even when she made gradual improvements in her English, the outcomes were far less than her expectations, therefore she decided to continue with PhD study in the UK to seek more opportunities to practice English. Some (Jun, Bo, Jia) participants assessed their language learning results based on feedback of other peoples' opinions. Private language learning has been found to be most effective when informed by feedback from others (Wu et al., 2009).

In other words, learner agency enabled the learners to reflectively think -
'introspectively or retrospectively look into their own thoughts, feelings, emotions,'
and critically assess the results (Gao, 2013: 229). As Gao (2013: 235) concluded,
language learners were enabled to use their agency 'through internal conversation or
reflective/reflexive thinking'; during this process, learners discerned and deliberated
various 'concerns, desires, and visions to identify their top priorities in the light of
contextual and structural conditions' (Gao, 2007).

5.8 Summary

This section has answered the four provisional research questions in my study based
on the findings and compared them with the related literature *(RQ1: What English
learning adjustments and developments do Chinese students make during their study
in the UK? RQ2. What language learning strategies do Chinese students studying in
the UK use as they attempt to improve their English proficiency? RQ3. How does the
use of these strategies by Chinese students change and develop during their period of
study abroad in UK? RQ4: What social and cultural factors influence their changing
experiences and their changing use of language learning strategies?).* The overall
characteristic of the participants' LLS use tended to be creative, flexible, voluntary
and independent. They no longer passively adopted the same LLS as instructed by
their teachers in China, but actively applied different, effective LLS to best fit their

own needs. Participants changed views to stressing independent study in their explorations of LLS use. The participants' language learning strategies were overall influenced by the following social mediating agents: peers, teachers and tutors and other native speakers; social material resources: technology and other artifacts; socio-contextual realities; the assessment mode and their interaction with learner agency. The overall changing pattern of the participants' dynamic language learning features can be summarized as follows: on the participants' arrival in the UK, they were all highly motivated and responded positively to meeting the new challenges and were keen to explore a wider range of strategies to improve their English. In the middle period of their MA study in the UK, they had settled into the routines of academic study and social life. During this period, the participants focused on dealing with their academic courses and developed a set of strategies mainly to meet the academic demands, especially to get high scores in assignments; they changed to stressing academic learning and development and were most frequently influenced by teachers and peers. As the participants approached the dissertation stage, they placed more emphasis on independent private study; most of them had become more capable of coping with the demands of studying and daily life and were more capable of taking advantages of the opportunities on offer when studying in the UK through integrating mixed ways of learning English (such as attending social activities, travelling in the UK or in European countries).

5.9 Some further issues

Several issues arose in my research which were not specifically dealt with when answering the research questions in the previous sections but are worth commenting upon.

5.9.1 The gap between Chinese students' expectations and the teaching reality

Some of the participants suggested that there was a gap between their expectations about the UK teachers' language teaching and the real teaching situation. They reported that their UK university teachers/tutors did not see their role as commenting/giving feedback on the pronunciation/ oral language use of their students, but rather on the subject content and understanding they showed. However, a Chinese viewpoint would see this differently. Jia and Meng reported that they sometimes simply read their PPT during their presentations, and the teachers only gave comments on the content of the PPT, not on the speaking skills of the presenters, although these students expected the teachers to correct their pronunciation and intonation. Bai reported the in-sessional language class was not as helpful as she expected, as the teachers only gave general instructions or suggestions, but did not pay much attention to her specific needs. Bai expected the teachers to identify her language problems and give her specific and effective solutions. Yu reported even though UK teachers were nice to the students, she hoped teachers could pay more attention and give more constructive feedback and encouragement when they talked to the L2 learners; since she was afraid of making mistakes or losing face, teachers'

extra praise could have given her more confidence in practising her English. Jun reported the main way UK teachers' helped the students to improve their English was through the feedback about their writing assignments, but her spoken ability could not be improved in this way; she hoped teachers could develop ways to give specific suggestions to improve the students' writing, speaking and other abilities.

Cortazzi and Jin (1997) also found Chinese students and British students have different expectations of teachers' roles. In the view of Chinese students, a good teacher should have a wide range of knowledge and can teach students what to learn and how to learn with clear guidance, and a good teacher is expected to also have a high moral standards and guide students in how to be a good person, and be kind to the students. As a result, a good student in Chinese teachers' views is expected to respect her teachers and listen to their teachers' instructions, not criticise what the teachers say. However, in British teachers' views, a good teacher should be a coordinator or a facilitator who can help the students to develop independently and creativity. A good student in British teachers' views should be analytical and critical rather than simply absorb what the teachers says and the students were also expected to engage and participate in classroom interaction.

Kingston and Forland (2008) argue that due to the cultural differences, students from an East Asian background might hold different views about Western education when they study in the UK. Their study of international students' expectations of academic

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issues found that the international students felt it difficult to take-notes during a lecture since they were working in a second or third language, so they hoped the teachers could give out notes in advance to assist their learning. Asian students within the Confucian tradition were confused about the strict punishment for plagiarism in UK Universities since they regarded plagiarism as a mark of respect. Kingston and Forland (2008) also shared a similar view to my findings that there is a gap between the students' expectations about UK teachers' language teaching and the real teaching and assessment situation. For example, some students studying business and engineering were assessed through timed examinations, which were the most stressful and challenging assessment mode for the L2 learners due to the language problems. They hoped they could be assessed through writing essays that allowed the students enough time to put their thoughts down on paper. Moreover, they found the participants hoped teachers would give more written feedback rather than only verbal feedback. Their study also pointed out the study pressure in the UK universities was so high that students got less time to utilize the schools' other resources to practice English. Students had expected they would be left with enough spare time to develop their interest in learning English.

5.9.2 The important role of Background knowledge in reading

Some of the interviewees suggested they became better able to understand when reading articles once they were more familiar with the background cultural knowledge of certain areas. This suggests the importance of background knowledge in reading. In

order to be a more efficient critical reader, Bo deployed the reading strategy that if he needed to read articles about one area, he would first familiarize himself with background information on that area. Bai reported that increased background knowledge was another important reason that led to the improvement of her ability to understand when reading. For example, Bai reported that it was only when she understood some legal issues about child protection in the UK, that she could get a correct understanding of a related topic in this area when reading.

Liu's findings (2012) supported the importance of background knowledge for critical reading. Students generally have a large number of reading tasks in their coursework study in order to acquire enough background information to enable them to compare and evaluate their views through considering other related works.

Huang's (2009) study gave a detailed explanation about how and why background knowledge plays such an important role in improving the learner's reading comprehension. Huang (2009) argues that even if the reader was equipped with sufficient vocabulary and grammar knowledge, reading skills might remain unsatisfactory. She further pointed out the importance of background knowledge underpinned by Schema Theory. According to Schema Theory,

'a text only provides directions as to how a reader should retrieve or construct meaning from previously acquired knowledge. Comprehending words, sentences, and entire texts requires the ability to relate the material to one's own knowledge. Effective reading is a combination of the non-visual information already stored and

organized in the brain and the present visual information printed on the page.' (Huang, 2009: 139)

Researchers working from a cognitive and psychological perspective have defined schema as non-visual information already stored and organized in readers' long-term memory. Schema theory has been found to have great importance for understanding in reading. Researchers have classified several types of schemata. Readers' background knowledge or world knowledge/specialized knowledge are defined as content schema which provide the readers' with a basis or foundation for comparison (Carrell & Eisterhold 1983; Carrell, Pharis & Liberto 1989). Other types of schemata such as textual schema provide readers with knowledge of language structures, vocabulary, grammar and knowledge of text organization. It can be inferred from the above that schema can play an important role in reading comprehension for both L1 (First Language) and L2 learners.

The argument is that the reader's knowledge of the subject or the related knowledge from their personal experience or cultural background knowledge permits the reader to achieve better understanding. Therefore, readers who lack sufficient background knowledge of the subject and context will have lower comprehension ability (Voss, Vesonder and Spilich 1980). The above discussion can partly explain why some of my interviewees developed to achieve better comprehension when reading articles after they had increased their background knowledge of a certain topic or area. Once awareness of the importance of background knowledge in reading has been developed,

suggestions for how teachers can help learners improve their reading comprehension through increasing their background knowledge seems quite useful. See details in the following, Implications section.

5.10 Implications

The following implications and suggestions have been generated based on the findings of my research:

5.10.1 Implications for the UK University teachers/tutors

1). When the participants described their language difficulties on arrival in the UK, one observation might be that class teachers or tutors/ supervisors in meetings could speak English more slowly or use simpler words and/or sentences to help international students understand more easily.

2). Bridging the gaps in expectations between Chinese students and UK teachers for learning English. The emerging issues suggest that participants hoped the UK teachers would not only pay attention to the students' understanding of the subject content, but also give feedback or comment on international students' oral English in terms of pronunciation, intonation and any pragmatic speaking skills when they had discussions in class. The findings from my research also suggest the students hoped the teachers could manipulate the composition of the discussion groups in class, to

ensure at least one native speaker student was in each group. Wright's (2015) study also found Chinese students may well realize the potential of high communication activities and be more responsive towards them due to an awareness that class interaction with native students aids their communication and helps them achieve their learning. These students also expected the classes to be interactive and participative in communication with the native students. She indicates that students are keen to develop their communication skills in, ideally, an open, friendly environment. Tutors could, therefore, draw on these expectations in their course planning and not hesitate to include communicative activities, regardless of any apparent passivity (Wright, 2015). Teachers could bear in mind the need to help international students build relationships with native speakers. In order to know more about the L2 learners' real needs, I suggest in-sessional or pre-sessional English language class teachers could share and discuss them with the L2 learners personally and, design appropriate teaching plans to help students to develop their English proficiency.

3). The findings from my study suggest the teachers/tutors' language feedback on the Chinese students' writing assignments were the most effective way of improving their language proficiency. Teachers could work on giving more detailed feedback on students' writing by pointing out specific problems and giving suggestions to resolve them. Despite the general advice provided in pre-sessional and in-sessional language classes, different international students may encounter different language difficulties,

and English language teachers' feedback on student writing assignments appeared to be one of the most effective ways of identifying different individuals' specific language problems and providing suitable advice based on their needs. Teachers (including language teachers and subject academic tutors) could also encourage the students to reflect on their learning progress to target areas needing remedial support and advice. Wright (2015) indicates an understanding of Chinese students' perception of effort and collaboration can also enable teachers to reinforce the learning benefits of effort in the form of volunteering information and attempting to answer in class, not just on language courses but in HE in general.

4). Recognizing the great cultural differences between the UK and China, the findings suggest Chinese students have less interaction with their teachers or ask fewer questions compared with Western students, or keep silence in group discussion. It would be helpful for UK teachers to understand silence does not necessarily mean Chinese students lack enthusiasm for learning, but it may be due to the language difficulties and a different learning culture. Under the culture of Confucian philosophy, Chinese people are more likely to prioritise harmony rather than question and challenge. Chinese students regard teachers as authorities, any disagreements would be regarded as showing disrespect to teachers (Ryan, 2010). Bearing this mind, it is better for UK teachers to focus on developing a variety of teaching strategies to improve the students' confidence in volunteering information in class, acknowledging the students that asking questions is encouraged in UK Universities, to create a

comfortable communication environment for students from different countries. Moreover, UK teachers (for both English language course teachers and subject academic teachers) are recommended to take into account that L2 students are developing new ways of perceiving, talking and thinking in the new context when they teach (Lantolf, 2013). Teachers who are aware of cultural differences and are knowledgeable about different countries' cultures might produce better teaching outcomes for international students. Overall, teachers may 'learn from students by understanding the students' cultural traditions.' It would be helpful if the teachers and the students could make mutual efforts to understand one another's culture as a process of 'cultural synergy' (Zhou, et al., 2008: 72).

5.10.2 Implications for the UK HE (Higher Education) providers

In my findings, the large number of Chinese students around were reported to be an obstacle to Chinese sojourners being fully exposed to authentic English environment. The university is recommended to think about how to place the students in class, accommodation and other school activities to ensure international students have opportunities to practice English with native speakers. For instance, university managers could avoid placing all the Chinese students in the same flat; it is better to combine students from different nations in one flat, to include at least one native-speaker local student included, and the same is true for when they design any school group activities or programmes. This research suggests the importance of native speakers in influencing L2 sojourners' adaptation to UK study from various

aspects. Indeed, the university is also recommended to take measures to enhance the relationships between international students and the native students and provide well-designed programmes throughout academic departments to create opportunities for collaboration across language groups (Wu et al., 2009).

Moreover, this research reported a series of Chinese sojourners' experiences and difficulties during their study in the UK University. UK HE providers could gather information from previous international students about the specific difficulties they faced and how they coped with them. This information could be passed on to newcomers to help them more quickly overcome culture shock problems and minimize their efforts to adapt to the new environment. UK HE providers might take this information into account when they design L2 programmes such as creating international curricula and international training sessions. The in-sessional and pre-sessional language classes offering English help especially for international students could be more beneficial if the teaching objectives were designed to meet the students' different specific needs from different aspects (Liu, 2012).

5.10.3 Advices for the L2 sojourners

1). Reconceptualise how to learn English. The study suggests if the L2 sojourners could become aware of the possibility of identity transformation from English learners to English users, they would be more able to cope within the TL environment and be more likely to have better English learning outcomes. Sociocultural theory

suggests 'understanding language is not a matter of mere understanding words or sentences, but of understanding actions-utterances which are constructively interpreted in relation to their contexts' (Lantolf and Johnson, 2007; Liu, 2013: 139). The findings from my study suggest students in China are more likely to learn English to pass exams and they could be good language learners rather than good language users. However, during their study in the UK, it is better for these students to see learning English is not simply about learning English to meet assessment requirements, but to use in real contexts. Instead of memorizing words and grammar rules, or mechanically translating, L2 learners are recommended to try to think in English and set the goal of being a user of English. For example, in academic reading, L2 learners not only need to check the meaning of new word or understand the meaning of the content, but think critically and build their own opinions. In academic writing, instead of remembering sentences structures or imitating/ translating other people's writing, L2 learners need to express their own opinions and write down their own words; in oral English communication, instead of being afraid of making mistakes or 'losing face', L2 learners need to be brave and speak more English in real conversations to get a better sense of how to speak English like native speakers.

2). Using peer group support. The findings suggest peers played significant roles in assisting the L2 sojourners to adapt to life in the UK.   Successful L2 learners could share their learning experiences and language strategies with their peers. I also suggest L2 learners could create platforms such as chat rooms on Facebook, Wechat

(a widely used APP for Chinese students) to share information. L2 sojourners might ask help from peers to comment on their works. It would be helpful for L2 learners to participate in peer group discussions to get more opportunities to clarify questions they had during the lectures.

3). As suggested by Cohen et al. (2005), if L2 learners can be prepared with a wide repertoire of LLSs before their visit, this would maximise their ability to overcome cultural and language learning difficulties. It would be helpful if Chinese learners or other L2 learners could learn or adopt the most popular strategies suggested in my questionnaire survey to more effectively deal with language difficulties during their study in the UK. Strategies such as trying to guess a new word's meaning according to the context; acquiring idiomatic English words or expressions from real daily communication; learning English through communication with native speakers and noting and correcting English mistakes from feedback from their interlocutors had 85% support in my questionnaire survey，is highly recommended to the L2 sojourners. These strategies originally generated in first and second interview sets and tested for popularity in the questionnaire survey might currently work best for newly-arrived international students coming to study in the UK, but L2 sojourners are also encouraged to employ other strategies based on their particular goals and situations.

4). Learner should make efforts to independently take control of their language learning themselves. The findings in my study suggest learner' agency played an

important role in regulating the language learning process. Additionally, just as the sociocultural theory suggests, 'students are international human agents playing a significant role in their own learning' (Lantolf and Johnson, 2007; Liu, 2013:137). L2 sojourners might be born with different levels of language learning ability, however, everyone can achieve their language learning goals and improve their language learning ability through effort. Adult learners in higher education are encouraged to think and learn by themselves (Su, 2012). L2 sojourners are recommended to make their own efforts by reflectively thinking about their learning process, by recording their thoughts and feelings for instance, and making plans, to clearly be aware of what they have achieved and what problems need to be resolved. It is also helpful for Chinese students to be aware that, different from ELT in China where students simply obey the teachers' instructions and pass exams, the English way of learning and study in the UK University puts more emphasis on the efforts students make through independent study. It would be helpful if Chinese students were aware of this difference before they studied abroad. They could carry out some research on the Internet to find current international students' views about studying in the UK (Benson et al, 2013). If they could quicker enhance their ability to utilize the social/academic resources, they could get better learning results. For example, they can volunteer for school activities to provide opportunities to practice English with the native speakers; set clear goals for each stage of their language learning; regard the teachers and other academic staff as helpers/facilitators and not hesitate to speak to them if they encounter problems. Overall, during study abroad, L2 sojourners are

recommended to proactively exercise their agency by making use of the resources around and creatively exploring different ways of assisting their English study.

5.10.4 Implications for teaching and learning English in China

1). Advice for home educational institutions. In order to assist the students to adapt quickly to life in the UK, schools in the students' home countries could set up a variety of preparatory intercultural courses offering information about British history, customs, education, religion, food and so on. Schools could organize more social activities, English learning sessions and more L2 programs such as one-year or short-term exchange programmes, summer schools, internships etc. offering the students more opportunities to experience life in the UK. As the findings suggest, Chinese students were still facing great language challenges when they studied in the UK, so Chinese schools could help by changing the teaching emphasize in ELT to enhance students' practical English abilities. ELT in China is recommended to focus more on the students' learning process through 'paying more attention to the students' learning experiences and LLS use' (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008: 184). Chinese schools could advocate collaborative study that encourages students' active participation with their teachers and peers, establish teaching guidelines that focus on the students' practical ability to use English in real contexts, rather than remembering linguistic knowledge (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008). The ELT curriculum could be reformed to be relevant to the students' real learning needs and learning materials could be designed based on these.

Moreover, course design in language education should to take cultivating critical thinking into account, including focusing on developing the learner's ability to self-evaluate, self-plan, self-explore to assist the students to set their own goals and reflectively think about their learning progress. Home schools could also recruit experienced or expert teachers or other staff members to provide suggestions or support for students aiming to study abroad, to give advice on how to cope with life in the UK and deal with language difficulties, or raise the students' awareness of how to actively develop the LLS necessary to meet their future goals (Pen, 2012). For tertiary English education, it would be helpful for universities or colleges to develop students' language abilities to higher levels of practical competence rather than simply revise what facts they have learnt.

Consequently, policy makers or education managers need to establish new assessment criteria to evaluate student progress and needs. The findings in this study suggest different assessment criteria might lead to learners conceptualising learning English learning differently and thus making different choices of LLSs. Apart from test scores as the only way to measure the students' English ability, other elements could foster student creativity in exploring suitable LLS, their ability to apply what they learnt to real English communication (or oral tests), their ability to evaluate their learning process, develop independent thinking in English studies could be added to the assessment criteria. Correspondingly, the assessment mode would need to be varied; apart from the exam, as the main assessment tool, others such as writing essays,

giving presentations could be considered to measure the students' English ability more holistically.

2). Advice for home country teachers, particularly for English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers in China. Apart from giving linguistic knowledge in class, teachers could develop more varied/flexible input and learning strategies with their students (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008). As suggested from the findings, technology helped the students to learn English in more convenient ways, so teachers could equip the students with more technological skills such as online searching ability, how to install or use APPs or other electronic devices. Teachers could develop ICT (Information and Communication Technology) E-learning, thus deliver ELT to greater numbers of students. Even if delivering knowledge, teaching new words or grammar rules, sentence structure, training the students' translation skills remain central teaching objectives, teachers are recommended to set up new teaching goals to improve students' practical ability. Teachers could put more emphasis on valuing the students' opinions, their practical communication abilities, cultivating the students' creativity in language learning, and their interests to explore a wider range of LLSs. Teachers are encouraged to use a variety of assessment modes as well - examination scores alone do not reflect the students' language ability; writing essays/ giving presentations/ conducting authentic English conversation exchanges are also good ways to assess the students' language learning outcomes.

A good ELT teacher, in my opinion, should be a good example (model) of an English user. S/he is responsible for raising awareness in the students of not only learning English as a subject, but also using English as a tool in their daily lives. It would be helpful if teachers advised and supported the students' intrinsic motivation by using English both inside and outside class. Teachers should therefore be able to teach and use English well both inside and outside the classroom to set practical examples for their students to facilitate their becoming better English users (Su, 2012).

A proposed '5 steps teaching model' for the ELT teachers.

- Teachers are recommended to begin with a grammar/ translation/ word memorizing approach. The purpose of this stage's teaching is to ensure the students are equipped with enough basic linguistic knowledge of English to develop basic skills in reading literature and exercise their cognitive and intellectual abilities. Teachers could ask the students to read English texts line by line and translate them into their native language; grammar rules or new words could be explained in this stage. Teachers could test the students' learning by asking them to answer comprehensive questions or filling the blanks in cloze tests or dictate words to link aural recognition with and writing. kn.

- When students' are equipped with the basic learning skills and linguistic knowledge, the second step is to expose the learners to an English speaking environment. The students do not necessarily need to speak at this stage, but

listen and understand the target language to gain comprehensible input through listening to their teachers speaking in English (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

- The third step is to converse with the students, providing learners with opportunities to speak and encouraging them to engage in interaction with their teachers or peers. This stage's teaching objective is to help the students apply what they have learnt in real communication, to develop the students' ability to use English to express themselves and clarify their thoughts, opinions and intentions, etc., to develop mutual understanding between the teachers and the students through their use of English. Teachers could ask the students to give presentations, give speeches, ask questions or participate in group discussions to achieve this stage's teaching goals.

- After general group teaching to develop the students' general skills in English, the fourth step is to explore different individual's 'developmental features' (Lightbown & Spada, 2013: 177). More specifically, teachers in this stage investigate each student's different learning abilities and what specific help they need based on their different situations. For example, teachers could identify different student's personalities or goals in English learning and design suitable teaching strategies to best fit each student's developmental needs. Teachers could take the students' interests and readiness for what they wish to be taught into account.

- The final step is to encourage and advise the students on how to learn and use English actively and independently. As the students are familiar with the

whole procedure of learning English, from the previous four steps, teachers are recommended to raise the students' awareness of flexibly combining or modifying their existing learning skills and create new learning strategies to best meet their own needs in different situations.

Developing different ways of inspiring students to increase their background knowledge about their learning subject is desirable. The emerging issue suggests the importance of background knowledge in reading implies that to help students understand reading material quickly and appropriate and no suffer from a shortage of background knowledge, English language teachers might usefully consider different teaching methods to help students increase their background knowledge. English teachers of reading material should know the reading material well and make clear what background knowledge the students might need, and help the students to develop the need to incorporate their pre-existing knowledge when approaching reading material to achieve a better understanding (Huang, 2009). Several effective teaching methods are recommended as follows:

- Teachers could use class discussion as a traditional way to inspire students to share their ideas about topics related to the reading text, make a summary of different students' ideas so that the students could open their minds to understanding the text.

- Teachers are also recommended to write and present their personal experiences, through comparing their own experiences with the related texts,

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so the students may understand the text more easily. When teaching English as a foreign language in class, teachers who teach English reading comprehension classes could ask the students to compare their home culture with the English speaking country's culture, to help students develop cross-cultural background knowledge and hence decrease the understanding barriers when reading English texts.

- Teachers could also be creative in using multimedia such as slides and videos to present background knowledge directly and vividly (Huang, 2009). Other innovative teaching methods such as making predictions to test before reading and cultivating students' interest in wider reading could help the students actively build up their background knowledge schemata.

3). Overall, the suggestions for the development of English teaching and learning in China could be viewed as national targets for 'changing practices in the Chinese learning of English' (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008: 15). National English curriculum reform could be conducted under the following principles and aims: to increase more classroom participation; cultivate the students' critical thinking and evaluation skills; enhance the student's practical and cross-cultural communication abilities; value the students' creativity and opinions; encourage the students' independent study and their self-awareness to explore and use wider a range of appropriate LLSs.

5.10.5 Summary

The findings of this study could help UK HE educators and Chinese educators get a clearer picture of the current Chinese MA students' dynamic English learning situation, the language challenges they face and their efforts to progress their English learning. The findings can also help UK and Chinese educators assess Chinese learners' concrete needs in learning English. The implications for pedagogy is for appropriate updated scaffolding systematically provided throughout Chinese students' MA study in the UK to ensure they can benefit as much as possible, since whether the students can successfully finish their study largely depends on whether they are offered the appropriate education scaffolding support. In sum, through exploring Chinese international students learning English and giving suitable suggestions based on these findings, a problem identifying and solution finding model for the language educators can be developed (Liu, 2012). As Sarangi and Roberts (1999: 336) illustrated, the significance of finding problems and giving suggestions in response to these problems from the research could help practitioners understand 'what matters and what is applicable' in real situations.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether Chinese students' adopted new strategies or changed their existing language learning strategies (LLS) while studying in a UK University. In this conclusion, I give a summary of what I did in this research, the outcomes of this study and outline the strengths and limitations of the study in terms of methodology, and make some suggestions concerning research to develop and explore further the outcomes of the study.

6.1 Summary of the outcomes of this study

Although there has been considerable research into LLS in a variety of educational and cultural contexts, it is still the case that there have been few sociocultural LLS studies that have tried to understand learners approaches to learning and using a second language within the framework of a particular cultural context. By contrast to the widespread LLS studies conducted within a cognitive psychology framework, this interpretive study has attempted to understand the dynamics of the shifts and developments in language learning strategies (LLS) used by a group of Chinese Masters students in a UK University within a sociocultural theoretical framework. A qualitative approach was used in this research. Data was collected at three stages over a time span of one year of students' MA academic study in the UK. All the participants were Chinese Masters students studying at the University of Warwick in

the academic year 2014-2015. The first and second stage data collection involved interviews that explored the participants' LLS use and how this changed and developed during their period of study abroad. The third stage data collection involved a questionnaire survey to validate by finding out if the salient findings identified from the first and second stage's interviews also applied to a wider group.

This study is, as far as I know, the first that has tried to interpret the dynamic, shifting nature of the LLS used by a group of current Chinese students over the course of a year's study programme, and the ways these are shaped by interaction with various social factors in the UK University, the learners' shifting motivations and their identity development as second language users. The outcomes of this study can be summarised as follows:

- The overall characteristics of the participants' LLS use tended to be creative, flexible, voluntary and independent. They no longer passively adopted the same LLS as instructed by their teachers in China, but actively applied different and effective LLS to best fit their own needs. The participants changed their outlook to place greater emphasis on their independent study when developing and extending their LLS use.

- The participants' language learning strategies were influenced by the following social mediating agents: peers, teachers and tutors and other native speakers; social material resources: technology and other artifacts; socio-contextual realities: assessment modes and learner agency.

- The large numbers of Chinese students and the scarcity of native peers appeared to play a constraining role on the participants' opportunities to practice their English, particularly on their arrival in the UK. However, peers (including Chinese students and other students) began positively influence their strategic language learning as they became more involved in their study in the UK. The participants' beliefs about learning and their choices of LLS shifted under the influence of their teachers'/ supervisors'/tutors' feedback and advice, mainly by facilitating students' independent development of LLS based on their own needs. Apart from the prominent role of teachers and peers, other native/English speakers in the UK also mediated the participants' LLS moving towards the use of more social strategies. The convenient technology and artifacts in the UK also empowered the participants to adopt various new and more flexible English learning strategies. The means of assessment in the UK University influenced the participants' LLS use, particularly for writing and reading, while cultivating students' critical thinking and evaluation abilities. Participants' LLSs was not only influenced by social factors, but also determined by the learners' agency, namely, their ability to take control of their learning progress. Learner agency in regulating the participants' LLS use in their new social context appeared to be a dynamic complex system, and the level of participants' agency kept changing, underpinned by the change in motivation mediated by the change in social context, and they mainly exercised their agency through reflective thinking and identity development as

users of English.

- There was a gap between the Chinese students' expectations and the actual teaching reality in the UK, and background information was also important for the learners to develop their reading and understanding of academic texts.

- Implications are that both UK and Chinese educators may benefit from providing suitable English teaching scaffolding based on their students' true needs and targeting their true problems to achieve successful language learning results in terms of being able to use and understand English as part of their dynamic learning process on their Master's subject courses.

6.2 Strengths and limitations of this study in terms of methodology

As reviewed in Chapter 2, most previous studies of LLS usage have been based only on the outcomes of quantitative questionnaire surveys, which has meant that it was difficult to capture the dynamic and contextual nature of such usage. Several recent LLS studies have begun to employ more qualitative approaches in an attempt to uncover the in-depth, dynamic nature of changing LLS use, sacrificing the possibility of broader, more generalisable outcomes. The strength of the current study in terms of methodology is based on the design and research ways of diversity, using in-depth interviews to enter into the lifeworlds of the 16 interviewees' language learning practices and using a questionnaire survey to test the major results and findings from my study on a wider scale. Some researchers (Gao et al, 2013; Griffiths and Oxford,

2014) advocate the combined use of semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys that fit local research contexts as the best way to enrich the data base. Another strength of this study is that the understanding about my research topic is deepened by the three periods of data collection and analysis, whereby each stage of the data collection built upon the previous stage's findings. I gathered data in the first stage to get a preliminary understanding of the original 8 participants' English learning experiences. I gathered data in the second stage interviews to see the changes in the original 8 participants' experiences of their English usage development, and I added another 8 participants to enrich the data. The final stage of this research study involved a questionnaire survey with 200 participants to see whether they shared the opinions of the 16 interviewees, if the overall results suggested that the 200 respondents (all Chinese Master students from Warwick University) tended to share similar feelings about the Language Learning Strategies listed in the questionnaire to the interviewees in my research, the likely applicability of those findings to a larger group could be suggested in this way, patterns are generated as well. This research findings were generated stage by stage from a small group to a larger group, which strengthened and enrich the outcomes of this study.

One limitation of this interpretive research is that all the initial data was collected via interview, following which I analyzed and interpreted my findings based on what people said. It can be argued that people's answers to interview questions may not truly reveal the 'facts'. People may choose to mislead the interviewer or more

problematically maybe mislead themselves. There is no way to determine whether their words really reflect the 'facts'. Conscious or unconscious bias is always possible. Moreover, for me as a researcher, even though I tried my best to interpret people's utterances holistically based on the respondents' understanding, as human beings use different complex ways to understand other humans' lives, my interpretation of the results of this research could be different to other researchers' interpretations. In all, the in-built problem of this interpretive research is that the data's reliability is always problematic. The use of multiple methods of gathering data was an important strategy to try to overcome such potential bias and interpretation concerns.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

This study attempted to explain how and why the Chinese Masters students studied changed their language learning strategies from a sociocultural perspective. However, it did not examine whether female and male students apply different strategies. Dörnyei's (2005b: 59) research indicated that males and females behaved in 'strikingly different ways' in the choice of LLSs. Some researchers, such as Green & Oxford (1995) and Young & Oxford (1997) have argued that females use affective strategies and social strategies more often than males in second language learning; however, other researchers such as Ehrman & Oxford (1995) contend that there was no difference between the LLS that males and females adopted in their research. It would be interesting to add gender as a variable in my questionnaire survey to see if

there was correlation between this and the frequency or type of LLS use in my future research. To the best of my knowledge, there is little literature examining whether learners' LLS use differs according to their specialist subjects. It would also worthy adding Master students of Arts, Social Science and Science as new variables in my questionnaire to discover whether there are any correlations between the students' learning areas and their adoption of certain types of LLS. Further reasons behind the significant statistical results could be explored in future research as well.

Based on the findings of my interviews, the reality of what makes a good second language learner appears to be a complicated issue. Due to the limitation in terms of the scope and the length of this current thesis, I am unable to consider these issues here. The current study sheds light on the relationship between the learners' LLS use and sociocultural factors as mediating agents, along with learning material resources. Psychological factors appeared to play an important role in regulating the learners' LLS use in my interview findings as well, therefore questions about how psychological and sociocultural factors interrelate with each other, and how they operate as a complex interactive system in influencing the L2 learners' LLS choice could be further explored in a future study. Some key issues such as autonomy, mood, attitude, personality, motivation, and the students' self-regulation could be further explored to develop LLS studies further. Moreover, future research could focus on which strategies and how individuals use them in different contexts to meet their personal goals.

In addition, one aim of this study was to track the dynamic changes in Chinese learners' LLS use in the UK University. Perhaps it would be helpful to conduct a longitudinal study in future with a longer period time of data collection. This could start by collecting data three to six months before the participants left China to study in the UK (looking at their English LLS in China) using various data collecting ways (observation, interview, diary keeping, MSN chats), and followed up by further data collected every two months till the end of their Master's study. It could be useful to explore the students' world more deeply, how and why the participants changed their English LLS from various aspects in detail, and several new factors could possibly be discovered through future longitudinal research. Since this study targeted Chinese learners' English learning experiences during their UK Higher Education experiences, future research could investigate participants at different levels or with different backgrounds. People at different levels could be grouped as undergraduate students, postgraduate students, long-term or short-term exchange students, visitors etc. People from different backgrounds could be grouped as learners who had previous experience abroad before they came to the UK and those who did not. It would be possible to provide more information about how people from various learning backgrounds pursue their English learning to see whether or not people at different levels share the same or have different LLSs, and how different people's personal backgrounds might influence their language strategic choices.

The present research, as with most other studies, has left more questions unanswered than answered. Interesting emerging issues such as the LLS that if the learners did not know how to say something in English, they would seek help from their Chinese classmates or friends who had lived in the UK for many years, was mentioned by most of my interviewees, however, this LLS was not popular with nearly half of the questionnaire participants. What leads to such differing results is worthy of discussion and investigation in future research. A minority of participants had negative feelings about acquiring English in the UK, and, although such negative views in LLS use were not discussed in this study, it would be useful to investigate why they felt like this.

Finally, future research might investigate how different courses and teaching methods facilitate the language learners' adaptation to the new environment in detail. This could provide information about what is the best way to help second language speakers transform themselves to language users, and what skills and strategies are useful for Chinese students to prepare themselves to better adapt to the UK's language, academic study and culture.

6.4 Summary

This study is unique in that it is the first to examine current Chinese students' changing LLS use in a UK University underpinned by sociocultural theory, as far as I

know. The whole study has illustrated that, even though Chinese students are used to passively obeying their teachers' instructions and all using the same, uniform LLS in their English learning as they receive most of their English language education in China, this does not mean they cannot change or be creative in their LLS use in the new, UK environment. After their study in the UK begins, it takes some time for the Chinese students to adapt to life in UK University; however, the final results suggest that they are able to develop suitable LLS and change to become independent/creative learners and to live a new life in the new culture successfully.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Invitation and consent to participate in my study

Dear participants,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. This study is the completion of my PhD thesis. The purpose of my research is to try and understand, and to find out the shifts in language strategy used by Chinese university students to learn more English during their studies in the UK. The information learned will be used to generate valuable questions in a following quantitative questionnaire data collection.

You can choose whether or not to participate in the interview and stop at any time. Although your words will be recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. I want to hear as many different viewpoints as possible. I hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with others. The responses made by all the participants will be kept confidential.

A £6 reward will be paid at the end of our discussion!

I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above:

Singed _____ Date_____

If you would like to get involved in my study, please do not hesitate to contact me. I

look forward to seeing you!

Appendix 2

First stage interview guide

Core questions	Optional questions
1. How do you feel about studying in the UK?	1. What do you think that you are learning English for?
2. Describe how you learn English.	2. What is the most important thing in learning English?
5. What kind of problems do you normally have in learning English?	3. Why are you particularly motivated to learn through English at University? Were you motivated in similar ways when you were on the Chinese Mainland? (motivation)
3. Which particular aspects of English do you had problems with? Which particular aspects of English have you been mainly work on to improve?	4. Why do you think that you have not done much about improving particular areas of English although you feel you have problems with them?
5. What have you been doing in order to improve your English?	6. What do you do to improve your speaking, listening, writing, reading, etc., normally?
6. What do you think of the UK English learning environment? In comparison	8. Are you satisfied with your English?

with Mainland China? (context)	
8. What are your targets in learning English? Why?	9. What kind of help do you need most?
7. Are there any teachers, friends, or other people who have influenced your language learning process? (peer group)	11. How well have you done with your learning though English so far?

Appendix 3

Second stage interview guide

Core questions	Optional questions
1. Compare the you of today and the you at the time when we first met, what changes in English learning have you made during this period?	1. What do you think that you are learning English for?
2. Describe how you learn English.	2. What is the most important thing in learning English?
3. Why are you particularly motivated to learn through English at University? Were you motivated in similar ways when you were on the Chinese Mainland? (motivation)	3. Which particular aspects of English did you have problems with? Which particular aspects of English have you been mainly working on to improve?
4. Have you improved your English while working on your academic subjects through English medium of instruction or spending specially allocated time on your English? (academic context)	4. Why do you think that you have not done much about particular areas of English although you feel you have problems with them?
5. What have you been doing in order to improve your English?	5. What kind of problems do you normally have in learning English?

6. What do you think of the UK English learning environment? In comparison with Mainland China? (context)	6. What do you do to improve your speaking, listening, writing, reading, etc., normally?
7. Are there any teachers, friends, or other people who have influenced your language learning process? (peer group)	8. Are you satisfied with your English?
8. What kind of progress do you think that you have made in learning English here?	9. What kind of help do you need most?
	10. What are your targets in learning English? Why?
	11. How well are you doing with your English learning so far?

Appendix 4

<div align="center">

英语学习策略问卷
Questionnaire of English Learning Strategy

</div>

您好，感谢您填写此份调查问卷！我是华威大学教育学院的一名博士生，这份问卷内容是我博士论文的一部分。此份问卷是为在英国完成 postgraduate study 的中国留学生所设计，内容关于英语学习状况等陈述。这些陈述并没有对或错的标准答案， 请按照您的真实偏好作答。完成整份问卷只需 3 分钟，谢谢！This questionnaire survey is the completion of my PhD thesis. This questionnaire is designed to investigate Chinese MA students' English learning experiences in the UK. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Please answer your true preference. Only take three minutes for completing, thank you!

请问您在英国居住了多久 how long have you been in the UK [单选题] [必答题]

○ 1 年 one year

○ 1-3 年 one-three years

○ 3-5 年 three-five years

○ 5 年以上 over five years

请问您所就读的专业是 your subject is 填空题] [必答题]

_____

请根据您的实际情况选择最符合的选项 Please Choose the most appropriate option based on your situation
1＝never or almost never true of me 我从来都没有或是几乎没有
2＝usually not true of me 我通常没有
3＝somewhat true of me 有点像我
4＝usually true of me 我通常是这样
5＝always or almost always true of me 我一直都是这样或是几乎一向如此
「我从来都没有或是几乎没有」表示该陈述的正确性很低。
「我通常没有」表示该陈述的正确性没有超过一半。
「有点像我」表示该陈述的正确性为一半。
「我通常是这样」表示该陈述的正确性已超过一半。
「我一直都是这样，或是几乎一向如此」表示该陈述的正确性几乎百分之百。 [矩阵量表题] [必答题]

	1	2	3	4	5

1.如果熟悉英语文章结构，我的阅读速度会明显提高 If I'm familiar with the English article's structure, my reading speed will increase significantly.	○	○	○	○	○
2.写作时，我用简单易懂的词汇和短句式较多 I prefer to use simple words and short sentences in my writing.	○	○	○	○	○
3.我常用以英语为媒介的社交软件（例如 **facebook**）和 **English speaker** 进行沟通 I normally use English based social networks (such as Facebook) to communicate with English speakers.	○	○	○	○	○
4.我会特意通过看英美剧、电影或听英文广播以提高英语 I watch British/American TV programmes, movies or listen to English radio stations to improve my English proficiency.	○	○	○	○	○
5.我主要通过在学校的学术学习以锻炼和提高英语能力（例如 看英语文献，上课，写论文，做 **presentaion,** 小组讨论等）I mainly practice and improve my English through academic studies in school (such as	○	○	○	○	○

reading the literature, attending lectures, writing essays, giving presentations, having group discussions).					
6.如果听不懂对话者的英语，我会请求对方放慢语速或重复，或请求其改换为简单的词汇和句式做表达 If I cannot understand what someone is saying in English, I will ask him/her to speak slowly or to say it again, or ask him/her to use simple words or sentences.	○	○	○	○	○
7.我从与 **English speaker** 的交流中学习英语，并从他的语言反馈中注意并改正我的英语错误 I learn English through communicating with English speakers and I note and correct my English mistakes from the feedback from his/her responses.	○	○	○	○	○
8.我通过参加英语社团或英语活动以练习英语 I practice my English through attending English societies or activities.	○	○	○	○	○
9.如果不懂某个词或某个句子的英文	○	○	○	○	○

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表达， 我会向在英国居住很久的中国同学寻求帮助 If I don't know how to say something in English, I will seek help from my Chinese classmates or friends who have lived in the UK for many years					
10.我从真实的日常生活交流中学习地道的英语表达（例如餐厅点菜／买单等） I learn native English words or expressions from real daily communication (such as ordering food in a restaurant/ paying the bill etc.).	○	○	○	○	○
11.如果聊天或阅读中遇到新词，我会试着结合语境猜测该词的意思 If I come across a new word when I'm chatting or reading, I will try to guess its meaning according to the context.	○	○	○	○	○
12.如果某个新词出现频率高，我会查该单词的意思并无意识记住 If a new word appears frequently in my daily life, I will check the meaning of this word and remember it automatically.	○	○	○	○	○

13.我通过英国或欧洲旅游以学习或练习英语 I learn and practice English through travelling in the UK or in European countries.	○	○	○	○	○
14.我参加语言课或学术写作课等课程提高英语 I improve my English through attending in-sessional language classes or academic writing classes, etc..	○	○	○	○	○
15.与 **English speaker** 交流中，如果对方反馈积极，我会更有动力说英语 If I get a positive response when interacting with an English speaker, I will be more motivated to practice English	○	○	○	○	○
16.我会模仿当地人的口音（即发音及语音语调）以提高口语 I improve my English through imitating native accents (this refers to pronunciation and rhythm/ intonation	○	○	○	○	○
17.需要外力推动我练习英语，自己不会主动创造机会和环境去练习英语 I won't be able to create a favourable environment for practising English by myself: I need external forces to push me to practice English.	○	○	○	○	○

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18.与来英国前相比，现在的我不会特意安排专门的时间学习英语 Compared with learning English in China, I haven't set specific times for learning English since I've been in the UK.	○	○	○	○	○
19.由于英语水平限制，难以与 **English speaker** 进行深度交谈 I cannot have in-depth discussions in English due to my limited English ability.	○	○	○	○	○

除以上提到的英语学习策略，请问您还有其他常用的英语学习方法吗？Apart from the English Learning Strategy listed above, please give other English learning ways if possible (optional) （非必答） [填空题]

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Appendix 5

A Sample of Interview Transcripts

First stage interview with Xia

A(interviwer)：就是你能跟我说一下，你到了英国以后，你觉得英国的生活怎么样？可以从文化、生活，还有英语学习呀这些的，都可以聊一下。

B(interviewee)：生活。嗯，文化，文化我觉得挺好的。然后生活，生活呢，这个地方比中国细致，我觉得。

A：嗯。

B：就是什么东西都管理的非常细致，你看那个修马路，那个 library 那条路修的，对吧？每个路口都有人站着，就是保证行人安全。包括咱们学校的邮箱系统，在本科生的时候没有这种系统的，所有事情都有人发邮件通知什么的，它就是比较细，我觉得这个挺好的。

A：嗯。

B：然后英语学习呀，重点啊。英语学习呢，我觉得第一个主要的，最基本的东西肯定还是从国内学的，然后带到这儿来的。然后就是背单词呢，来这儿我就不系统的背单词了。

A：嗯。

B：我就是遇着，我多见几次我也就认识了，我就，像国内基本上买那种书，是吧？经常背那个，就是从 A 到 Z 就这么背，现在我就不干这些事儿了。我能遇到什么词我就查一遍，然后看一眼，第二次我也不怎么想背了我就，第二次不行，我大不了再查一次，我查个三次我肯定就认识了。

A：嗯。

B：然后是看书，然后生活中的一些东西，有的东西一遍我也就会了。

A：嗯。

B：就是有些词，我觉得在国内是不大能学得会的，你比如 currency，currency 这个词，英国的货币，这个词，我在国内我怎么也背不到这个词。然后但是来这个地方以后，我一遍我就背得了，就是很自然就学习到了。还比如超市那个小推车叫 trolley，叫 trolley。

A：嗯。

B：那个词我在国内我记得应该是背过，但是，但是我不知道它是啥东西，我只知道那是什么意思，但是我并不知道超市里的推车就叫 trolley。

A：嗯。

B：然后到这个地方以后，我一听别人这么说 trolley，那我一遍就记得了。

A：嗯。

B：然后还有好多表达方式吧。

A：都可以详细说一下。

B：就是有的时候我觉得我的英语说的越多，我就说的越好。

A：嗯。

B：然后跟状态也有关系，就是有的时候我说话就很，说英语就表达很流畅。

A：嗯。

B：有的时候半天才蹦出来一个词，我自己也不知道为什么，我自己也不知道为什么。就是，其实我发现了，但是我没弄清楚为什么，有的时候说的很顺，有的时候表达也很自信呀什么的，有的时候就…就完全不知道自己该怎么说，我不清楚，这个我…发现有这么个情况，但是具体原因我不知道。

A：哦。

B：然后，最多的一些，就是我上星期我去银行办事。啊，对，我还发现，就是，想到这个，就是我的英语学习，包括听力、阅读，很长程度上不取决于我自己，跟说话者有很大关系。

A：哦。

B：像比如说有一个我的一门课，那个老师是从新西兰来的，他说的英语我就很难听懂，一节课两个小时，我听懂的时间也就一半，我知道他在说什么，但是我经常容易走神，我经常容易听不懂。还有一个老师，就是我的必修课的老师，我基本上都能听懂，就是没有什么听不懂的，就算有一点点听不懂但也没有什么关系。在中国上课也不可能每句话都听懂，就是根据说话者它有很大关系。然后我的阅读的东西，跟这个写作者的风格也有非常大的关系。我慢的话我一个小时才能读个五六页，快的话我可以读十几页，就是差别比较大。

A：哦，我可以这样理解吗？一个老师方面是口音还是他的表达？

B：语速，跟他的口音有关系，主要是语速跟口音。

A：还有发音方式啊这些。

B：就是口音嘛，就是口音，这个比较有关系。然后…

A：写作的话。

B：就是阅读的话，那个就很多了，第一个生词是不是多，生词多，太多了我也懒得查，大概看个一两眼，这个东西就行。然后还有他的写作风格。我不是说它语法难不难，语法对我来说不是什么太难的问题。就是有的写作就是，包括我，我比较喜欢看我的一门课，美国外交的老师，就是那个老师他自己写的文章，我就读起来非常顺，就是我读起来我就舒服，读的也很快，idea 抓的也准，然后记得也牢。还有写的书，写的文章，第一我读的慢，第二读完了我也记不住。就是，就很糟糕。我这个也是，你看他们表面上没什么生词，但是我就是抓不准点。

Appendix 6

Numbers and percentages of questionnaire results

1＝never or almost never true of me
2＝usually not true of me
3＝somewhat true of me
4＝usually true of me
5＝always or almost always true of me

Item\Option	1	2	3	4	5
1. If I'm familiar with the English article's structure, my reading speed will increase significantly	7 (3.5%)	15 (7.5%)	33 (16.5%)	89 (44.5%)	56 (28%)
2. I prefer to use simple words and short sentences in my writing	1 (0.5%)	27 (13.5%)	57 (28.5%)	66 (33%)	49 (24.5%)
3. I normally use English based social networks (such as Facebook) to communicate with English speakers	18 (9%)	58 (29%)	59 (29.5%)	33 (16.5%)	32 (16%)
4. I watch British/American TV programmes, movies or listen to English radio stations to improve my English proficiency.	9 (4.5%)	33 (16.5%)	50 (25%)	63 (31.5%)	45 (22.5%)
5. I mainly practice and improve my English through academic studies in school (such as reading the literature, attending lectures, writing essays, giving presentations, having group discussions).	3 (1.5%)	21 (10.5%)	47 (23.5%)	89 (44.5%)	40 (20%)
6. If I cannot understand what someone is saying in English, I will ask him/her to speak slowly or to say it again, or ask him/her to use simple words or sentences.	7 (3.5%)	17 (8.5%)	51 (25.5%)	92 (46%)	33 (16.5%)
7. I learn English through communicating with English	5 (2.5%)	21 (10.5%)	52 (26%)	74 (37%)	48 (24%)

speakers and I note and correct my English mistakes from the feedback from his/her responses					
8. I practice my English through attending English societies or activities	43 (21.5%)	71 (35.5%)	44 (22%)	25 (12.5%)	17 (8.5%)
9. If I don't know how to say something in English, I will seek help from my Chinese classmates or friends who have lived in the UK for many years	31 (15.5%)	61 (30.5%)	48 (24%)	39 (19.5%)	21 (10.5%)
10. I learn native English words or expressions from real daily communication (such as ordering food in a restaurant/ paying the bill etc.).	4 (2%)	14 (7%)	45 (22.5%)	76 (38%)	61 (30.5%)
11. If I come across a new word when I'm chatting or reading, I will try to guess its meaning according to the context.	1 (0.5%)	6 (3%)	33 (16.5%)	94 (47%)	66 (33%)
12. If a new word appears frequently in my daily life, I will check the meaning of this word and remember it automatically	4 (2%)	5 (2.5%)	34 (17%)	86 (43%)	71 (35.5%)
13. I learn and practice English through travelling in the UK or in European countries.	13 (6.5%)	39 (19.5%)	54 (27%)	61 (30.5%)	33 (16.5%)
14. I improve my English through attending in-sessional language classes or academic writing classes, etc..	26 (13%)	37 (18.5%)	56 (28%)	53 (26.5%)	28 (14%)
15. If I get a positive response when interacting with an English speaker, I will be more motivated to practice English	4 (2%)	10 (5%)	33 (16.5%)	78 (39%)	75 (37.5%)
16. I improve my English through imitating native accents (this refers to pronunciation and rhythm/ intonation	11 (5.5%)	23 (11.5%)	41 (20.5%)	72 (36%)	53 (26.5%)

17. I won't be able to create a favourable environment for practising English by myself: I need external forces to push me to practice English.	20 (10%)	41 (20.5%)	59 (29.5%)	54 (27%)	26 (13%)
18. Compared with learning English in China, I haven't set specific times for learning English since I've been in the UK.	5 (2.5%)	16 (8%)	36 (18%)	84 (42%)	59 (29.5%)
19. I cannot have in-depth discussions in English due to my limited English ability.	28 (14%)	43 (21.5%)	50 (25%)	43 (21.5%)	36 (18%)