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English Language Learners of Chinese Immigrant Families in Canadian Schools

By

Jiayang Shi

A Major Research Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Faculty of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2021

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English Language Learners of Chinese Immigrant Families in Canadian Schools

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Dec. 15th, 2021

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ABSTRACT

Given the context that many Chinese immigrant families are settling in Canada, their children, as English language learners (ELLs), have encountered a variety of obstacles and barriers while studying at local schools. The purpose of this Major Research Paper (MRP) is to understand the obstacles and barriers that Chinese newcomer ELLs in Ontario have encountered and hence to offer some helpful suggestions. A series of official documents of Ontario ELL curriculum has been introduced to school educators by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2005, 2008), such as *Many Roots, Many Voices: Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom and Support English Language Learners Grade 1 to 8*. Meanwhile, Chinese newcomer English learners have accepted systemic English language education in China before immigration. Therefore, to better understand the needs and challenges of Chinese newcomer ELLs, English curriculum in compulsory education in China and educational documents for ELLs in Ontario Canada will be discussed in this paper, followed by a comparison of pedagogies applied in compulsory education in Canada and China. Comparing the similarities and differences, and giving suggestions to pre-service, and in-service educators may help ELLs and EFLs to improve their academic performance. Other literature in the field is concerned with Chinese ELLs in Ontario elementary schools and the obstacles that they face at school. However, only a few studies compare ELL curriculum documents in Canada and English curricula standards in China, then give suggestions to schoolteachers, parents, and students' home countries about the challenges faced by Chinese immigrant children. Those barriers and challenges reflect the problems that still exist in curriculum and educational policies. Therefore, it is important to introduce Chinese EFLs to Ontario teachers in order to help Chinese ELLs get involved in their unfamiliar environment.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Chinese Immigrant Boy

A Chinese immigrant student under the pseudonym ‘David’ was a young boy who I met in an Ontario public primary school when I was assigned to work as a research assistant for Dr. Shijing Xu and Dr. Michael Connelly’s SSHRC Partnership Grant Project (Xu & Connelly, 2013-2020). My job was to help liaison the sister school connections between this Canadian school in Windsor and a Chinese school in Chongqing. When I first met the boy in the Canadian sister school, he was working towards completing the second grade. Based on his appearance, he seemed, in my eyes, like a model student who was taciturn and reserved and never interrupted his teacher and always answered questions when called upon in the classroom. It seemed to me that David was a well-rounded individual who was well on his way towards a successful future as a Chinese immigrant student.

However, later I discovered that there was more to David than met the eye. David and his mother had shared their house with a Chinese visiting scholar who came through Dr. Xu’s Reciprocal Learning Program. Hence, I was given the opportunity to become acquainted with this family. When I had the chance to talk to the visiting scholar, I was told that, over the past few months, David would burst into tears and refuse to leave the house when his mother was preparing him to go to school. This turned out to be a daily occurrence. I was taken aback to hear these stories since they stood in sharp contrast to my image of David in school. I would never have guessed that this quiet, respectable boy would have been so troubled at home before stepping foot into the classroom. As an

international student from China, I speak both English and Mandarin fluently. Hence David was always excited to talk with me whenever I was in his class as Dr. Xu's research assistant. When he had trouble understanding the class content or communicating with his classmates, he would confide in me that speaking with others was not so easy for him. For example, he expressed anxiety about trying to make friends with English-speaking classmates as he found it difficult to understand them because of language and cultural barriers. When the language barrier was not an issue, his apprehension would disintegrate. For instance, David shared with me his passion for playing soccer and told me about his accomplishments. When playing sports, spoken language is superseded by body language. Therefore, on the soccer field or playground, he could socialize more easily.

My conversations with David as well as my personal observations have indicated that language barriers create undue stress for him and impede his acculturation. One day, when another Chinese girl joined the class and sat next to David, his outlook changed drastically. Soon after that, he felt more comfortable because he had a fellow who shared his linguistic and cultural background. They could speak to one another in Mandarin and could help each other translate the teachers' lessons. It was easy to observe that when David was able to speak his native language (whether it be to his new classmate or myself), his behavior changed drastically. For example, based on my observation, he became happier, more eager to participate, and more excited about completing his schoolwork. However, when David was placed in scenarios where he had to speak English, he became reclusive and dejected.

It was important to note that David's case was not anomalous among Ontario's Chinese immigrant students. I, as an international student, also encountered similar issues in terms of cultural shock and language barriers.

Challenges in My International Schooling Experience

As an international student in a Canadian university, I have had to cope with many hardships in order to adapt to my new surroundings and complete my studies. Before I began my studies as an international student, I had never travelled to Canada. For most native English speakers, performing academic work such as reading course materials, writing summaries, and synthesizing information is not a big issue. However, for me as an English Language learner, in order to keep up with the course schedule, I spent much more time reading the articles, searching for relevant information, and even adopting translating tools to help me understand some of the content. In addition, I suffered a lot from culture shock and came to feel anxious about having to rely predominantly on my second language. For instance, ordering fast food in restaurants was not a problem to most English language native speakers, but it was a challenge to me because much food-related vocabulary was unfamiliar. I did not want to bring any trouble to the servers, especially when the queue was long. Normally, I checked the menu online in advance, made the decision and practiced the pronunciation many times. If the online order service were provided, that would be life saver to me because I could avoid any face-to-face conversations. In order to relieve this anxiety, I bought a dog which I named Taco. The worst situation was when I took Taco to see a veterinarian. The vet spoke very quickly and used lots of professional vocabulary. This caused me to respond as simply and politely as possible, without really understanding what he said. Thankfully, I was

able to make new friends before long, many of whom could speak Mandarin. Overall, living as an international student was not easy, but there were also many aspects of Canada that I could enjoy outside of my education. For example, in my spare time I was able to explore places such as the riverside where Canadian geese gather.

Context of Major Research Paper - A Brief Introduction of SSHRC Partnership Grant Project

As a Chinese international student with the hope of improving my English language skills and cross-cultural communication competencies, I decided to hone my abilities through involvement in one of my professors' research projects. I was fortunate to be offered an opportunity to participate in Dr. Xu and Dr. Connelly's SSHRC Partnership Grant Project (Xu & Connelly, 2013-2020; Xu, 2019). With the University of Windsor as its leading institution in collaboration with six Chinese universities and two school boards in Canada (Xu & Connelly, 2017). The project was initiated to create connections between the Eastern and Western worlds, harmonizing East-West dichotomy (Xu, 2017, 2019). After reading some articles about the SSHRC partnership grant project and browsing the official website, I felt this project totally suited my future academic aspirations. In order to contribute to my own efforts towards this project and to kick start my academic career, I worked as Dr. Xu's research assistant in the project, taking charging of the regular communications between one pair of sister schools. I feel honored to have been granted this opportunity to work in the project led by Dr. Shijing Xu and Dr. Michael Connelly. Since I have been involved, this program has had a profound impact on my academic and cultural development as it has for many Canadian and Chinese teachers, principals, and pre-service teachers (Howitt, 2019; Xu, 2019).

Xu and Connelly's (2013-2020) SSHRC Partnership Grant Project is a large-scale and multidimensional educational project. The overall goal of this project is "to compare and contrast Canadian and Chinese education in such a way that the cultural narratives of each provide frameworks for understanding and appreciating educational similarities and differences" (Xu & Connelly, 2017, p.137). It has two major components: the Reciprocal Learning Program (RLP) and the Sister School Network (SSN) (Xu & Connelly, 2017). I worked as a research assistant in the Sister School Network. According to Howitt (2019), in Windsor Canada, "over the 10 years of this unique partnership, 12 schools have participated from both the elementary and secondary panels. Over 100 educators, approximately twenty-five administrators, approximately 6000 students and over 150 parents" (p. 744). The Sister School Network has brought a lot of benefits to participating principals, teachers, and students, such as "improvement of teaching practices", "tolerance to difference", "comprehensive grasp of global citizenship", and "reciprocity and kindness generated through collaboration" (Howitt, 2019, p. 743). Through collaboration with different scholars from different academic backgrounds and universities, a framework named "Reciprocal Learning as Collaborative Partnership" was proposed by Xu & Connelly (2017) to help researchers and educators collaborate reciprocally to form "We-Consciousness" (Xu & Connelly, 2017).

Through engagement in the Sister School Network, I had many opportunities to interact with schoolteachers, through which I gradually found my research interests. With Dr. Xu's guidance and support, I visited a Canadian sister school on a weekly basis in order to help find some topics that interested both sides and facilitate communication between the two sister schools. For example, I helped to coordinate the monthly online

meetings between the Ontario elementary public school (kindergarten included) and a Chinese elementary school and their affiliated kindergarten. I helped schedule a meeting date and facilitated the online meetings, such as providing bilingual support during the meetings and taking meeting minutes. After each online meeting, I worked with other research assistants to draft a newsletter and sent it to both sides for their verification through a WeChat group and an email list.

As previously mentioned, I benefited immensely as a research assistant with the program. I was tasked with responsibilities that were entirely new to me. I still remember the first time I played the role of language interpreter during a sister school Skype meeting. I was nervous and excited at the beginning, but these feelings subsided as I learned the responsibilities that I needed to take. I prepared for every Skype meeting by organizing the materials, and throughout the meeting, I ensured the precision of the translations. At times, these were difficult hurdles to overcome, but it was a rewarding process. For example, I was required to communicate with the in-service public-school teachers in person, which brought me practical knowledge about what they have experienced in the field of education. I also assisted the teachers and helped students-in-need with their in-class assignments. Moreover, I observed ELLs and took some field notes in order to make comparisons with them and other ELLs in a future study.

My research interest in English language learning (ELL)

There are four reasons why I chose English language learning as my research topic. Firstly, my educational stream in the Master of Education Program was *Second Language Acquisition, Culture, and Society*. Exploring more about English Language

Learners (ELLs) and the process of acquiring foreign languages was related to what I have studied. Secondly, Over the last two years, I have been one of the research assistants who participated in various kinds of activities in Dr. Xu and Dr. Connelly's SSHRC Partnership Grant Project. Based on my regular visits to a Windsor primary school through the Sister School Network, I became interested in what barriers or obstacles that Chinese ELLs might face in Ontario public schools during their settlement in Canada. I was intrigued by what I have seen and learned from this program, and eventually decided to focus my major paper on these experiences. Given my Chinese cultural background and my experience with culture shock in Canada, I feel that I am in the same boat with David to empathize with and understand his experiences (and the experiences of students in similar situations). Thirdly, after performing an extensive literature review, I have noticed that even though many studies are focused on the depiction of Chinese immigrant children in Ontario public elementary schools and the difficulties they face when immigrating to this province, there are a limited number of studies that have compared the differences and similarities of Canadian and Chinese English language education curricula and give suggestions. The barriers that ELLs must overcome reflect problems that exist in the education system, curriculum, and pedagogies in their home country. I have sorted through the literature in order to create a summary of the commonalities and key aspects that it contains. This paper will hopefully provide contextual support and suggestions regarding ELL students—especially Chinese ELL students—for the benefit of pre-service and in-service teachers within the Ontario elementary public school system. One of the main purposes of this paper is to provide supportive comments or suggestions to address these issues.

Therefore, my research question is, “what are the barriers or obstacles that Chinese ELLs might face in Ontario public schools during their settlement in Canada?”

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review on related journal articles, documents, and curricula both in Canada and China. The first section highlights some commonly used definitions of the relevant terms in language acquisition, such as “L1”, “L2”, “ELL” and “EFL”. There are many acronyms and abbreviations to address English Language Learners, which often confuses readers. It is of foremost importance to clearly explain the differences among these terms. The second section is focused on Canadian curriculum on English Language learners (ELL) and the acculturation process. In addition, literature on Chinese curriculum on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Mainland China is provided. The last section discusses some relevant theories in the field, such as Cummins’ Iceberg Theory (1981).

Definitions of Relevant Terms in Language Acquisition

There are many acronyms used in language teaching and learning discourse. This discourse changes based on different social contexts. In Canada for example, the term “ELL” has been dominantly used in public documents due to equity purposes. Therefore, it is significant to highlight the different definitions used in this discourse.

L1 and Mother Tongue

Many studies have argued that the relationship between “mother tongue” and “L1” can be confusing. Botelho (2002) states that “mother tongue is an elusive concept which is difficult to define precisely” (p. 217). However, some scholars argue that mother tongue should be a language spoken in one’s early childhood without being trained

systematically or learned formally. Pattanayak (1998) also stresses that “these [mother tongue and L1 languages] may not be the same always as L1, L2, and L3 refer the serially ordered list of languages formally acquired in school” (as cited in Botelho, 2002, p. 218). Furthermore, L2 is emphasized under the theme of ELL and the context of Chinese immigrant students in Ontario elementary public schools. Due to the inconspicuous differences between “L1” and “mother tongue”, there is no specific distinction between these two terms in the following paragraphs.

L1 and L2

According to Sinha, Banerjee, Sinha, and Shastri (2009), first language (L1) also refers to one’s mother tongue, native language, or primary language. Normally, this is the language acquired by children in their early childhood before three years old. Meanwhile, a second language (L2) is always related to further education, employment, or any other uses. L2 is a widely used language or an official language, which contrasts with dialect as well as local language (Sinha, Banerjee, Sinha, & Shastri, 2009). Furthermore, L2 is not only about the sequence of language learning but also indicates the level of language use relative to the main language or dominant language (Schoonen et al, 2003; Stern, 1983). As Kecskes and Papp (2000) assert, “the L1 and L2 are related in the mind, the L2 cannot be learned as a second L1” (p. vii). Therefore, we cannot simply assume that the process of learning L2 is just like that of learning L1. In fact, the relationship between L1 and L2 is complicated. Selinker (1983) states that two types of transfer could bring varied impact during the process of L2 acquisition: passive transfer and active transfer. In active transfer, L1 contributes to L2 acquisition. In passive transfer, L1 could be the factor which interferes with L2 acquisition (Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015). Hence, Odlin (1989,

as cited in Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015) argues that it is necessary to highlight the importance of ELLs' native language in their L2 acquisition.

According to Bhela (1999), a way for language learners to start communicating in a second language is to begin to talk about translation equivalence, or to think that every word in L1 has a translation in L2. When L2 learners want to write or speak in the target language, they often rely on the structure of their native language. However, if the structure of their native language is different, many errors will likely occur (Bhela, 1999; Decherts & Dillis, 1999; Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015; Dulay et al, 1982).

There is a clear relationship between mother tongue and a second language. The more similar the mother tongue is to the second language, the more easily ELLs will adapt and thrive during the L2 acquisition process (Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015; Schoonen et al, 2003). This emphasizes the promotive and inspiring role that the mother tongue plays in one's L2 acquisition. Not only this, but "second language learners not only already possess a language system which is potentially available as a factor in the acquisition of a second language, but equally importantly they already know something of what language is for, what its communicative functions and potentials are" (Corder, 1983, p. 24). This means a second language learner already has a grasp on a language system which can also be a potential benefit in learning a second language. Equally important to this, a second language learner already understands some of the uses of language and what their communicative potential is (Bhela, 1999; Sinha, Banerjee, Sinha & Shastri, 2009).

English as a Foreign Language

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning refers to instances where non-native English speakers learn to speak English for academic, professional, or personal purposes but will not be speaking the target language within their typical daily interactions. EFL is “the term used to describe the study of English by non-native speakers in countries where English is not the dominant language” (Nordquist, 2017, para. 1). People who acquire EFL within a language context other than English are EFL learners (EFLs). For example, immigrants who have planned to settle in Canada voluntarily with school-aged children normally have their children receive formal education in their home countries. Some of these children have learned English as a foreign language. This is different from the situations of refugee children who experience war or other crises and consequently receive barely any schooling prior to immigration. To make matters worse, these children may have internal trauma or other suffering due to separation from their families (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 2008, 2015).

In Canadian contexts, international students are students studying in Canadian schools or universities with “a valid study visa” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 6). Many have arrived in Canada without family members accompanying them and live with extended family, in host families, or on their own. These students are high school students with heavy academic pressure who are eager to attend a prestigious Canadian university (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, 2015). These students have usually received professional English language training and have passed several English language tests, such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). International students have an integrated knowledge hierarchy and basic language capability in order to digest class content (Steps

to English Proficiency, 2015). For instance, Chinese schools include English as a compulsory subject, but many Chinese students do not use English in their daily interactions. Even though the current study does not explore EFL learning contexts, many of the strategies used in EFL classrooms can be utilized in other English language learning contexts. Thus, EFL strategies offer valuable insights into the language learning process (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

English as a Second Language (ESL) & English Language Learning (ELL)

English as a Second Language and English Language Learning refer to a remarkably similar notion, which is the process of learning English as a new language in an English language environment on a daily basis (Wright, 2010). The differences lie in that ESL is used in earlier studies, while ELL is used more frequently in recent years because English could be the third, fourth, even fifth language for immigrant children who are now referred to English language learners (ELLs). Therefore, regardless of ELLs' linguistic background, ELL is a more precise term and could cover more diverse cases (Gunderson, 2008). For clarity and convenience, the referenced notion of ESL in research papers will be replaced by ELLs in the current paper.

Genesee (1994, as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005. p. 9) points out that “learning English is a necessity not only for becoming socially integrated into the life of the school and the community at large but also for academic success in school and ultimately for economic survival and well-being in adulthood.” The characteristics of some ELLs were illustrated in Carrasquillo, Kuker and Abrams' paper (2004), who found that they were “struggling with the reading and writing demands of the curriculum. These

students need[ed] strategies to ease them into trusting the functionality of reading and writing and to use literacy for purposes of communication and learning” (p. xi). Learning English is not the final purpose for ELLs, but a tool to acculturate them into the new school and social linguistic environment (Pan & Block, 2011). Thus, improving academic performance and becoming socially integrated are the final purposes.

English language learners move to Canada from various countries overseas. Therefore, their educational experiences and cultural backgrounds can vary drastically. For example, some ELLs “arrive in the classroom with limited or no experience of the Roman alphabet... As well, some may be unfamiliar with the left-to-right direction of written English and English in print” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 10). Regardless of age and English language capability, however, they may be sent to a separate ESL classroom for the purpose of improving their English skills. For this reason, various kinds of supports are required to help these immigrant students to achieve academic success (Pulliam & Terantino, 2020; Wright, 2010).

Many studies show that L1 plays an essential role in ELL students’ learning process. Research shows that years of effort will enable ELL students to catch up to their Canadian classmates in English writing, listening, reading, and speaking proficiency. As stated by Cummins (2008), “English language learners require at least five years to catch up to English-speaking students in the acquisition of academic language skills” (p. 1). During settlement, it is obvious that ELL students acquire English and learn subject contents by using their L1. In fact, there are multiple studies that demonstrate that continual promotion of L1 for ELLs is essential towards acquiring L2 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005; Pulliam & Terantino, 2020). The benefits of promoting the use of L1

in ELL's learning process include improvement in mental astuteness and socializing skills, and greater cultural awareness, continuity, global vision, and future potentiality (Carrasquillo, Kuker, & Abrams, 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

Ontario ELL programs are important to support ELLs' learning in the globalized world. When it comes to Canadian-born English language learners, these consist of aboriginal children whose L1 is a language other than English and children who were born in immigrant families/communities in which English is not the primarily spoken language (Nordquist, 2017; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). ELL students' relationship with the Ontario public school boards is bidirectional. With a wide variety of domestic and educational experiences, ELLs bring challenges to the Ontario educational system (Pulliam & Terantino, 2020; Wright, 2008). ELL programs are provided in Ontario public schools for all ELLs to achieve academic success and personal development no matter what their history may be. What ELL programs bring to the ELLs is also significant and meaningful for their futures. The significant role that teachers and schools play in supporting ELLs' identities and bilingual achievements will equip them with a strong competitive edge in globalization (Carrasquillo, Kuker, & Abrams, 2004). English as an international language is viewed as an addition to the mother tongue, rather than the replacement of L1. Therefore, the advantage of bilingualism is significant to ELLs especially regarding the aim of global competence (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Moreover, according to Bialystok (2001), recognizing the importance of bilingualism and encouraging ELLs to promote L1 and L2 at the same time will have a profound and lasting influence on an individual's life and succeeding institutional education.

As Carrasquillo, Kuker and Abrams (2004) state, ELLs' mother tongues play a crucial part in recognition of social culture and linguistic competence. ELLs acquire language proficiency by contextualizing their learning. Acquiring a second language does not have to be done in an orderly and systematic way. Learners can use previous language, learning, and common knowledge.

Most ELLs develop a functional level of English within the beginning few years of learning English, but they need ongoing support to develop the cognitive academic language competencies that are necessary for academic success (Carrasquillo, Kuker, & Abrams, 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Bilingual education is greatly beneficial towards the development of a second language. Acquiring a new language and becoming bilingual is not just about acquiring a new language cognitively, but also about understanding another culture and developing a new identity. Campbell and Li (2008) conclude that limited English language proficiency prevents ELLs from understanding lectures, grasping instructions, comprehending the criteria of assignments, and finishing tasks and tests. Meanwhile, other studies (Cummins, 1981; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005) show that ELLs develop a basic English language ability within the first two years of their schooling. In order to help ELLs to achieve academic success, collective support is required by the ministry of education, schools, and teachers alike. Being bilingual is not identified by the acquisition of a new language, but also by learning about a foreign culture and developing a new way of thinking within a foreign environment.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in China

Learning English as a Foreign Language in China has been accepted widely by Chinese people since China implemented the policy of Reform and Opening up in 1978. One of the aims of this policy was to strengthen China's communication with the outside world. During early 1980s, China was the sixth largest world economy; it has grown rapidly since it joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and now ranks as the world's second largest economy (IMF, 2021). Therefore, China has benefited from the multilateral trading system and has strengthened its connection to the world in the past few decades. Acquiring a foreign language as a crucial way to accelerate trading efficiency and to broaden horizons leads to a phenomenon that although many Chinese students from kindergarten to university have spent a lot of time and money in mastering English, many of them are still not proficient in using English (Shi, 2017). In fact, according to He (2020), there are more than 400 million EFLs in China, which is the largest number of EFLs in any single country (Pan & Block, 2011). Fishman (1996) argued that "The world of large-scale commerce, industry, technology, and banking, like the world of certain human sciences and professions, is an international world and it is linguistically dominated by English almost everywhere, regardless of how well established and well-protected local cultures, languages, and identities may otherwise be." (As cited in Pan & Block, 2011). Globalization means that English as an international language appears everywhere in the world (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; Northrup, 2013; Nunan, 2003). Therefore, Chinese parents overwhelmingly agree that supporting their children to learn English is a promising idea. English is not only one of the three required subjects in Chinese compulsory education and high school, but also a required course in Chinese universities. Acquiring the certificate of "University English"

is mandatory to attain a bachelor's degree. College English Test Band (CET) is a mandatory high-stakes assessment for most college students in mainland China whose major is not English (He, 2020). Even among adults, learning English is a popular activity to improve personal skills and enhance competitiveness in society.

English Curriculum in Compulsory Education in China

China has experienced radical changes in its education system in the past few decades (Pan & Block, 2011). The previous version of the English curriculum in compulsory education was issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2001 and was revised in 2011 (Chen, 2017). According to the curriculum document (2011), English, as one of the main subjects (along with Chinese and Mathematics) has both “instrumental nature” and “humanistic nature” in compulsory education (grade 1 to grade 9). Moreover, as one of the most widely used languages in the world, English has become a valuable tool for international communication, and scientific and cultural exchange (Pan & Block, 2011). Wang (2007) states that, “of all the foreign languages taught in schools, English undoubtedly enjoys the largest number of learners” (p. 87). At present, in China's education system, besides English, Japanese and Russian are also widely offered as options in compulsory education. However, according to statistics from Liu & Gong (2001), English learners account for more than 99% of all foreign language learners in China, while the percentage of the combination of Japanese and Russian learners was less than 1% (as cited in Wang, 2007). Therefore, the universality of English will not be shaken at present or even in the foreseeable future. According to Taylor (2002), there are more than 200 million Chinese students learning English at school, which accounts for

20% of the students in the world (as cited in Pan, 2014). Besides, there are approximately 13 million students studying English at colleges or universities. Given such large numbers of EFLs in China, it is worthy to discuss this phenomenon from many dimensions.

In the following section, three perspectives of learning English as a foreign language (purpose, criteria, and suggestions) will be illustrated. These perspectives come from China's national English curriculum documents (Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China, 2011).

According to Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (2011), the overall design of the English curriculum is guided by the scientific concept of development and the advanced concept of foreign language curriculum. Based on the national multifarious conditions and comprehensive consideration on the development of English education in China, the overall goal of the English curriculum (2011) in compulsory education is to form students' preliminary comprehensive language ability, promote their mental development and improve their humanistic accomplishment. Based on the rules of language learning and the developmental needs of students in the compulsory education stage, it designs the overall and graded curriculum goals from five aspects - language skills, language knowledge, emotional attitude, learning strategies and cultural awareness (Chen, 2017; Ministry of Education in China, 2011). These five aspects are inseparably interconnected. To be more specific, language skills and language knowledge contribute to comprehensive language capability. Furthermore, cultural awareness has a positive influence in understanding language and using language

properly (Ma, 2021; Scarino, 2017). Effective learning strategies promote learning efficiency and develop independent learning ability (Carnell & Lodge, 2001). Moreover, a positive emotional attitude is conducive to active learning and sustainable development. The five aspects complement each other to promote the formation and development of students' comprehensive language capability (Chen, 2012; Ministry of Education in China, 2011).

Based on overall goals and graded curriculum goals, English courses in the compulsory education stage (grade 1 to grade 9) start from grade 3 and continue until the senior high school courses. The English curriculum of the whole basic education stage (including compulsory education and senior high school) is divided into nine levels according to the EFLs' capabilities.

According to the English curriculum in the compulsory education stage, there are level requirements in the areas of language skill, language knowledge, emotional attitude, learning strategies and cultural awareness (Ministry of Education in China, 2011; Wang, 2007). Traditionally, language capability included language knowledge (phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar) and language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). However, it is now seen as a comprehensive application of these five aforementioned skills (Chen, 2017; Cheng, 2002). The basic knowledge of the English language that students should learn and master in compulsory education includes phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, and language forms used to express the functions of common topics. They complement and promote each other in language learning and communication (Chen, 2002; Chen, 2012; Ministry of Education in China, 2011; Wang, 2012, 2013).

Emotional attitude refers to the factors that affect students' learning process and effect, such as interest, motivation, self-confidence, will and cooperative spirit, as well as the national consciousness and international vision gradually formed in the process of learning (Wang, 2007). According to both editions of English curriculum documents (2001, 2011), keeping a positive attitude is the key to success in English learning. Furthermore, Wang (2007) asserts that students are encouraged to experience the fun of English learning and actively try to use English in their study and life. She states that “the principles and performance descriptors postulated [by the MOE (Ministry of Education)] reflect an activity-based approach to provide children opportunities to experience the language and facilitate their own discovery of meaning as first-hand experience” (p. 117).

Learning strategies refer to the various actions and steps students take to effectively learn and use English. According to Cheng (2011) English learning strategies include:

- cognitive strategies (steps and methods to complete learning tasks) (He, 2002; Ministry of Education in China, 2011)
- control strategies (students planning, trying, evaluating, and adjusting their actions and steps to learn)
- communication strategies
- resource strategies

These learning strategies are flexible and diverse, and students should develop their own learning strategies (Hu & Adamson, 2012).

Based on the English curriculum issued by Ministry of Education (2011), language has rich cultural connotations (Kramersch & Widdowson, 1998). In foreign language teaching, culture refers to the history and geography, local conditions, traditional customs, lifestyles, norms of behavior, literature and art, and the social values being studied (Battiste, 2000). In the process of learning English, exposure to and understanding of foreign cultures is beneficial to the understanding and use of English and to the cultivation of international awareness (Roofe et al., 2018).

According to the suggestions from the Ministry of Education in China (2011) to English teaching and learning from the fourth part of English curriculum face to all the front-line teachers in mainland China. The implementation suggestions include teaching suggestions, evaluation suggestions, development and utilization of curriculum resources, and compilation and use of teaching materials (Cheng, 2011). In the evaluation suggestions, the correct evaluation system is an important guarantee to achieve the curriculum objectives, and the evaluation system and standards determine the curriculum objectives (Cheng, 2011; Gu, 2012). For example, more than a decade of English teaching has revolved around the college entrance examination, the most important exam for all Chinese high school students. This has also led to score-only theory and exam-oriented education as one of the key issues addressed in this paper.

According to Gu (2012), the evaluation of English courses should be based on the objectives and requirements of the curriculum standards. This will achieve effective monitoring of the whole teaching process and results. On the development and utilization of resources as well as the compilation and use of teaching materials, Carnell, and Lodge

(2001) put forward many principled suggestions to teachers, encouraging teachers to make full use of the advantages of the information age, flexibly use teaching materials, develop curriculum resources, and achieve teaching objectives more effectively according to the actual needs of students.

The curriculum documents illustrated suggestions to schools, teachers, and students in detail. Moreover, parents, students, teachers are aware of the importance of English language learning. Furthermore, tremendous time and effort were put into the English language learning, however, it is still hard for Chinese EFL to learn English efficiently. The author tries to analyze and list the reasons behind this phenomenon.

China's Exam-oriented Education System and Teacher-Centered Pedagogy.

In this section, the exam-oriented education system in China will be discussed historically and socioculturally.

Confucianism, as a national ideology, has influenced Chinese culture and education system deeply for more than two and half millennia. Moreover, it is still influential in many other East Asian countries, including that of Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaysia (Lee & Jones, 2017). *Great Harmony Society* is the highest ideal society, or highest stage of human society, propagated by ancient Chinese Confucianism (Lee & Jones, 2017; Tu & Du, 1996). Of all the factors needed to achieve the Great Harmony Society, education and self-discipline were considered the most efficient and available methods. Therefore, the concept of obligations was emphasized, and people were reminded to always keep on the rails (Hu & Adamson, 2012). Under these circumstances, the Confucian education system has had profound influence on

Chinese students, who are usually considered to be quiet and disciplined in the classroom (Tu & Du, 1996). This phenomenon often relates to the individual's personality, growth environment and the teacher-centered pedagogy that is applied in traditional Chinese classes. Modern Chinese education is still influenced by traditional teacher-centered pedagogy even though it has undergone several "Westernization movements." For thousands of years, 'Imperial Examination' was the primary way to determine who would have access to educational resources and would in turn gain entrance into higher education. The examination was rigid and primarily assessed candidates' writing skills through an "eight-legged essay," or a stereotyped writing-style with a strict structure (Tu, 1998; Wu, 2011; Zhong, 2011). Candidates were not allowed to express personal thoughts but were to follow a specific structure and demonstrate their memorization of classic literature (Berry, 2011). According to Wu (2011), modern Chinese pedagogy is rooted in Confucian pedagogy, though it has changed over time. For example, Berry (2011) notes that the "imperial examinations were officially abolished in 1906 and replaced by a three-tier national examination system for assessing students in three major stages: at the end of primary, middle, and secondary education" (p. 50). This three-tier national examination system became the keystone of the modern Chinese educational system which includes "non-regular tests during-term time, mid-term examinations, end-of-year examinations, graduate examinations, and entry examinations for further education" (p. 50-51). Though there have been significant changes overtime, there are two key elements that remain central to the Chinese educational system: teacher-centered learning and exam-oriented assessment.

Wu (2011) concludes that China's education culture is drastically different from the Western academic culture as Chinese students are quiet and disciplined, and Chinese teachers are respected as authorities. Studying and memorizing textbooks is the primary method to advance one's knowledge. Moreover, Ballard & Clanchy (1991, cited in Wu, 2011) suggest that China's education systems "are mainly oriented towards the conservation of knowledge, and this approach to learning emphasizes the reproductive ability of students' in their book" (p. 570). This is usually thought to be the essence of Confucian pedagogy, which is teacher-centered and does not encourage students to challenge the teachers or textbooks by asking questions. Instead, the ability to interpret classic literature has been a central skill that students have been required to possess (Hu & Adamson, 2012).

Wu (2011) also mentions that rhetoric blaming is part of the Confucian heritage. Confucian philosophy describes self-assuredness to be the root of egotistic or narcissistic personalities, which prevents learners from making progress. Teachers should therefore be strict and highly demanding, not rewarding students too often with compliments. This stands in contrast to Western teaching pedagogy, where praising and complimenting students' work is seen as an important way to build students' self-confidence and a sense of identity. This difference of educational philosophy heavily influences the different teaching pedagogies of the East and West.

Wang (2007) argues that "formative assessment should be the major form for assessing pupils' achievement in English. Variety and selectivity should be the characteristics of assessment in primary schools. Test-oriented evaluation is not encouraged for the primary phase" (p. 117). However, for schools, parents, and students

themselves, linguistic competence, including grammar competence as emphasized in the college/university entrance exams, is more important than social linguistic competence under the exam-oriented circumstances.

Though there are many scientific ways to learn English language efficiently, Confucian pedagogy and exam-oriented education system have had an overwhelming influence on students, teachers, and parents. This is because the English curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education has been adopted by most elementary public schools in China. Therefore, Chinese ELLs who received formal education in China before immigration are likely to be deeply influenced by Confucianism and exam-oriented education system.

English Language Learning (ELL) in Canada

Support of English Language Learners (ELLs) curriculum

The ELLs registered within ESL programs in Ontario public schools are varied in age, which brings challenges to the schools. Therefore, course content and assigned tasks in ESL classes should be varied according to the respective ages of the students. To help ELLs to achieve better academic performance and integration into a new society, the teachers, principals, school staff and parents should work together as a team. This is a shared responsibility that needs to be recognized by all schoolteachers, staff, principals, and school administration, parents, community members, and students themselves (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Principals rely on teachers to administer these programs successfully and to implement instructive strategies to best reach ELL students' full potential. In fact, the shared responsibility by school administration is not only about

improving students' standardized test scores, but also to cultivate the continuous learning ability of all students. To coordinate with each sector and help ELLs, school staff, administrators from the Ministry of Education, parents, and community members should work collaboratively.

According to Conzemius and O'Neill (2001), each stakeholder plays a different role in ELLs' learning process. For school administrators, a warm and welcoming learning environment should be created for newly arriving ELLs as well as their families once they settle down. Such examples include providing language support for immigrant/non-English-speaking parents and helping them to get involved in the ELLs' learning procedures. Learning experiences should be enriched and refined for ELLs to make sure the whole program is running efficiently and effectively (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 2008). Beneficial curriculum and teaching methods should be incorporated into teacher guidance and assessment of student needs. Supporting the collaboration between teachers is necessary for improving their teaching capabilities.

The ELL teachers play an essential role in supporting ELLs in Ontario public schools. In one of their narrative inquiry research papers, a case of a Chinese immigrant child who settled in Canada with his family is illustrated. According to Xu, Connelly, He, and Phillion (2007), Asian students were always considered as the "model-minority" (p. 413). Moreover, it was believed that they would eventually succeed academically and economically, particularly in relation African and Latino minorities based on Nash's (1991) arguments (as cited in Xu, Connelly, He, & Phillion, 2007) in U.S. and Canadian society. Therefore, Chinese ELLs needed more attention from teachers.

Teachers get to know their ELL students' cultural backgrounds, personalities, academic experience (or lack thereof), mother tongue, etc. when ELLs become settled in the classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 2008). Multifarious teaching strategies and cooperation with other teachers are necessary to support ELLs. Even though ELLs are normally not encouraged to speak their mother tongues in class (Harbord, 1992), the Ontario Ministry of Education still suggests teachers to use a dual-language approach. For front-line educators, it is vital to "support ELLs to take time to develop rapport" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p.20). Establishing a healthy and friendly relationship between teachers and students will help students in their studies. Respecting diverse cultures and students' home languages in the classroom is also necessary for their success. Building a warm and welcome learning environment for all ELLs is still a top priority. It is essential to communicate with parents effectively and to understand students' situations bidirectionally (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p.19).

No matter how much assistance is available, much of the responsibility falls on the ELL students themselves; they must make effective use of their resources to improve their learning. Therefore, ELLs are suggested to cooperate and communicate with their classmates while completing an assigned task. Strengthening ELLs' relationships with their teachers, parents, and schools is beneficial for their success, as well as seeking help whenever necessary in both their academic and personal lives (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2001; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p.19).

Parents should strive to be more connected with schools. The Ontario ELL curriculum documents strongly suggest that parents should get involved in school events

whenever possible to support their ELL child/children's education. Deforges (2013, as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) argued that "the more engaged parents are in children's schoolwork, the better the children would perform academically" (p. 20). There might be other obstacles obstructing non-English speaking parents from supporting their children at school, such as their own lack of English language proficiency. However, it would still be beneficial for parents to read ELL children English books on a regular basis. Parents could also become familiar with the Ontario curriculum and continue encouraging children to stay on top of their school schedule. Moreover, Deforges (2013) states that parents should attend teacher-parent/school-parent seminars, both in formal and informal ways, regularly. It is important for them to care about children's school life and to share children's interest in things that they encounter at school. (Conzemius & O'Neill 2001; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008)

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2005, 2008), community partners are valuable resources for ELL students' academic progress. When community partners are assigned to work with new immigrant students, it would be more beneficial to assign them to students with whom they share the same language, cultural background, or family situation (Sandy & Holland, 2006). They can also organize a mutual study assistant center which distributes information among foreign parents and children. Community partners can collaborate with the school board to work on building facilities such as public libraries, literacy-improving initiative programs, study centers, and workshops (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2001; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). According to the *Student Nutrition Program Guideline* (2016), "Ontario's Student Nutrition Program (SNP) helps schools and community locations to provide nutritious

breakfasts, morning meals, lunches and/or snacks to children and youth, indirectly supporting their education and healthy development” (p. 4). This is because studies show that school-aged students who eat breakfast are more well-behaved while attending school (Pratley, McPhail & Webb, 2015). Local community volunteers cooperate with schools to provide nutritious and healthy meals for the benefit of the students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). In fact, community partners can even offer other services such as providing job opportunities for immigrants, and an orientation of the school system for ELLs and their families (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Acculturation Processes.

Statistically, there are more than 7.5 million immigrants and second-generation Canadians in Ontario who are raised in families that use languages other than French or English (Statistics Canada, 2017). Moreover, more than 10% of this population is of Chinese origin (Statistics Canada, 2016). This large population of Chinese immigrant children has changed the classroom composition in Ontario schools, necessitating a re-examination of Ontario’s current classroom practices to ascertain whether this population is being effectively supported. Xu (2019) believes that the influx of new immigrants from Asian countries changed the racial proportion of students in Canadian schools at the beginning of the twenty-first century. A continually growing population of Chinese immigrants is now residing as a visible minority within Canadian schools. In some areas such as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Chinese immigrants are the largest immigrated ethnic group (Xu, 2017). In the foreseeable future, the number of new Chinese immigrant from Mainland China will continue to grow steadily (Wang & Lo, 2004).

Among all the reasons to immigrant to a new land, the promise of a quality education is the strongest one for Chinese parents. This makes them willing to take on the challenges that immigration entails. Consequently, this makes most Chinese parents push their children to study hard, with a specific focus on improving their children improving their English language capabilities. Despite learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in China, Chinese immigrant families will register their children as ELLs with the Canadian school system in English-speaking provinces in Canada. Although some of these children are already fluent in English, they still have extra hurdles to overcome in order to keep up with their Canada-born peers.

Traditionally, young children who have not received any professional English training back in their homelands are considered as ELLs. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2005), “ELLs naturally want to develop a grasp of the language for social, as well as academic, purposes” (p. 8). ELLs are willing to get involved in their new class environments and get acquainted with their teachers and classmates. However, based on many research papers, Chinese ELLs in Ontario primary schools are shown to feel alienated in their educational context due to language and cultural barriers (Long, 2017).

Keeping cultural diversity is prompted by Ontario government, however, a certain extent of acculturation is inevitable when ELLs are trying to get into social integration. Conducting an extensive literature review based on the acculturation experiences of Chinese immigrant children within Ontario’s schools (or other educational systems) can help to provide insights into overcoming the barriers they face. These barriers commonly include communicative language barriers, academic culture shock, new social norms and

values, and adaptation to a new curriculum and teaching pedagogy. (Chen, 2002; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008; Xu, 2017; Zhong, 2011)

Implementing fair and inclusive practices will, in turn, affect every aspect of a student's school life. These implications help schools to encourage their students to achieve higher standards of learning (Early & Potts, 2015). Schools are also encouraged to fulfill the potential in students themselves, and to help ELLs strengthen their own identities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Diversity within the school should be well-respected by the entire school staff and students. Cultural diversity also ensures that all students at school are free from "harassment, bullying, violence, discrimination, racism, physical punishment and expressions of hate" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 22).

One of the strategies of promoting inclusion and diversity in ELLs' learning is to integrate their L1 in English learning processes (Early & Potts, 2015). Immigrant families whose first language is not English prefer to communicate with their children in English at home, because parents believe that speaking L1 at home might confuse children's language system and interfere with their L2 development, thereby reducing their chances of academic success in the future. Therefore, in these parents' opinions, creating an immersion English environment at home seems necessary to help their children familiarize themselves with the new school/society (Early & Potts, 2015; Liang, Mohan & Early, 1998). Furthermore, according to Cummins (1981), some schoolteachers as well as administrators maintain that children's proficiency in L1 is likely to bring deficiency in L2. In fact, children might feel they have to reject their home culture to be assimilated into the "majority" (Darcy, 1953, as cited in Cummins, 1981). According to many recent

studies, bilingualism is not an interference, but a contributing factor to promote ELLs' academic performance. In addition, recent research studies show that bilingualism will not confuse students' L2 development. Conversely, it helps ELLs to build self-esteem and promote academic performance (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1981; Early & Potts, 2015). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2005) states that ELLs "using their first language as well as English enables them to draw on their strengths, including their existing academic, linguistic, and cultural knowledge" (p. 15).

Theories

Everyday English and Academic English

"Everyday English ability" often refers to foundational interpersonal communication skills or conversational English. For most ELLs, they can master everyday English within one or two years. Since their day-to-day vocabulary and sentence structures are related to their living environment, they are often able to improve their language skills rapidly (Ministry of Education, 2008; Uribe, 2008). Many ELLs have been taught English for years in their home countries, which is why they are quite proficient with conversational English. This includes listening and speaking fluently and communicating with peers as well as teachers. However, they are still struggling with the ability to read and write in an academic manner.

Academic English ability, referred to as cognitive academic language skills, is more demanding for ELLs to acquire, both in time span and conceptual depth (Collier, 1987; Collier & Thomas, 1989; Saville-Troike, 1991). If students want to be socially and economically successful, they must be able to excel at the appropriate academic level.

Furthermore, performing at that level can be an ongoing struggle, as academic English requires “multiple complex characteristics of English that are necessary for long-term success in public schools, completion of higher education, career development opportunities and financial rewards” (Rumberger & Scarcella, 2001, p. 1, as cited in Uribe, 2008). Unlike everyday English that requires some practice and memorization to learn unfamiliar words and create simple sentence structures, academic English is more demanding because it requires academic citation skills and academic awareness (Cummins, 2008). Academic English is more about learning a new way of thinking, such as “describing properties or processes, comparing and contrasting, hypothesizing, and generalizing” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p.13). To be more specific, ELLs need to learn English through an understanding and proficiency in abstract words or concepts across a variety of subjects.

People who only have everyday English proficiency may not be able to socialize with others because socializing requires inter-cultural and intra-personal communication skills as well. Moreover, in the classroom setting, some ELLs with a certain level of everyday English may struggle with communication in academic purpose (Scarcella, 2003). The classroom setting relies more on listening skills, rather than a reciprocating conversation. The subject matter in the classroom is heavily reliant on an understanding of Western culture and history, which ELL students may also not possess. Moreover, ELL students will not have the aid of body language or an opportunity to ask questions which is a widespread practice with everyday English. For these reasons, ELL students will have difficulty comprehending the lessons at the same level that native speakers will (Saville-Troike, 1991).

ELL students can understand their current surroundings and express themselves in the classroom. Nevertheless, unfamiliar history and culture that are not so relevant to their prior life may prevent them from understanding, reading, and writing at a standard academic level (Collier, 1987; Collier & Thomas, 1989; Scarcella, 2003). For example, Canadian history, Indigenous heritage, and Canadian geography are areas in which ELL students may struggle. Nouns that occur frequently in everyday English such as ‘books,’ ‘friends,’ and ‘pencils’ can be mastered and used by ELLs. However, they will have trouble using complicated and less common terminology such as “sequence,” “asymmetry,” and “nuance” (Scarcella, 2003). With the help of everyday English, ELLs can use simple words and sentence structures, but when it comes to more complex grammatical structure, ELLs will have difficulty discerning the subject, verb, and object - not to mention using them in a sentence.

From the perspective of linguistic components, everyday English (conversational English) and academic English vary considerably. Scarcella (2003) demonstrates that there are five components to distinguish everyday English from academic English, and each of them has respective features. The five components are: “phonological, lexical, grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse.” (Scarcella, 2003, p. 11)

Concerning the phonological component, ELLs’ knowledge of everyday English involves sounds and sound combinations, such as pronunciation of consonants, vowels, consonant clusters, emphasis and intonation, grapheme, and spelling (for example, “weak” versus “week”) (Scarcella, 2003). Academic English requires ELLs to master conversational English as well as expand upon their new understanding of phonological

features, distinguish patterns of emphasis, and learn new patterns, such as the difference between “demography” and “demographic” (Mauranen, 2012).

From the perspective of the lexical component, ELLs’ knowledge of everyday English involves understanding the forms and basic meaning of daily-used words and understanding the prefixes, roots, suffixes, and grammatical constraints of words. Meanwhile, for academic knowledge, ELLs must extend their knowledge of the varied forms and meanings of words. Scarcella (2003) gives us an example, such as “research” and “investigate” (p. 12).

From the perspective of the grammatical component, transcending everyday English includes an understanding of semantics, syntax, relations, phonemes, and the nature of distribution; grammatical knowledge; and an understanding of simple punctuation rules to avoid errors such as, “if I was you” (Scarcella, 2003). Moreover, ELLs must master knowledge that is used more academically: the knowledge of morphological and syntactic properties that are relevant to argumentative composition, procedural description, and analysis (Krashen, Long & Scarcella, 1979). They will need a firm grasp on metaphors and more precise punctuation as well. From the sociolinguistic perspective, ELLs need knowledge to understand and use sentence structure appropriately (Cummins, 1991). For example, they should know it is inappropriate to greet a teacher with “what’s up?,” or “How ya doin’?” (Scarcella, 2003) For academic use, ELLs require knowledge of an increased number of language functions, such as apologizing, complaining, greeting, and making requests (Collier, 1987). Besides this, knowledge of different writing genres, such as expository and argumentative text is necessary (Mauranen, 2012).

From the perspective of the discourse component, this involves ELLs' knowledge of basic socialization in daily life (Scarcella, 2003). This includes communicating with others as well as grasping basic writing skills (Cummins, 1991). Such examples are writing an e-mail/letter/card, social discourse, and making requests of others. Academically, ELLs should understand the discourse characteristics used in a particular academic genre, including a means of transition and other organizational signals (Collier & Thomas, 1989; Cummins, 1991, 2008). This helps them to gain insights into what they are reading, their relationships, and following logical lines of thinking when reading. In writing, these discourse characteristics can help readers unfold the paper and provide a smooth transition between ideas (Scarcella, 2003). We should be aware that the development of the cognitive dimension involves scaffolding development and sequential learning. The cognitive components of academic English when applied in everyday situations can be distinguished from academic situations (Mauranen, 2012).

Cummins' Iceberg Theory (BICS/CALP)

The terms "Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills" (BICS) and "Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency" (CALP) are commonly referenced in bilingualism and among students who have difficulty with language acquisition (Cummins, 2008). Students may be lacking in academic performance due to their cultural background or mother language (Cummins, 1981). Carrasquillo, Kuker and Abrams (2004) state that "through the years, this group of students (ELLs) often fails to attain grade-level literacy and faces an increasing struggle to meet the academic demands of the curriculum" (p. ix). Some ELLs have not had the chance to develop proper language proficiency. Cummins' (1979, 1981, 1984) earlier work demonstrates his ideas about second language

development using a simple matrix. BICS describes the development of conversational fluency in a second language (basic interpersonal communication skills), which is strongly related to “cognitively undemanding manifestation of language proficiency in interpersonal situations” (Cummins, 1981, p. 23), such as grammar, fluency, and accent. Scarcella (2003) also states that “In BICS, meaning is accomplished through the assistance of contextual and paralinguistic cues. This means that students do not have to depend only on language in order to attain meaning; rather, to attain meaning, they can use a variety of cues, including body language and intonation.” (p.4). Meanwhile, CALP describes the use of language in decontextualized academic situations (cognitive academic language competence), which is defined as “those dimensions of language proficiency that are strongly related to literacy skills” (Cummins, 1981, p. 23). Cummins’ Iceberg Theory was based on Olsen’s (1977) utterance and text as well as Burt and Dulay’s (1978) “natural communication” tasks and “linguistic manipulation” tasks. Then Cummins and other researchers extended BICS and CALP this model later (Collier, 1987; Collier & Thomas, 1989; Cummins, 1984; Saville-Troike, 1991).

According to Cummins (2017), the difference between BICS and CALP is emphasized by the formalized differences between conversational fluency and academic language fluency. These differences can be characterized as components of the concept of “language proficiency.” Cummins argues that incorporating all aspects of language or performance into one aspect of general or global language proficiency is problematic. Cummins also gives readers an example of two children who were native English speakers but could not speak a second language. The younger child could understand everything that is common in their daily life settings, strictly through observation. On top

of this, he could use specific language to express himself as effectively as the older child (Bhela, 1999). However, when it came to academic reading, writing, and the depth and breadth of vocabulary, there was a large disparity between the two children. In other words, some aspects of a child's first language, such as phonology, reach a certain level early; while others, such as vocabulary and terminology, develop as children grow up (Cummins, 2008).

However, in Cummins' earlier research (Cummins, 1981,1984), there are two studies that demonstrate correlations between BICS and CALP. The academic development of bilingual students suggests that educators and educational administrators often conflate conversational and academic aspects of English proficiency. This conflation contributes significantly to students' academic difficulties - especially for students who are learning English as a second language (Cummins, 2017).

The previous research that was mentioned above was also integrated into Cummins' earlier work. One of these studies was regarding teachers and educational administrators who have always held an opinion that when English as an Additional Language Learners (EALs), English as a Foreign Language Learners (EFLs) and ELLs communicate fluently in English, they have overcome various difficulties in English. However, these English Learners (ELs) often performed poorly in academic tasks in the classroom and failed on the language scale for the cognitive tests that were part of a psychological evaluation (Collier, 1987; Collier & Thomas, 1989). This revealed an inaccuracy of judgement. It appeared that ELLs, EFLs, and EALs were having communication challenges even though they had settled into a pristine environment only a few years prior. Therefore, the complex combination of L2 oral English fluency and L2

academic language proficiency directly led to the inaccurate placement of these bilingual students in special educational programs (Cummins, 1981).

Another study involved an in-depth analysis of language performance data. It concluded that there was, on average, a gap of 2-3 years between achieving fluency in conversational English and meeting academic standards in English (Cummins, 1984). Two-year exposure in an English language environment could help ELLs gain proficient conversational English and basic academic English skills.

Even though ELLs acquire Everyday English fluently, this does not necessarily mean that they have attained complete English language proficiency. In many cases, they could still have trouble with writing academic English (Cummins, 1981, 2017).

According to Carrasquillo, Kuker, and Abrams (2004), “ELLs probably demonstrate phonetic awareness knowledge of phonics, decoding, and word recognition; however, they demonstrate lower levels of literacy than would be expected of students in their age group and grade level” (p. x). Recommendations were then offered to teachers as to how to understand the concepts of BICS and CALP to support ELLs in their classroom.

CHAPTER 3

DISCUSSION

This section provides a detailed discussion on the curriculum and pedagogy of current language teaching. It discusses these issues using a comparative perspective. It also outlines the analysis of three factors that contribute to ELLs' learning. In addition, the gaps between research and practicality are highlighted with some recommendations and suggestions.

Similarities and Differences in Canadian and Chinese Curricula

In this section, the curricula of compulsory education in Canada and in China will be compared. Since most Chinese schools providing mandatory education are public schools, the context for comparison should be restricted to public elementary schools on both sides. Obvious similarities exist between the Ontario ELL curriculum documents (2005, 2006, 2008, 2015) and the Chinese Ministry of Education's English standard curriculum (2011). These similarities can be sorted into five categories. Firstly, both curricula have graded classification in English teaching and learning based on learners' age and capability. The content of ESL courses and the depth of classroom tasks are also determined by the age and learning level of students in both Ontario and China (Ministry of Education in China, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, 2008). For example, the results of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) are important to ELLs to continue their further education in Ontario schools (Eizadirad, 2019). This is similar to the final examinations that take place at the end of each grade in China. In both

systems, this functions as a criterion with which to classify and grade English learners. Currently, the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) is the province-wide tool used to measure students' English language proficiency. This test is also used as an assessment by the Toronto District School Board to compartmentalize ELLs based on their English-speaking ability (Hersh & Hume, 2003).

Secondly, English as a language is considered as a tool, not as an end in both curricula (Pan & Block, 2011). Whether one is an ELL or an EFL, learning English is seen to achieve various goals, such as acquiring academic knowledge, improving learning ability, socializing/communicating with others, and improving academic performance. It is also seen as a means through which to live a better life and pave the way for future studying (Pan & Block, 2011).

Thirdly, curricula in both Canada and China are designed for all domestic English learners, rather than a specific group of them. Courses are designed for all and should take the students' average level of English capabilities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008; Ministry of Education in China, 2011).

Fourthly, English is not the learners' first language or mother tongue. No matter what the first language is, ELLs' and EFLs' first language and second language are interdependent (Cummins, 1979, 1981). According to Cummins (1981), L1 and L2 correlate highly with each other, especially in reading. Moreover, the older ELLs who are good at L1 CALP also do better in L2 CALP acquisition compared to their younger counterparts.

Fifthly, both curricula are designed for schools, in-service and pre-service teachers with detailed knowledge and define educators' responsibilities and duties to support ELLs academically (Carnell & Lodge, 2001).

The differences in the Canadian and Chinese curricula can also be illustrated in three aspects. Firstly, English curriculum in China is designed for elementary schools nationwide. Any official documents or education policies issued by provincial ministries of education should comply with the national curriculum and combine it with the local situations (Cheng, 2011). In Ontario, however, ELL documents are issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education, with no official documents issued at the federal level.

Secondly, China has a vast territory and a dense population. Due to the varying levels of economic development throughout the country, there is an unbalanced distribution of educational resources, teachers, and teaching apparatuses. The teacher/student ratio is also varying drastically in different regions. Moreover, each course is taught by a different teacher, leading to teachers not becoming familiar with each student and not being able to teach them according to the student's individual aptitudes. In contrast with China, Canada has a small class education system, with one teacher in each class in lower grades to teach all subjects. Students can therefore be given more opportunities to explore the knowledge they are interested in.

Thirdly, English teachers who teach in elementary schools in China are EFL themselves. On the contrary, teachers in Canada are usually English native speakers. But we must be aware that teachers are not born to be teachers. Many people hold an opinion that English native-speakers teach better English. However, according to Freeman and

Johnson (1998), “what teachers know about teaching is socially constructed out of the experiences and classrooms from which teachers have come. furthermore, how teachers use their knowledge in classrooms is highly interpretive, socially negotiated, and continually restructured within the classrooms and schools where teachers work” (p. 400). The pedagogies that teachers adopted how to teach are based on their own memories as well as experiences when teachers themselves were students. Therefore, the assumption of English native speakers teaches better than non-native English speakers is unsustainable.

Similarities and Differences in Pedagogies

In this paper, the focus is on Chinese immigrant ELLs. Therefore, different pedagogies will be compared between Canadian and Chinese elementary schools. It is unanimously agreed that Canadian school education places more emphasis on students’ personal development. A variety of pedagogies are applied to meet students’ interests (Zhang & Liu, 2014) and some of them have remarkably similar meanings. An example of this is EFL and ELL. The difference between EFL and ELL is that the mother tongue or L1 is always used to express emotions. The L2 however, is meant to express opinions (Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas & Roger, 2003). In fact, the purpose to acquire English for many ELLs led to the English for Special or Specific Purposes (ESP) program. The materials and book contents for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), tourism, agriculture and so on, are designed to promote the development of the English language around the world (Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas & Roger, 2003).

Analysis From Three Perspectives

Various challenges and obstacles that many Chinese immigrant children face in their daily and academic lives were presented in the previous chapters. During the acculturation process, Chinese immigrant students have experienced challenges such as linguistic barriers, academic culture shock, new social norms and values, and unfamiliar curriculum and pedagogy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008; Zhong, 2011). In the following paragraphs, I will articulate the differences and similarities between those terms. Furthermore, I will discuss how to help Chinese immigrant students and Chinese ELLs efficiently overcome these obstacles from five perspectives: language barriers, culture shock, different social norms/values, adaptation to the Ontario curriculum, and adaptation to new teaching pedagogies.

Language Barriers.

It is unavoidable for ELLs to face language barriers, in other words, communication difficulty in daily and academic life. From my own understanding, even though, only an exceedingly small number of second language learners can reach the level of native speakers, in other words, the vast majority of second language learners cannot be as successful as the native speakers (Towell & Hawkins, 1994; Nemati & Taghizade, 2013). For younger ELLs, they are more easily to acquire native-like pronunciation, phonetics, and accent. However, for the grown-up ELLs, they are more likely to have the positive transfer that occurs during their L2 acquisition. Which means L1 could positively support ELLs when they learn L2. Therefore, either group has their own advantages.

Nowadays, in many cases, ELLs are not encouraged to speak their mother tongue in ELL classes, especially when children work on teamwork collaboratively. It is understandable that the more frequent output of a language, the more proficient the language learners are meant to be. The purpose of the language is to communicate with others, no matter what the language or ethnicity is. Speaking English during the teamwork can not only improve their English language capability, but also promote cooperation among classmates. Nevertheless, ELLs are encouraged to speak English rather than their mother tongue, which does not mean any disrespect shown to L1. In fact, we need to be aware that L1 could facilitate L2 acquisition in active transfer (Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015; Kecskes & Papp, 2000). Furthermore, when ELLs are allowed to speak their mother tongue and share their ethnic identities, they are more relaxed and voluble, which is helpful to release nervousness and stress when they enter an unfamiliar environment.

The importance of L1 has been shown in many other ways. For instance, many Chinese ELLs like the mathematics best among all the subjects. The reasons behind it contain many and varied a lot, but one of them is that mathematics does not need too many English language skills. If ELLs acquired a few mathematics terminology and basic rules, they could simply focus on the operation symbols and do the calculation, then answer the questions. Language is no longer an interference to ELLs during mathematics calculation. It is also important to help the ELLs to develop a growing mindset such as perseverance, confidence, and keep a positive attitude towards failure to support their English language learning.

Cultural Shock.

Chinese immigrant children have experienced much cultural conflict in their life all the time. Most of them maintain Chinese culture at home and Canadian culture at school (Chen, 2002; Xu, 2017; Zhong, 2011). This conflict could be expressed in many ways, such as language and food. To be more specific, being obedient and showing filial piety are the best way to express respectfulness to their parents as well as the elderly (Chen, 2002). However, students are encouraged to think critically at school in Canadian public school. Asking a question is more important than answering a question.

Cultural awareness has a positive influence on children's language learning. Cultural awareness helps English learners to understand and use English language properly (Cheng, 2002; Ministry of Education in China, 2011).

It could be confusing for Chinese ELLs during their growing process, and they might develop two-sided personalities. To make things worse, they could have mental diseases under such pressures or psychological illness (Lee & Chen, 2000). Under the circumstances, these young immigrants could be interfered from being successful in their academic future or career life deeply by those obstacles. Having experienced culture shock at an early age could lead to tense relationships between children and their parents. Solving the cultural shock problem for students could be critical during their growing process.

New Teaching Pedagogy

For Chinese immigrant children, they must adapt to a new teaching pedagogy from a teacher-centered Confucian pedagogy in Ontario public schools. Most Chinese immigrant children had accepted systematic education back in their homeland. The

criteria of how to be a good student in China and in Canada is quite different. In Canada, students are encouraged to discover the problems, ask questions, then find the answers by themselves. It is different from the teacher-centered class. Encouraging students to think critically is cultivated since kindergarten. Teaching pedagogy could be varied, and Canadian teachers have their personal style. Please note that only the differences are emphasized in Eastern and Western schools, not about comparing which is better and which is worse. Both teaching forms fit in social norms respectively (Zhong, 2011).

English Immersion Environment in ESL Class. In Ontario elementary public schools, the dominant language in school is English. In ESL classroom, instead of speaking ELLs' mother tongue, they are encouraged to communicate in English in order to create an English immersion environment. The programs offered currently, and the pedagogies applied for ELLs are emphasized in this paper. In most people minds that minority students who are in English deficiency should be exposed to English language environment as much as possible. Therefore, in some related programs, such as English as a Second language (ESL) program, instead of speaking their home language to express their opinions, ELLs are encouraged to communicate in English entire day, which also called "English immersion environment." Furthermore, people assumed that academic input should be as simplified as possible for ELLs to acquire English. In the original words, "decomposing conceptual content and skills into their component parts will also be analyzed" (Cummins, 1983, p.374). According to Cummins (2008), immersion target language environment could bring possible detrimental effects on children's mother tongue. This was the initial concern for the immersion target language program. This concern came from Canadian French immersion programs. However, these opinions are

challenged critically. Obviously, spending longer time on second language learning, there would be shorter time for children's first language acquisition. However, this is not tested correctly in the later research. As to the assumption, "linguistic mismatch," which means home language and school language could confuse children, will "almost inevitably result in academic retardation" (Cummins, 1983, p. 373). The main factor that contributed to the success of Canadian French Immersion Program was that the bilingual program was staffed by bilingual teachers. When it comes to the minority, in this major paper, Chinese ELLs, the majority ESL teachers cannot speak in Mandarin or Cantonese. Bilingualism for immersion student development is what Lambert (1975) calls "additive" bilingualism, because students add a second language to their skill pool without affecting first language proficiency. On the contrary, minority students who "drown" in monolingual English courses (Cohen & Swain, 1976; Cummins, 1983; Lamber, 1975) often develop a "subtractive" form of bilingualism in which the first language is "subtracted" or substituted during the learning process. Second language. As a result, students tend to have lower literacy skills in both languages. For these reasons, researchers involved in evaluating Immersion programs in Canada have consistently advocated "minority language bilingual immersion" programs for minority students.

Since the practical reality is not always congruent with the curriculum or developing into the ideal situation. It must be fraught with barriers and challenges in teaching and learning English in Chinese context. According to Wang's statement in her paper (2007), "...assessment for primary school English should focus on enhancing pupils' overall development and teachers' effectiveness in teaching." (p. 117).

The Problems in Teaching English

Even though in China countless time and tremendous effort were put into English language education, English teaching and learning remain unsatisfying, especially in language output, such as oral English and written English (He, 2020).

Teaching English in Chinese Context

It is important to be aware that English language teaching is not exactly the English education. English language teaching is about teaching English language knowledge. The English curriculum in compulsory education has the dual nature of instrumental and humanistic. As a tool, English courses undertake the task of cultivating students' basic English literacy and developing their thinking ability. Through English courses, students can master basic English language knowledge, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and preliminarily form the ability to communicate with others, laying a foundation for further learning English and other scientific and cultural knowledge in English. In terms of humanities, students can broaden their horizons, enrich their life experience, and form cross-cultural awareness through English courses (Ministry of Education in People's Republic of China, 2011)

Western teaching strategies encourage students to ask questions and think critically. Asking questions and thinking critically are encouraged positively. However, Some Chinese ELLs have trouble with adapting to the student-centered pedagogy teacher-centered. Academically challenging authority is considered negative engagement; therefore, classroom discussion is a vital component of assessment. This new pedagogy

brings Chinese ELLs unexpected challenges during their settlement. This situation also brings challenges to Ontario teachers to handle on.

Suggestions to Assist EFLs and ELLs in Learning English

Since many Chinese immigrant children have encountered language problem during their settlement in an unfamiliar environment. This situation brings us to reconsider the English education in their home country.

Suggestions to front-line teachers, including pre-service teachers and in-service teachers. Firstly, in the teaching process, educators should adhere to the students' interests, pay attention to individual differences, optimize classroom teaching, and improve teaching efficiency (Ministry of Education in China, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Teachers should fully understand the current English level and development needs of all students, choose appropriate teaching methods, so that students can maintain confidence, gain a sense of achievement, and finally achieve independent learning. Secondly, teachers should fully understand students' individual learning experiences, capabilities and personal learning styles, respect students' individual characteristics and give full play to their different potentials, establish a sincere, understanding and trusting relationship with students and instruct students individually. Thirdly, teachers should arrange teaching contents and steps, organize various forms of classroom interaction, and encourage students to learn and use English through observation, imitation, experience, exploration, demonstration, and other methods.

Traditionally, the purpose of studying is to acquire academic knowledge; however, cultivation of learning capability is more important than learning knowledge itself in the

theory of social constructivism (Chen, 2017). We must be aware that learning is lifelong, while schooling is periodical. Having independent learning ability is crucial to EFLs and ELLs' future study. A lifelong learning habit will benefit children throughout their lives.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

After extensively reading all kinds of the related literature, I have gained fundamental knowledge regarding the challenges and obstacles that Chinese ELLs face during their studies and daily life. My personal study life in Ontario has granted me a way to empathize with the Chinese immigrant children who were attending school; I feel a deep connection to those Chinese ELLs. The difficulties that they encounter living in a foreign environment similar to those which I have needed to overcome. My Chinese upbringing as well as my fluency in both Mandarin and English allow me to understand the gaps and differences between West and East. Unless you have walked in their shoes, it will be difficult to understand the full extent of their daily challenges as well as the assistance they need. Personal experience also intrigues me to think over the English language education back in my home country, China. In fact, I have accepted systematic English language courses for more than 10 years, however, I still have trouble socializing and communicating with English native speakers when I first came to Canada.

After the discussion in Chapter 3, here comes the conclusion, China's exam-oriented education system and teacher-centered pedagogy influenced students, teachers, and parents overwhelmingly. It is hard to make a change from emphasis on linguistic competency to improving social linguistic competency/social communication. Therefore, the parental involvement being one of the effective ways to help immigrant children to settle in Canada (Carnell & Lodge, 2001; Zhong, 2011). Therefore, Canadian ELL teachers should know some basic information ELLs' personal interests, English language

capability and academic experiences, moreover, Chinese students are not born to be academic successfully. Cultivating ELLs' interests of learning and guiding them to develop the independent learning ability are important to ELL teachers. Besides, give some time to Chinese ELLs to adapt to student-centered pedagogy. Sometimes, Chinese ELLs would rather not to express themselves even though they know what the answer is. Hence, supporting and guiding Chinese ELLs to know that it is not about whether the answer is right or wrong, but the critical thinking by students matters.

Many Chinese immigrant parents give their children additional homework after school to finish. Hiring a specific compulsory course tutor is quite common in many Chinese immigrant families, besides, to cultivate children's artistic talents, playing an instrument, for example, piano or violin is popular. Training children in specialized sports skills, and being skilled in children's mother tongue, normally is Mandarin or Cantonese (Chen, 2002). However, there are still factors that interfere parental involvement, such as language barriers, financial status, and cultural background (Chen, 2002). Due to the language barriers, many Chinese immigrant parents have limited chances to initiate a talk with schoolteachers. In fact, many grandparents play a significant role in parental involvement in children's school life rather than the parents themselves, because they are busy at work and struggle to raise the whole family. They barely could spare time to pay attention to their children's school performance. Otherwise, Grandparents usually have language deficiency to communicate with schoolteachers efficiently. Therefore, strengthening the connection between schools and parents is important. Communicating mutually and efficiently can affect students positively (Martin & Hagan-Burke, 2002).

According to Cummins' theory (1979, 1981, 2008), the relation between L1 and L2 is interdependent and correlative. L1 is not an interference factor to L2 development, on the contrary, L1 helps ELLs to understand L2 and acquired academic knowledge (Cummins, 1981). However, the current situation is that creating an immersion English at school become a common phenomenon.

To some ELLs with limited English language proficiency, it is anxious when they do not understand what others talking around them. Just like David I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. He was in grade two and could not participate in the ESL program until grade three. However, his anxiety and concern were obvious. His teacher and mother's solicitude were true. Helping Chinese ELLs in Ontario is a practical issue and much research have been done to this topic. It is not only the teachers' and parents' responsibility to improve their academic performance at school, but also the whole society needs to get involved. The current situation that barriers and challenges that Chinese ELLs encountering at school reflects some problems that exist in Chinese education system. In fact, the curriculum documents illustrated suggestions in detail. Parents, students, teachers were aware of the importance of English language learning, and tremendous time and effort were put into the English language learning, however, it is still hard for Chinese EFL to learn English efficiently. not only focusing on language knowledge such as pronunciation, semantics, and grammar, but also on practical application and language communication. However, when the education system is examination-oriented, schools, teachers, parents, and students must pay more attention to book knowledge and written English, and it has become a consensus to improve English capability and get higher scores within a limited time. In this case, the education system

has existed for many years, and even becomes the optimal solution based on the actual social situation. Even though, it is difficult to change the entire education system to achieve the ideal purpose, parents and front-line teachers are still can do their best to help EFLs and ELLs to strengthen their linguistic competency. After all, the purpose of learning English is to achieve better academic performance and integration into the new society. Therefore, students must pay attention to not only competency but also social linguistics, the practical application of language and communication with others based on their own situation, to truly achieve the purpose of learning English.

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