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**The Motivational Journeys of Chinese Postgraduate  
Students in a UK University:**  
An Ecological Perspective for Practitioners and Academics

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics

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### Glossary of abbreviations

BALEAP	British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EP	Exploratory Practice
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
HE	Higher Education
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MA	Master of Art degree
MSc	Master of Science degree
MOLT	Motivational Orientation of Language Teaching
PS6	Pre-sessional 6 weeks
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PS6	Pre-sessional 6 weeks
UKCISA	UK Council for International Student Affairs

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## **Declaration**

I confirm that this thesis has been composed by myself alone and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree at another university.

## Abstract

Chinese students represent the largest cohort of international students on UK university campuses. However, little research has investigated this student population in Britain. Most studies have either examined Chinese students in other English-speaking countries or have conflated Chinese students with other international cohorts. Therefore, this thesis focuses on Chinese students with the aim of understanding their specific journeys in the UK. These experiences are understood through the concept of motivation which, in applied linguistics, has normally been studied in relation to learning a language for *general* purposes. However, this study puts the spotlight on learning English for *academic* purposes and for studying at university. More crucially, this investigation offers a longitudinal perspective which, through a student-centred analysis, illustrates the nuances and shifts of students' motivation. This is a fresh and original approach to the study of motivation which has generally consisted in cross-sectional views of the construct.

The focus is on a group of Chinese students who completed a pre-session course and a Master's at a university in the Midlands. Data was generated throughout an academic year beginning with a stage of practitioner research (phase-1, duration of the pre-session) and qualitative interviewing (phase-2, duration of Master's). Narrative analysis was used to draw out themes from multiple data sources.

The findings suggest that students were driven to Britain by their desires to actualise their *ideal selves* (e.g. building a successful career). Also, the study reveals several factors which sustained and enhanced these students' motivations during the pre-session and the Master's (e.g. dialogic teaching approach, timely feedback). However, other factors emerged which had a less positive impact on their motivations (e.g. lack of interaction with certain tutors, university assessment procedures, library resources).

Furthermore, this study challenges the view that Chinese learners are passive and uncritical learners. As such, this thesis suggests that rather than promoting a *large culture* (Holliday, 1999) approach to teaching and learning, we should deCentre our assumptions and fixed ideas (Holliday & Amadasi, 2020), and interrogate our beliefs to create 'threads' of understanding within *small cultures* thereby averting 'blocks'. The notion of *cultures of learning* thus becomes relevant to account for the sheer diversity in student populations (Jin & Cortazzi, 1993).

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

It has been well-documented that increasing numbers of international students are choosing to study in an English-speaking country. In the UK, UKCISA (UK Council for International Student Affairs) reported 325,665 international students from outside the EU registered at British universities for the academic year 2017/18. The recruitment of international students in the UK has been a policy priority since the introduction of full-cost tuition fees in 1979 (Walker, 2014). Thus, international students account for a significant proportion of the UK student population in Higher Education (HE henceforth). They also bring immediate income which sustains HE institutions and the British economy more broadly (British Council, 2008; Lomer et al., 2018). However, whilst the UK has remained a top destination (OECD, 2014) attracting the largest number of international students after the US, competition within the global HE landscape is intensifying. Attractive destinations such as the US and the UK must now contend with growing academic markets in Australia, and New Zealand (Marginson, 2006) as well as some non-English-speaking countries which offer appealing university degrees through English-Medium-Instruction (EMI) (Mok, 2012).

Despite the inviting discourses which portray HE in western societies as beneficial (e.g. the Britain is GREAT campaign), research has highlighted a multitude of issues which international students confront during their HE study-abroad experiences (e.g. Wan et al, 1992; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Morita, 2009; Dooey, 2010; Cheng & Strauss, 2010). Some of these studies have narrowed the focus upon specific aspects such as speaking opportunities (Copland & Garton, 2011), the role of assessment (Tian & Lowe, 2013), and others have looked more holistically at the concept of adjustment and cross-cultural differences (e.g. Wu & Hammond, 2011). Some investigations have reported short-term snapshots of international students' experiences (e.g. Dooey, 2010), whilst others have adopted a longitudinal framework (e.g. Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Gu & Brooks, 2008). Crucially, a number of researchers have tended to examine international students subsuming into this category a range of nationalities (e.g. Gu et al., 2010; Copland et al., 2017; Kettle, 2017), whereas others have targeted specific cultural groupings (e.g. Wu, 2015; Heng, 2017).

## **1.2 Research focus**

This study sheds light on the largest and growing group of international students in the UK, the Chinese demographic. In particular, I focus on Chinese students at Master's level because these represent the key increasing figures within the UK HE sector. Research on Chinese learners has been thriving over the past couple of decades, bringing together the expertise of scholars from around the globe. Nonetheless, there is little consensus about the meaning(s), value(s) and assumption(s) embedded within the notion of the 'Chinese learner'. For instance, a strand of the literature has adopted the term to refer to all Chinese-speaking learners or Confucian-heritage students (e.g. Watkins & Biggs, 1996).

My choice to focus on and use the terms *Chinese students* was not driven by an essentialist view about Chinese learners as a separate group with fixed cultural traits that universally apply to all people from this cultural heritage. On the contrary, I was interested to explore the dimensions of 'small culture' (Holliday, 1999); or, drawing on Xue (2005), I would call it, *international student small culture*, from the perspective of Chinese students.

## **1.3 Research aims**

Whether grounded in an essentialist or constructivist paradigm, the research community has offered numerous insights to understand Chinese learners in western societies. However, within this rich research arena there seems to be a pervasive etic perspective and a paucity of results yielded from an emic approach. Therefore, to address this lacuna, I investigated Chinese learners in the UK from an 'insider' researcher viewpoint. To do so, I began to follow a group of Chinese students from the early days on a 6-week pre-session programme (PS6 henceforth). During PS6, I was the teacher in charge of the reading and writing module, I adopted a teacher-researcher role and employed Exploratory Practice (see below 1.4) to research these students. Upon completion of PS6, I followed them throughout their year on an MSc in Programme and Project Management and conducted several rounds of interviews to elicit additional data.

My investigation was focused and mediated by the construct of motivation. In line with Woodrow (2013), I argue that motivation is one of the most impactful and fluctuating factors which shape international students' performance and experiences. There is also a dearth of research which examines Chinese learners in the 'west' through the construct of motivation. Importantly, motivation research which has looked at international students tends to focus on language-related

issues. However, this study looked at the motivational dimensions which went beyond language issues and covered a wider web of experiences including the integration in new academic discursive communities (Paltridge, 2001) as well as living in the UK as international students. Crucially, the longitudinal design of this study addressed the call for investigations which explore Chinese learners in new changing learning environments from a developmental perspective (Ryan, 2011; Wu, 2015), thereby illustrating the dynamic interrelationship between the learners and the new socio-educational context(s).

Therefore, the subject of this thesis concerns the trajectory of Chinese postgraduate students' motivation to study and live in the UK.

#### **1.4 Practitioner research and motivation: a new perspective**

As well as offering a longitudinal view of motivation, this thesis offers a fresh understanding of the construct by drawing on Ushioda's (2016) 'small lens approach'. Given the tendency in the second language (L2) motivation field to research language learning and teaching processes at a rather general level, this approach calls for 'a more sharply focused or contextualized angle of inquiry'(p6). This narrow focus promises an empirical understanding of how motivation interacts with specific aspects of second language acquisition (SLA) whilst offering insightful and nuanced analyses of motivation in relation to particular classroom events.

I now introduce the concept of Practitioner Research (PR) which is a step towards generating a fine-grained understanding of motivation in this study. According to Hanks (2017), there are many different forms of Practitioner Research (PR) in language education, most notably: Action Research (AR), Reflective Practice (RP), and Exploratory Practice (EP). In 5.71. I will discuss EP in more detail as it represents the methodology for phase-1 of this study, but for now I offer a brief definition and outline the relationship between EP, AR and RP.

##### **1.4.1 Action Research**

AR represents a flourishing area of the language education research arena and, as such, there are many perspectives which illustrate the approach. Some of these take a pragmatic and solution-oriented stance for language teaching (e.g. Burns, 2005; Nunan, 1993), while others focus on social justice (e.g. Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003; Villacañas de Castro, 2017). More recently, Banegas and Consoli (2020) have characterised AR as a methodology which, with its focus on *action for*

*change, is context-driven, practical, collaborative, cyclical, ecological and ultimately, transformative.* AR has continued to develop into sub-varieties such as Collaborative Action Research or CAR (Burns, 1999), Participatory Action Research, or PAR (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003), and Exploratory Action Research, or EAR (Smith and Rebolledo, 2018). Therefore, AR usually involves language teachers, often working alongside other teachers, academics and/or students, who investigate problems that pertain to their *situated* educational practices with a view to solving such problem(s) and generating change for improvement and/or social justice.

#### **1.4.2 Reflective Practice**

Schön (1983) introduced the concept of RP with the aim of encouraging practitioners to reflect on their own practices. In particular, RP can be operationalised through two perspectives: *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. The former refers to ‘situations where the expected flow of a class is interrupted for some reason and the teacher has to rethink, improvise, re-prioritize, or reorient the direction of the lesson.’ The latter, on the other hand, refers to ‘the more contemplative type of reflection that takes place beyond the immediate pressures of the teaching moment, when one can think back over what happened and consider what has been learned from it.’ (Edge, 2011, p16). Therefore, RP expects teachers to identify problems in their practices, pause to reflect on their work *whilst* teaching and/or *after* teaching with the aim of looking *into* and/or *back* on their practice, thereby utilising reflections to change or improve their classroom realities.

#### **1.4.3 Exploratory Practice**

EP originates from the need to develop a research approach which busy language practitioners may adopt without experiencing ‘burn-out’ (Allwright, 1991a, Allwright, 1991b). Crucially, EP promotes a form of inclusive practitioner research whereby learners as well as teachers are accorded equal agency and power to investigate their own learning and teaching practices. This is possible by integrating teaching, learning and research (Allwright, 1993, 2003, 2005). Significantly, EP, RP and AR share some common aims. They all envision educational practices as social practices, include a degree of reflection and promote the classroom and pedagogic practices as the arena for language education research (e.g. Allwright, 2001; Hanks, 2017b). However, as argued by Hanks (2019), there are important aspects which distinguish EP from other forms of practitioner research.



EP seeks to go beyond RP and AR by envisioning learners as well as teachers as co-researchers, thereby making ‘collegiality’ one core principle of EP (Allwright, 2003). Furthermore, EP is less concerned with *change*, and rejects the notion of starting investigations with a ‘problem’ and trying to solve it (Allwright, 2006; Miller, 2009). Rather, EP argues that resolving a problem without knowing *why* the problem surfaced in the first place is not helpful. Therefore, the approach aims to develop *understanding(s)* of teaching and learning practices (e.g. Allwright, 2001, 2009; Gieve & Miller, 2006; Miller, 2009).

The process of working for understandings is called ‘puzzling’ or ‘puzzlement’ and therefore teachers and learners are encouraged to *puzzle about* their own practices. Importantly, research (or puzzling) is integrated into “normal pedagogic practices” using typical teaching and learning activities as instruments to enhance understanding(s) (Allwright, 2003). Essentially, EP is a methodology which promotes the investigation of teaching and learning practices through the very same teaching and learning activities employed within such practices with a view to allowing teachers and learners to ‘develop their own understandings of what they are doing as learners and teachers’ (Allwright, 2006, p15). In 5.12, I illustrate what this meant in practice within a UK pre-sessional context (phase-1 of this study) where I was the teacher. Given the high-stakes nature of a pre-sessional course, EP seemed a suitable methodology which a busy English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teacher could adopt without experiencing ‘burn out’ or compromising any teaching responsibilities or learning needs.

### **1.5 Who am I?**

I consider myself an experienced English language teacher who has worked in a variety of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings in France, Italy, Spain and the UK. I have also taken leadership roles as Director of Studies for British Council-accredited schools and therefore supported other teachers with their teaching practices. In 2013, I moved to the area of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in the UK university sector, and in this field too, I have taken up managerial positions. My shift to EAP was inspired by my Master’s in English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics at King’s College London which stimulated my thinking about the connections and tensions between the academic arena and the world of teaching practice.

It was during my Master's year that I further developed my longstanding interest in motivation. In my previous teaching experiences, I had always been actively concerned with motivation through my desire that both my learners, colleagues and myself be *happy* in the classroom. However, when I first came across Zoltán Dörnyei's and Ema Ushioda's works I decided to take this interest to a higher degree level and investigate it more systematically to achieve better understandings that may inform my teaching practice. Therefore, this PhD project was largely influenced by the goal of ensuring that my EAP teaching practice was motivational. As such, I chose to focus on international students because the majority of them become involved with EAP pre-sessional courses and because, over the years, UK universities have welcomed increasing numbers of international students. In particular, I was interested to understand whether all the potentially beneficial insights one may gain from theories of motivation are being implemented, and how, in the classrooms. This PhD thus brought together my scholarship activities, which I had developed since my Master's, and my research engagement with motivation at a higher level.

From the early stages of the PhD journey I recognised a strong resonance between my own teaching philosophy and Exploratory Practice's focus on *quality of life* which seems intimately connected with my notion of motivational teaching. Therefore, I acknowledge here my inevitably biased dispositions towards these topics which, in turn, led to high degrees of reflection and reflexivity throughout this project and thesis writing.

### **1.5 Thesis overview**

In this thesis I focus on the motivational trajectories experienced by a group of Chinese postgraduate students who began their UK journey on a pre-sessional programme before progressing onto a Master's in programme and project management at the same university.

I begin Chapter 2 by unpacking the concept of internationalisation of HE followed by the developments in the internationalisation of UK universities, with emphasis on Chinese students. Here I raise some critical questions about the term *Chinese student* and clarify the focus of this study. In Chapter 3, I chart the history of EAP in the UK with a focus on pre-sessional courses and illustrate debates concerning teaching and assessment practices as well as adjustment in relation

to Chinese students on such programmes. The second part of this chapter examines studies about Chinese students' experiences and motivations on postgraduate courses in the UK.

In Chapter 4, I engage with theoretical influences from the field of L2 motivation which informed this study. In particular, I illustrate the need for motivation inquiries which are meaningful to the classroom by referring to some theoretical concepts which have characterised the field over the past 20 years. This leads to a discussion of ecological perspectives on motivation which shaped the research design of this study. At the end of this chapter, I outline the key gaps in the fields of L2 motivation and intercultural studies about Chinese students in the UK.

I begin Chapter 5 with an articulation of my Research Questions (RQs) and the evolution of these throughout the PhD timeline. This is followed by my epistemological stance, interpretivism, which aligns with EP's focus on *understanding* and my ecological view of *motivation in context(s)*. I then outline the pre-sessional context where I collected data during phase-1 of the study followed by an illustration of the MSc programme (phase-2) which all my students completed after the pre-sessional. I outline my research design for both phases and examine the research instruments I envisaged to use. I then discuss the preliminary study and what I learnt from this which, in turn, informed my fieldwork. I conclude the chapter with macro and micro ethical considerations.

Chapter 6 discusses the *natural history* behind my analytical approach. I briefly articulate the various influences from narrative inquiry which led to my approach of 'writing as analysis' (Benson, 2013; 2019). This is followed by an audit trail of the steps taken to analyse the data systematically following this approach. This discussion emphasises the role of MAXQDA which supported my reflexivity and interpretations thanks to its various functions, including the use of different memos.

Following a preamble on the representation of findings, Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 take the form of narratives which chart the motivational trajectories of my participants. Each chapter recounts the story of one focal participant chronologically from the early days on the pre-sessional, throughout the MSc programme to the end of the UK experience. This chronological structure highlights the key factors and experiences which influenced and shaped each student-participant's motivation to live and study in the UK.

In Chapter 11, I move from a focus on the individual cases to a cross-sectional analysis and discussion of the findings and position these within the wider literature. I conclude in Chapter 12 with a summary of the key contributions, an evaluation of trustworthiness of the study and some questions which provide directions for future research.

## Chapter 2: Internationalisation of UK Higher Education

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the concept of internationalisation of HE and the major debates associated with this phenomenon. I then shift my focus on the UK and illustrate the key phases of internationalisation at British universities. This discussion is geared towards understanding Chinese students who represent the largest cohort of international students in the UK university sector. I thus scrutinise the term *Chinese* as well as the assumptions associated with Chinese students with a view to defining the focus of this thesis on *mainland*-Chinese students. Finally, I survey the literature to examine these students' motivations to study in Britain.

### 2.2 What is Internationalisation of HE?

The number of mobile students in HE programmes worldwide has grown dramatically in the past few decades, rising from 2 million in 1998 to 5.3 million in 2017 (OECD, 2019). However, one question of terminology must be raised here. Who are these mobile students? OECD distinguishes between *foreign students*, 'who are not citizens of the country in which they are enrolled (...) [but] they may be long-term residents or even be born in the "host" country'; and *international students*, 'those who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study' (2019, p238). This thesis is concerned with the latter.

Student mobility is mainly driven by lack of educational facilities in the home country or the prestige of institutions in the host country (OECD,2019). English-speaking countries are the most attractive destinations, a fact which points to the advantageous role of the English language in national and international job markets (Kettle, 2017). The US is the top OECD destination country with 985 000 of the 3.7 million international students, followed by the UK with 436 000 international students, Australia with 381 000 and Canada 210 000 (Ibid, 2019).

Students from Asia form the largest group of international students enrolled at university, totalling 2.1 million across the OECD in 2017, and over 860 000 of these hail from China. Nonetheless, these trends and flows are becoming increasingly varied and multidirectional (Ryan, 2013). Although international students are attracted to English-speaking institutions, more and more students find other countries such as Finland and Norway equally appealing as these now offer

degrees through the medium of English at lower tuition fees than Anglophone destinations (Kettle, 2017).

These student flows have led to the phenomenon of *internationalisation of higher education*, but this concept has not always been clearly defined (Al-Youssef, 2013). It is often equated to the notions of *cross-border education*, ‘the movement of people, programmes and institutions across national jurisdiction’ (Kettle, 2017, p8), or *Transnational education*, the ‘offshore provision of courses by universities and other higher education providers’ (2017, p9). Internationalisation of HE has also been used as a synonym for *globalisation*. However, globalisation refers to the flows of social, cultural, economic, technological and knowledge-based concepts and artefacts across borders thereby leading to interconnectedness between countries (Knight, 2006). In contrast, internationalisation of HE is understood as the integration of an international/intercultural/global dimension into all the core activities of universities, including teaching, research and services (OECD, 1999).

Nonetheless, the implementation of internationalisation remains far from clear. Knight (2011), for instance, questions whether internationalisation has become a ‘catch-all term’ which institutions utilise in their policies to achieve prestige rather than working on producing ‘international standards of excellence’. Chowdhury and Phan (2014) argue that universities appear to focus on economic revenue based on the recruitment of high fee-paying international students rather than the educational benefits of this phenomenon. Similarly, Ryan (2011) and Kettle (2017) maintain that internationalisation of HE should prioritise the values of intercultural learning and mutual growth as opposed to the strategies to enrich university finances and reputational standing. I now look at the HE landscape in the UK.

### **2.3 Internationalisation of British universities**

The UK has attracted international students into HE for a long time. In 1999, Tony Blair declared that Britain needed to recruit more international students and launched the multi-million Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI) (Blair, 1999; British Council, 1999). The aim was to increase the number of non-EU international students by 50,000 before 2005 (BC, 1999). The UK attained a substantial increase in international students and revenue (BC, 2003), exceeding the targets by 43,000 students (Blair, 2006). Two years later, the PMI was revamped with the launch of the ‘Initiative for International Education’ which was aimed at enhancing the international students’

educational experiences (Blair, 2006). New educational initiatives emerged from these government policies, and for example, the former Academy of Higher Education (AHE), now Advance HE, have conducted relevant research and designed a framework for the internationalisation of HE (2019). This framework is a spin-off from the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), and promotes principles of inclusivity, flexibility, interconnectivity, and collaboration which aim to guide, evaluate and enhance international activities within universities (e.g. internationalising the curriculum).

However, Trahar (2007) suggests that reality is not as rosy for international students in the UK, and there can be a vast gap between the marketing of pedagogic strategies to foster intercultural growth and the actual experiences of international students. Issues concerning international students include class participation (e.g. Hodkinson & Proropat, 2014), academic success in comparison with their peers (e.g. Crawford & Wang, 2015) and poor social interactions and integration in the new socio-academic reality (e.g. Peacock & Harrison, 2009). Looking at international students' social integration in a US university, Chen and Ross (2015) went as far as arguing that there was a 'Chinese educational enclave', thereby pointing to the lack of social and academic engagement of this community of international students with their local counterparts. Following this line of inquiry, Spencer-Oatey et al., (2017) conducted a mixed-methods study which highlighted critical levels of dissatisfaction in Chinese students who failed to socially integrate in the UK and reported struggling to form friendships with UK and other cohorts of international students. These findings are mitigated by a number of factors (e.g. individual student personal attitudes, contextual differences) and, as such, the authors do not wish to generalise such results; however, they call for universities to address the issue of integration in contemporary universities with an eye to fostering student satisfaction, (international) student employability and academic success.

Spencer-Oatey et al.'s work aligns with Healy et al.'s (2014) proposal of *students as partners in learning and teaching in HE*. The notion of partnership is conceptualised as a form of student engagement, whereby *both staff and students* work together to enhance learning and teaching practices. Therefore, this partnership is an enterprise in which *all* participants (staff, domestic and international students) are actively engaged in cooperative learning and teaching to promote values such as authenticity, empowerment, trust. Crucially, this approach puts 'reciprocal learning' at the

core of student-staff and student-student relationships, thereby questioning implicit assumptions about university learning and teaching, promoting reflection and reflexivity and suggesting new ways of thinking, being and doing in the contemporary university. This could therefore lead to a more active student voice and, as a result, international students would be recognised in such a way to truly become part and parcel of an internationalised university experience. This in turn generates benefits for all other students at the university (Ryan, 2011; Spencer-Oatey, 2017). Importantly, though, Healy et al. acknowledge a host of tensions and possible challenges which may emerge from the engagement and implementation of this partnership which include questions about student-staff relationships, especially due to power differentials, as well as issues at the interface between educational policy and the proposed partnership pedagogy. The authors point out that a partnership approach might not be right for everyone, nor HE every context. Therefore, their argument is not prescriptive in nature, but, rather, is a call for an exploration of a partnership pedagogy where assumptions about learning and teaching are revisited and *all* students engage actively within the university to achieve their full potential.

Ryan (2011) identifies 4 phases of internationalisation in the UK. The first phase began in the 1990s with an expectation that international students adapted to the British ways, the second phase saw institutional efforts encouraging lecturers to acknowledge the growing presence of these students, the third phase was characterised by stronger institutional policies promoting the ‘global citizen’, with efforts mainly resulting in improvements in university services rather than in the classroom. The fourth phase has just begun, and a crucial observation is that international students are no longer the minority group, which reveals a need for more collaboration and understanding from UK universities and their main actors, notably lecturers.

Ryan invites lecturers to reflect on how they can best work with international students to benefit everyone, encouraging the exploration of new avenues where teaching is no longer unidirectional (i.e. teacher towards students), and international students are given better opportunities to demonstrate their talents. After all, as Trahar (2007) notes, most international students are taught and research postgraduates, and therefore they are educated adults, possibly professionally experienced, who carry rich and diverse educational traditions. Ryan thus argues that lecturers need to discover international students’ needs and offer strong support, especially in the first 6 months of their time in the UK. This is because the understanding of new academic conventions,



whilst living in a new environment, does not happen naturally and lecturers need to devise appropriate strategies to ensure such support (Borland & Pearce, 2004).

Given the fast-growing flow of international students into UK universities alongside the calls for a better student experience, a field of inquiry with a focus on international students has been established (Quan, Smailes, & Fraser, 2013). This may be connected to the undeniable fact that international students, with their financial investments, have become ‘vital’ for the UK economy as they generate around 12.5 billion per year (BC, 2008). However, as mentioned above, concerns have been raised about whether their needs and expectations are fully met, and with the competition from other English-speaking countries (e.g. US, Australia), the UK’s role as attractive leader of HE is now being challenged (BC, 2015; Welikala, 2015). This becomes even more critical if we consider the emergence of non-English-speaking countries that offer HE education in English at much lower fees than the UK (Shen, 2005; Kettle, 2017).

I now turn to a discussion of the literature concerning Chinese students in Britain because they represent the largest cohort with 106,503 in 2017/18 (Higher Education Statistical Agency, HESA, 2019).

#### **2.4 On the term Chinese**

In line with Wu (2014), I recognise that the expression *Chinese students* remains unclear and complex especially when the literature has sometimes conflated in this group the cultural heritages and experiences of students from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and mainland China. However, it is crucial to recognise that the term Chinese is grounded in specific historical, cultural and geopolitical contexts and sensitivity is required when discussing such a concept (Jin & Dervin, 2017). Therefore, while ‘a single unified concept of a Chinese learner is conceptually tidy, [it is] open to the dangers of stereotyping’ (Gerbic, 2005, p241). In this vein, Ganassin (2020) draws on Curdt-Christinansen and Hancock (2014) to point to the complex diversity of the ‘Chinese’ world wherein several people represent ‘Chineseness’ in different ways. For instance, Wong and Wen (2001) suggest that mainland-Chinese students and Hong Kong Chinese students have different conceptions of learning which stem from different secondary schooling experiences. Cross and Hitchcock (2007) highlight the political dimensions linked to the historical developments of certain regions which point to the differences in cultures of learning across the Chinese world.

I do not subscribe to an essentialist view of culture; however, I do believe that cultural heritage or influences, alongside individual traits, may play a part in shaping one's behaviour and identity. Therefore, I clarify here that this study is concerned with *mainland Chinese* students, and I confine my discussion to this population in order to avoid oversimplifications about the heterogeneous nature of students from different Chinese societies. However, as Ryan (2011) advises, caution should be taken when describing mainland Chinese students because within mainland China, too, there is a complex variety of representations based on diverse factors such as financial, educational background and geographical area.

I now return to the focal context of this study, the UK, and examine the motivations which drive Chinese students to British universities.

## **2.5 Why Chinese students choose Britain**

Research has already uncovered some of the key determinants behind international students' choice to study abroad. For instance, it is often argued that students are attracted to the target institution's reputation, the teaching staff and better job prospects (e.g. Soutar & Turner, 2002; Ryan, 2011). Nonetheless, most research on international students' mobility has generally conflated various populations of international students into one category (Bamber, 2014), thereby failing to foreground nuances between different cultural groups. I now look at research which has targeted mainland-Chinese students in the UK.

After a search on Google scholar using the words 'motivation Chinese students study UK university', I noticed that investigations of Chinese students in UK HE tend to address issues of motivation in a fairly limited way, or from a limited range of perspectives. Most studies have focussed on issues concerning adaptation/adjustment, cultural differences with peripheral discussions, usually in the introduction or literature review, about Chinese students' motivations to study and live in the UK. With this thesis, however, I address this gap and offer insights to enrich the following contributions in the field.

In a study driven by her experience as a Chinese postgraduate student in London, Hong Ding (2009) recounts that studying and living in Britain was a dream shared by many at her Chinese university in the early 1990s. She went through considerable 'effort, drama and luck' (2009, p313) throughout the application process and the business of obtaining a research scholarship, but she

was happy to endure all this for her imagined life in the UK, ‘country of beauty, peace and freedom.’ She was particularly motivated to enhance her English language skills and her professional identity as an English language teacher from China. As part of her research, she conducted several interviews with 4 Chinese Master’s students. The study revealed admiration for the West which was portrayed as having an abundance of cultural resources with westerners having more options in life than Chinese people who are ‘expected to do certain things at certain stages’ and feel pressure from society. This realisation drove one participant to travel to the UK and capitalise on what she had ‘missed out’ whilst living in China.

Another participant, Huan, who had worked for 10 years before securing a scholarship, had gone through a difficult divorce and came to the UK ‘yearning for new outlooks and change in life’ (p316) alongside her desire to ‘not be submissive anymore’. Ding thus draws on Canclini (1995, p1) to portray China as a society where ‘traditions have not yet disappeared, and modernity has not completely arrived’. This way she framed these two participants’ desires as core motivations for ‘individualised lifestyles and free life choices’ in the UK. Two other participants showed an inclination towards the UK connected to their understanding that they would enhance their skills and career prospects. Ding concludes that her participants’ ‘small stories’ were articulate and powerful enough to challenge the ‘grand narratives’ of postmodern discourse about Chinese students in the west. Nonetheless, I note that despite her engagement with these participants and her efforts to reproduce their voices, we lack an understanding of her methodological approach to interviewing.

Bamber (2014), in a mixed-methods study, investigated Chinese female students in the UK and revealed several motivations where the notions of intrinsic and extrinsic values intertwined. First, these students viewed UK postgraduate education as more prestigious than the Chinese counterpart. Crucially, despite progress in relation to gender equality in China, some of these female participants foregrounded the notion of *shengnu*, a term which translates as ‘left on the shelf’ and refers to women who spend too much time in HE or are unmarried. This is to signal the need to complete postgraduate education in the least time possible and the UK represented a better option than China or the US. Another critical finding relates to the costs involved in the year abroad. The US, which is usually the first-choice destination, was discarded because of parental concerns about safety and because of the high tuition fees and living costs which were

comparatively lower in the UK. Finally, an important reason that drove these students' decision to study in the UK was the Schengen visa which would allow them to travel around the UK and Europe. For these participants, striking a balance between studies and travelling was essential as they saw the year abroad as the last opportunity to travel freely outside China.

In another study, Wu (2014) administered a questionnaire to 169 Chinese students who had previously studied in Britain between 2009 and 2010. 30 of these participants were interviewed and additional data obtained through two focus group discussions. Findings reveal a strong desire for 'cultural enrichment' driven by the motivation 'to broaden horizons and experience different cultures and lifestyles' (p431). Career betterment was another core finding driven by the understanding that within the competitive Chinese labour markets, graduates with international qualifications are in a stronger position over domestically educated peers. The study also reported a motivational orientation towards personal growth based on the comparison between the older generation of Chinese people who helped develop China and contemporary students pursuing personal goals 'outside' China'.

Another important finding concerned the notion of prestige of British universities as opposed to Chinese universities which were seen as 'old-fashioned and stifled their passion for learning' (p433). An additional nuance to this finding was their understanding that British degrees would guarantee better job prospects than degrees from other countries. Furthermore, these students seemed to demonstrate a preference for comfortable locations and good weather as well as good institutional reputation. Some students, for instance, avoided Scotland for fear of cold weather.

Wu concluded that Chinese student mobility is connected to the concept of *human capital accumulation* (Useem & Karabel, 1986). This concept stems from Weber's recognition of educational credentials in advanced industrial societies and Bourdieu's conceptualisation that individuals are owners of 'capital' (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). As such, human capital theory was generated through three interrelated concepts, *scholastic capital* which refers to achievements from coursework, *social capital* that relates to one's social networks, and *cultural capital* which is framed as the symbolic prestige one possesses.

Wu (2014) notes that while this framework explains context-mediated or external forces which influence one's motivation, it fails to account for individual characteristics such as academic

ability and personal traits. In my view, another limitation of this study is that despite the large sample size, this remained a cross-sectional analysis at a specific point in time of these students' experience. Thus, it lacked a longitudinal understanding of motivation and failed to account for the dynamic nature of the construct (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). My study is designed to address this gap and chart the complex and fluctuating nature of Chinese students' motivation throughout their UK university journey.

## **2.5 Summary**

I began by examining the notion of internationalisation of HE and indicated that Chinese students represent the largest cohort in the UK. Significantly, I highlighted the complexity of the term *Chinese* and clarified that the focus of this thesis is on *mainland*-Chinese students. Furthermore, I discussed the motivations behind these students' choice to study in the UK and found that the literature has tended to treat motivation peripherally or through cross-section research designs, thereby failing to account for the dynamic nature of the construct. With this study I address the lack of research on Chinese students' motivation through a longitudinal approach and specifically focus on mainland-Chinese students in the UK rather than subgroups of Asian students or, even more broadly, international students.

In the next chapter I discuss the provision of EAP in the UK with a focus on pre-sessional courses, and the experiences of Chinese students on these courses as well as on Master's degrees.

## Chapter 3: The journey through the UK academic system

### 3.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter with an examination of the broad context of EAP in the UK with emphasis on key studies concerning Chinese students. This focus is determined by the increasing numbers of Chinese students required to complete pre-sessionals as a condition of their university offer. I first provide an overview of the history of EAP in Britain and then illustrate the core debates about pre-sessionals. In the second part of the chapter, I survey the diverse literature on international students pursuing postgraduate studies to discuss the key arguments concerning Chinese students on a UK Master's programme. I explore pedagogical issues such as the use and role of English in postgraduate departments and the different cultures of learning in the internationalised UK university. I conclude with a review of the notion of adjustment to postgraduate life in Britain.

### 3.2 English for Academic Purposes in the UK

EAP is a specialist area 'grown out of (...) a slightly older field of language teaching – that of *English for Specific Purposes* (Bruce, 2011, p4). EAP centres upon enhancing both language skills and study skills (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), and Jordan (1997) proposes a distinction between English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). Nonetheless, Hyland (2002) argues that there needs to be a specific emphasis on the disciplinary discursive community and, therefore, challenges the effectiveness of general EAP courses. Following from this, Hyland & Hamp-Lyons (2002, p2) maintain that EAP should focus on 'the specific communicative needs and practices of particular groups in academic contexts. (...) grounding instruction in an understanding of the cognitive, social and linguistics demands of specific academic disciplines'. Bruce (2011, 2015) supports this call for discipline specificity and defines EAP as 'the study of English for the purpose of participating in higher education' (2015, p6).

Since the 1960s, British universities have provided international students in need of language and academic skills support with EAP programmes which take the form of *pre-sessional courses* – short courses lasting between 6 and 12 weeks or *foundation courses* – longer programmes that may last up to a year (Jordan, 2002). EAP practices in the UK have undergone nation-wide scrutiny and brought together experts since 1972 when four universities founded the group Special English

Language Materials for Overseas University Students (SELMOUS). Their aim was to discuss the main challenges in EAP practices. This organization then changed its name to the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes in 1989 and then to BALEAP in 2010. In order to aim for a global understanding of good practice and quality within EAP, the organization published an influential framework for EAP teachers, the *Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes* (BALEAP, 2008), and in 2014, they began the BALEAP TEAP (teaching English for academic Purposes) scheme (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Both the framework and the TEAP scheme are strategies to promote a code of good practice amongst the diverse EAP teaching and learning communities both in the UK and overseas. As a result, nowadays many pre-sessional programmes are accredited by BALEAP, which conducts regular checks for the institutions to maintain their accreditation.

### **3.3 Pre-sessionals**

Traditionally, pre-sessionals have been delivered by universities but recently these are also offered by private providers (de Chazal, 2014; Ding & Bruce, 2017). Bruce (2015) highlights that the level of subject specificity depends on whether all the students in a pre-sessional group will aim to enter the same degree course in the same discipline. In many cases class groups are mixed in that students may aim for a range of degrees and, therefore, it becomes rather complex to orientate the course towards one subject area. Importantly, de Chazal raises the point that, on top of language and academic skills, pre-sessionals entail an element of cultural development including the institutional culture as well as the local city and country's cultures. This normally leads to the development of social programmes alongside the academic EAP course which are aimed to support students in their transition to the new society. The design and implementation of pre-sessionals has not been without difficulties, and the quality and experiences of EAP courses differ across the country. I now review the core debates about pre-sessional practices and policies with a continued focus on Chinese students.

### **3.4 Chinese students on UK pre-sessionals**

The literature on pre-sessionals is vast and although Chinese students often feature in discussions about EAP courses in the UK, researchers have tended to conduct investigations with diverse samples of international students as opposed to targeting specific groups. For example, Wu and Hammond (2011) refer to their participants as 'East Asian students' with these ranging from China,

Taiwan, Thailand, Japan and South Korea. Similarly, Scandrett (2011) refers to international students ‘who were predominantly from Asia’. Others (e.g. Lamie & Issitt, 2005; Copland & Garton, 2010; Jarvis & Stakounis, 2010) refer to ‘international students’ as groups of participants hailing from a variety of countries. Therefore, given the focus of my study on mainland Chinese students, I review the key debates about UK pre-sessionals by examining those investigations which specifically address Chinese students as well as the studies targeting ‘international’ or ‘Asian’ students but with the proviso of extrapolating from these relevant insights to inform this study.

### **3.5 Settling in the UK**

Adjusting to the UK environment involves both academic and socio-cultural efforts. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006), in a mixed-methods study, examine Chinese students’ psychological and sociocultural adjustments. By using Zung’s (1965) Self-rating Depression scale and Ward and Kennedy’s (1999) Sociocultural adaptation scale, the study revealed that most students experienced psychological or sociocultural adjustment issues such as the difficulty of handling daily life demands and the struggle to communicate with the locals. These two variables correlated significantly with these Chinese students’ stress.

In another mixed-method study, Gu and Maley (2008) investigated the notion of psychological stress as a result of ‘learning shock’, ‘existential/life struggles’, and issues of ‘personality and maturity’. *Learning shock* was conceptualised through unpleasant feelings and experiences learners face when exposed to a new environment (e.g. students’ unfamiliarity with teaching strategies and assessment criteria). *Existential struggle* was understood as the experience of a lifestyle which contrasts dramatically with one’s home counterpart (e.g. leading a lonely life, lack of supportive friendship). However, one of the most significant findings of this study was that the student’s personality can make a clear difference. For example, the authors suggest that disciplined and focussed students dealt better with adjustment difficulties than students who were more relaxed, and perhaps less aware of the contrast between student-centredness versus teacher-centredness.

Similarly, Zhu (2017) explains Chinese students’ difficulties of adjustment through the notion of socialisation in the West and proposes the *student’s personal landscape* as a framework. This concept, too, foregrounds the notion of maturity highlighting the students’ dispositions and success



in interpersonal communication, social activities, and the need to manage financial stress (e.g. living costs and tuition fees).

Overall, as reported by Copland and Garton (2010), international students face many adjustment issues at their pre-sessional stage in the UK, and the common denominator of these problems lies in their language competence, and perhaps more importantly, in their perception of such competence. They echo Wan et al. (1992, p617), who examined factors affecting academic stress and found that ‘English-language skills appeared to override all other concerns, which suggests that international students’ perceived language skills have the most significant influence on their appraisal of the stressfulness of classroom situations’.

However, Copland and Garton extend these concerns beyond the classroom highlighting that their students’ stress with English stemmed from challenging interactions outside the immediate university setting. Crucially, they argue that these concerns about English skills, which weaken students’ sense of agency, have more to do with intercultural understanding than language abilities. They thus push for the development of ‘socio-cultural competence’ in order to give international students the opportunity to say ‘now I feel like I live in the UK’.

### **3.7 Teaching and Learning on pre-sessionals**

Rao and Chan (2010) suggest a dichotomy between *surface learning* which entails memorisation of knowledge to pass exams and *deep learning* as an approach which advocates meaningful and critical engagement with knowledge. An assumption has often been made that Chinese students opt for surface learning (e.g. Watkin & Biggs, 1996), but this assumption has been contested. Cortazzi and Jin (2001), for example, argue that in China, too, it is possible to encounter teaching approaches which foster learner-centredness, thereby expecting the students to take an active role in knowledge and meaning-making. This is echoed by Ryan (2011), Paine and Fang (2007) who report that mainland China has successfully implemented many projects which promote collaborative and interactive learning methodologies thus suggesting that Chinese students, too, may be familiar with these teaching styles.

Nonetheless, the notion of Chinese students as passive learners who see teachers as providers of knowledge through a ‘transmission’ approach (Xie, 2010) is not uncommon on UK pre-sessionals. Bradshaw (2004) echoed these concerns with his students showing awareness of a shift in their

learning approach from ‘rote learning’ to understanding and expressing opinions. These students described the role of the Chinese teacher as someone whose way of thinking is imposed upon the students without questioning it. On the pre-sessional, however, these students experienced considerable change in the way their thinking and learning operated. Although this was challenging, the positive relationship they developed with their teachers and their encouragement helped them significantly in taking an active learning role.

This takes us to an important debate about EAP provision concerning the question whether EAP should be *accommodationist*, leading students to certain expected targets, or *critical*, instructing students to develop an authorial voice within their new discourse community (Bruce, 2015). This question originates from a discussion between Santos (1992) and Benesch (1993) about the purposes of EAP. Santos posits that L1 writers can draw on and address complex ideologies with their writing as opposed to L2 writers who are too preoccupied with linguistic technical skills to produce ‘ideological’ writing. Benesch challenges this view arguing that all teaching and learning is ideological and that EAP is no different. Indeed, she argues that EAP classes should ‘offer flexibility’ in terms of teacher and learner agency and proposes the concept of ‘rights analysis’ as opposed to ‘needs analysis’ whereby students are invited to understand power relations and take an active role in shaping what happens in the classroom.

In my view, Benesch’s (2002) argument is commendable in offering a model that promotes egalitarian agency amongst students and teachers. However, given the aforementioned issues about students’ background and ‘cultures of learning’ (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), the concept of critical EAP argued by Benesch seems rather complex to implement. This is not to say that it is unrealistic, but it would require the EAP teachers to help students achieve an understanding of their *rights* at a time when these students are already struggling to function fully in the new academic and social milieus (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2006).

### **3.6 IELTS**

Another key challenge on pre-sessionals is the need to reconcile the demands of the university postgraduate programmes with the students’ skills derived from their training for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). This test has attracted increasing attention in the literature (e.g. Burger & Krueger, 2003; Green, 2005), and has become a very controversial topic. Some studies have indicated weak statistical relationships between IELTS scores and actual

students' academic performance (e.g. Dooney, 1999; Hill et al., 2000). Coleman, Starfield and Hagan (2003), for example, show discrepancies between students' and staff's views of the IELTS, where the former see it more positively as an indicator of future success, and staff regard it as less reliable leading to the argument that admissions standards should be higher.

Moore and Morton (2005) focus on task 2 of the IELTS test which consists of writing a 250-word text to be structured as an opinion, disadvantage/advantage or problem-solution essay. The authors compiled a corpus of 20 task2 IELTS rubrics and a corpus of 155 university assignments from 79 academics. While these assignments were collected from both undergraduate and postgraduate students, their findings remain valid as the IELTS tasks remain the same irrespective of the candidate's target university course. Moore and Morton yield two main findings, one concerns the major contrast between university writing tasks, which depend on the subject discipline, and the IELTS task 2 which requires candidates to write generic texts similar to the essay genre. However, even within the essay category there exists a subject-specific diversity in academia. The other finding, and perhaps the most critical, concerns the differences between the requirements to pass an IELTS test and the requirements to successfully write a university assignment. The former encourages writing as 'opinion-giving', 'evidence as anecdote', 'writing as separate from reading', whereas university writing is rarely spontaneous, and while opinions/reflections are welcome by certain disciplines these must be supported by reliable evidence.

Hyatt (2011) conducted a mixed-methods study targeting HE stakeholders' perceptions of IELTS and its predictability of student academic success. The sample consisted of 100 staff from 36 university departments. Most respondents revealed that they considered the IELTS as a good predictor of academic performance whereas a minority (12%) believed that even when students obtain an IELTS overall score 6, students will still struggle, especially with their written assignment. Hyatt thus supports Bayliss and Ingram's (2006) argument that the IELTS may be able to predict students' language behaviour in the first six months of the academic programme but without any guarantee of subsequent academic performance.

### **3.8 Assessment on pre-sessionals**

Students who generally begin a pre-sessional in the UK will have met all the requirements for the target university department with the caveat that their IELTS score may not be good enough. This means that these students' academic and linguistic skills are assessed during and at the end of pre-

sessionals to ascertain whether they can progress to their degree programme. However, as Banerjee and Wall (2005) indicate, there is no universal approach across UK institutions to assess students on pre-sessionals and determine their suitability for further academic studies. Some institutions ask students to take the IELTS again at the end of the course, which is why some pre-sessionals simultaneously prepare students for the IELTS test and their future degree programmes. However, the quality of this approach is questionable given the discrepancies between IELTS and academic demands (Moore & Morton, 2005).

Other institutions design their in-house summative test which may, to a certain degree, resemble an IELTS. Some institutions rely on both coursework assessment throughout the programme and summative assessment. At the end of pre-sessionals, portfolios or assessment profiles are compiled for each student and sent to the admissions office of the target department. These documents outline the students' achievements either on a pass-fail scale or through a 'can-do' statements approach.

Banerjee and Wall (2005) examine Lancaster University where all these assessment strategies have been tried and combined throughout the history of their pre-sessionals. The key issues they report concern the student profile report. This document is written for three different audiences: the administrative admissions office, the academic admissions tutor and the students themselves. However, it is difficult to write in such a way to satisfy these three different readerships. Whereas a pass-fail report may work well for admission tutors, the wording may have disturbing effects on the students. As a result, sometimes pre-sessional coordinators edit these reports to make them more 'diplomatic', but this then becomes an issue for admissions staff who struggle to interpret the underlying message, which defeats the purpose of the document. Having realised these issues are common in other UK institutions, Banerjee and Wall propose a 'checklist' which incorporates achievement statements and criteria for both coursework and final assessment thereby creating a holistic picture of the students' profiles. However, it is critical that this form be shared with both students and tutors early on the programme to ensure understanding and to track progress.

### **3.9 Pre-sessionals as a deficient system**

One core debate concerns the very ontology of pre-sessionals and their pedagogic and assessment practices which Turner (2018) describes as 'the remedial economy of English. This concept recognises the geopolitical dominance of English used by an 'imagined' monocultural academic

community who ignores the international and multilingual realities of HE. This remedial mechanism expects international students to achieve a certain ‘standard’ level of proficiency, but the issue is that such linguistic proficiency (or deficiency) is often applied to the students’ intellectual abilities, as well. This, in turn, generates inhibiting effects on learning. Hunma and Sibomana (2014) reveal that students are less likely to take risks with their learning or engage with high-order intellectual tasks if they feel under the pressure to conform with a certain ‘dominant’ culture. This is what Turner calls ‘linguistic conflation ideology’ (2018, p139) whereby students’ intellectual ability is submitted to the same judgment as their English language proficiency.

To address this issue, Hunma and Sibomana created what Canagarajah (2004) calls ‘a safe house’ where students of a minority group can express themselves academically without such pressure. While the strategy is commendable, this begs the question is it necessary to create a divide so that everyone may be able to express themselves in contemporary multicultural universities? Why should international students feel the pressure of English as an inhibiting force on their other cognitive skills? And, as Ryan (2011) puts it, international students in the UK are not a minority anymore, therefore, it would be more enriching to acknowledge everybody’s resources and talents, welcoming them to contribute to a true international HE experience where interculturality is celebrated.

### **3.10 Interim summary**

So far, I have illustrated the historical developments of EAP in the UK which have led to the current wide provision of pre-sessionals across the country. I have discussed the core issues of student adjustment on this early stage of their UK journey and continued with academic debates such as the discrepancy between students’ IELTS skills and the actual academic skills required at university, and issues of discourses which position EAP as a *remedial* construct. Significantly, I have identified a gap in the literature which has generally investigated the above issues in relation to diverse groups of international students as opposed to Chinese students, the focus of this study.

In the next section, I review the core debates concerning Chinese students’ experiences in postgraduate departments after the pre-sessional.

### **3.11 Chinese students on Master's programmes**

The topics illustrated in this section highlight that transition from a pre-sessional to the new academic life at university entails difficulties which are different from those experienced and addressed on pre-sessionals. These difficulties include the new role and impact of the English language and new learning dynamics determined by teaching approaches that may not resemble those used by EAP teachers. Ultimately, all these new aspects of UK university life point to the notion of adjustment which Chinese students experience from the beginning of their Master's programme.

#### **3.11.1 English in the new academic life**

Wu and Hammond's (2011) students reported a struggle with everyday use of English as they found this more varied than within the pre-sessional context. English users spoke more quickly, using colloquialisms and less-standard forms, an issue that was reflected in their lectures, too. These linguistic weaknesses, as suggested by Copland and Garton (2011), raise several challenges for international students both in social and academic interactions. Furthermore, according to Mulligan and Kirkpatrick's (2000) study, 1 in 10 international students seemed confident to say they understood the content of their lectures very well, and almost one-quarter reported misunderstanding most of the lectures. They conclude with recommendations that pre-sessional teachers should train students through "real" lecture experiences. These days, however, this kind of lecture-training is becoming more common in many UK universities (e.g. Hanks, 2015).

Therefore, the difficulties these students face in the new academic setting raise important questions for the universities as institutions that promise high quality education with an international focus. Kettle (2017) examines a university's policy stating that they are committed to an international curriculum which fosters students' capabilities such as creativity, independence and critical judgement. However, she challenges these statements because they seem to portray English as the standard in academic practice with certain rules and structures, thereby ignoring the linguistic diversity brought by international students. However, echoing Turner (2018), the question remains what is international about these university policies when international students face serious challenges that can go as far as affecting their intellectual and social spheres and no real effort is made to welcome them in a truly 'international' HE environment? In my view, it is understandable that *English* be the dominant language practice at *English*-speaking universities; however, Kettle's

and Turner's arguments remain valid calls for caution for those academics who may diminish international students' skills, talents and background because of 'less standard' usage of English.

### **3.11.2 Cultures of learning**

Jin and Cortazzi (1993, 2002, 2013) use the term 'cultures of learning' to refer to the socio-cultural 'taken-for-granted frameworks of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs' about teaching and learning. Therefore, culture of learning frames what teachers and students may expect in a classroom and how interactions may unfold. Significantly, Jin and Cortazzi (2002) use the plural *cultures* of learning to highlight that Chinese people represent vast social and individual diversity within mainland China and among Chinese societies elsewhere.

While I do not deny that these students share a common heritage, Confucianism (Watkins & Biggs, 1996), it is equally important to understand that individual and geopolitical dimensions may alter the notion of universality in Confucian culture. To illustrate the key feature of Chinese cultures of learning, Jin and Cortazzi use the English class in China as a model and argue that it is indeed common to see a teacher-centred and book-based interaction with several rounds of choral recitation and performance of formulaic language. However, it is also stated in Confucian writings that to learn, one must think and for this to happen students must understand and 'make meanings their own'. This points to an element of reflection and criticality which, for example UK lecturers often see as something Chinese learners lack.

Wu and Hammond (2011) reported pedagogic concerns because despite completing a pre-sessional, their students experienced problems with the new teaching methods on the Master's and felt a strong contrast with their traditional teaching methods back home. They struggled with interactive activities and seemed challenged by new subject knowledge which they had not acquired during the pre-sessional. This lack of specific discipline knowledge and difficulties with the Master's teaching methods resulted in poor performance in the first couple of assignments which was followed by disappointment. These concerns are common amongst Chinese and other international students in the UK, and therefore one may ask why they do not seek advice or additional help if they struggle so much?

In this regard, Busher et al. (2016) argue that East Asian students' passivity is linked to cultural attitudes of respecting and not disturbing teachers with questions or criticality. This connects with

Jin and Cortazzi's Chinese cultures of learning, but it is unfair to assume that these students are uncritical of their experiences (Barron et al., 2010). After all, Confucianism expects students to acquire new knowledge and seek understanding in a solitary learning mode whereby students would not question such knowledge until they have fully acquired it and feel confident to engage with questions (Bary, 1983 in Li, 2010).

Furthermore, Chinese students may see teachers as wise moral guides (Gao & Watkins, 2001) who cannot be critiqued in light of their superiority. In a similar cultural vein, Gonçalves (2011) reports that some students may not be familiar with strategies such as groupwork or independent learning and therefore may require support to understand *how* to enact successful behaviour in such circumstances. This resonates with Jin and Cortazzi (2017) who invite Chinese students, British lecturers and other UK-based peers to make the mutual effort of understanding each other's cultures of learning. In other words, all staff and all students (both home and international) 'need to be aware of, appreciate and extend their repertoires of practices with a variety of cultural approaches and strategies to advance their teaching and learning' (2017, p238). More crucially, Jin and Cortazzi emphasise that the notion of 'cultures of learning' entails learning about learning thereby highlighting the need for all parties in HE to learn *about, from* and *with* each other's cultures of learning.

Mulligan and Kirkpatrick (2000) offer numerous strategies that somewhat implement Jin and Cortazzi's call for understanding of Chinese students' learning background. For instance, to support quiet students who may not ask for clarification when they are confused, lecturers could begin each lecture with an outline, provide a skeleton notes of lecture content, and use clear signposting language to move between ideas. However, this is not to say that all international students' experiences report such issues in relation to their academic, intellectual or even social wellbeing. Indeed, there are success stories in the literature such as Busher et al.'s (2016) students who experienced learning challenges but, crucially, these were counterbalanced by high levels of enthusiasm generated by teachers' encouragement. The students were particularly happy to receive email or face-to-face tutor support if they had any concerns about their studies. These success stories thus lend support to Jin and Cortazzi's (2017) call for universities to develop intercultural competence amongst staff and student, thereby leading to mutual understanding through reciprocal learning and mindful communication. Therefore, returning to the notion of internationalisation of



universities, it is worth noting that actions for truly internationalised curricula and experiences require considerations of learners' academic as well as social needs. Such considerations must extend beyond issues of adjustment and generate an understanding and development of international students' 'dimensions of diversity of world knowledge, social experience, cultural and intellectual resources' (2016, p248).

Having illustrated that on Master's programmes students experience issues which differ from those addressed on pre-sessionals, I now conceptualise these difficulties through the notion of 'adjustment'.

### **3.11.3 Adjustment**

The most popular and well-known stage theory of cultural adjustment is the U-curve hypothesis formulated by Lysgaard (1955, p50), who described the concept as follows:

Adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a 'crisis' in which one feels less well-adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community.

Oberg (1960) used the terms 'honeymoon', 'crisis', 'recovery' and 'adjustment' to illustrate the four stages of this hypothesis. However, research has shown that this hypothesis is overgeneralised. For example, in Wu and Hammond (2011), students showed no honeymoon effects at the beginning of their sojourn. In fact, although they showed signs of unfamiliarity and dissonance with the new academic system, but these diminished in time. Also, the researchers concluded that the students did not experience any culture shock or crisis, rather 'bumps' which were easily managed thanks to the students' determination to do well.

In Busher et al (2016) and Pritchard and Skinner (2002), students experienced considerable social tensions in the early days of their experience (e.g. isolation and loneliness). However, as their sense of unfamiliarity with social and academic life moderated, students began developing appreciation for both city and university cultures. Again, this shows no signs of honeymoon at the start of the postgraduate experience, and there are no instances of crises or recovery either. Rather these studies depict a dynamic and fluctuating understanding of the local cultures of learning in the new academic environment.

Therefore, adjustment is a complex construct which cannot be defined in fixed terms. As Durkin (2008) posits, some Asian Master's students are more aware than others about the differences between their home country and the UK. For some of them, these differences turn into an 'education shock' (Hoff, 1979 in Thorstenson, 2001), which is not necessarily a negative experience as it merely points to the students noticing dissonance between societies. As such, this does not automatically turn into a 'crisis' which will require a 'recovery'. Also, echoing Jin and Cortazzi (1996), Durkin argues that the speed of adjustment to the new cultures of learning, and I add, living, will vary from student to student and depend on their motivation, educational background and the support they receive.

Thus, rather than defining adjustment through a fixed structure that cannot be applied universally to all international students, I draw on intercultural theory and, in particular, the 'small culture' approach suggested by Holliday (1999) and his grammar of culture (2013, 2016). Holliday (1999) distinguishes between a 'large' culture, which refers to ethnic, national cultures, and a 'small' culture which addresses the ways in which individuals interact and negotiate affiliation with particular social groups (e.g. professional groups). Whereas 'large culture' encompasses notions of nation, centre and periphery, a 'small culture' focuses on activities *within* the group. As groups are constructed through human interaction, they can develop, change, break, and their nature be 'formed on the go' (Amadasi & Holliday, 2018).

In this thesis, I heed Holliday's (1999) call for a 'small culture approach' with a 'deCentring' perspective (Holliday & Amadasi, 2019) thereby stressing the need to observe and interpret interactions and encounters between people with a focus on their individual experiences rather than on the 'essence' of culture as a 'large culture' model. deCentring requires a disposition to step back from making large culture-based assumptions and observe the individuals and their unique approaches to culture, and how they construct their identities within 'small culture' settings. I therefore do not aim to define adjustment for Chinese students, but rather to understand how the students in this study enact their behaviours and navigate the possible cultural 'threads' and 'blocks' at social and educational levels and how these impact on their motivation.

#### **3.11.4 Summary**

I began by illustrating the key developments of EAP in the UK which have led to the provision of pre-sessionals. I discussed the core issues of student adjustment on these early days of their UK academic journey and examined academic debates such as the validity of the IELTS as a predictor of performance at university. In the second section, I looked at Chinese students' transition to postgraduate departments and highlighted issues related to the use of English pointing to a marked contrast between the language issues on pre-sessionals and those encountered in their Master's studies. I unpacked the concept of 'cultures of learning' and applied this to the new postgraduate academic realities. Finally, I discussed the notion of adjustment by referring to seminal intercultural theories and espoused the 'grammar of culture' approach alongside the need to deCentre our assumptions and beliefs when aiming to understand others' cultural positioning. Importantly, in both the review of EAP and postgraduate studies, I identified a gap in the literature which has generally investigated the above issues in relation to diverse groups of international students as opposed to Chinese students, the focus of this study.

In the next chapter, I review the construct of motivation examining the key theoretical frameworks which informed this study.

## **Chapter 4: From L2 Motivation Theories to Classroom-meaningful Constructs**

### **4.1 Introduction**

I begin this chapter by highlighting the historical struggle to define motivation within the field of applied linguistics. I then examine the theoretical concepts and frameworks which have become influential over the years and which have evolved alongside the need to make motivation research relevant to the classroom. Importantly, I note that investigations have generally approached the construct from broad perspectives and through external researchers who have gained cross-sectional views of motivation. This, in turn, highlights the need for more fine-grained and longitudinal approaches able to capture the complex and dynamic nature of this phenomenon. Finally, given that traditional lines of inquiry have focussed on motivation to learn a language for *general* purposes, I develop the argument to understand motivation to learn a language for *academic* purposes.

### **4.2 From traditions to innovations**

L2 learning motivation is one of the most prolific research areas in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Ortega, 2011), and, in recent years, Boo, Dörnyei and Ryan (2015, p145) have noted ‘an extraordinary surge’ of motivation research. Nonetheless, it has become apparent that no conceptualisation of motivation, to date, has been able to theorise the fullness of this construct (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p4). Ellis and Shintani (2013), for instance, offer a definition which incorporates many of the definitional elements attributed to motivation: ‘motivation is a complex construct that involves the reasons or goals learners have for learning an LL, the effort they put into learning and the attributes they form as a result of their attempts to learn (2013, p287).’ While researchers have inevitably been unable to ‘capture the whole picture’ (Ibid, 2011, p4), I adopt Dörnyei and Ushioda’s idea, stating that motivation is concerned with ‘the direction and magnitude of human behaviour (...) in other words, motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, how hard they are going to pursue it’ (2011, p4).

L2 motivation research has traditionally adopted quantitative methods and investigated groups of learners using questionnaires with the results being processed through descriptive statistical procedures and elaborated further through inferential analyses (Ibid, 2011, p212). This methodological tradition has been praised for ‘rigour and systematicity’ in data-gathering and analysis along with comparability, replicability of data, and generalisability to wider populations (Ibid, 2011, p400). Nonetheless, quantitative instruments are unable to capture the complex and fluctuating nature of the construct, as they reduce the intricate differences between learners’ motivations to quantifiable variables (Ushioda, 1994). Significantly, throughout the 1990s, the field began to notice the need for *situated* perspectives to research motivation with no longer a focus on the motives and attitudes of *collective groups* of language learners, but rather a focus on the motivations of *individual* learners in *specific* classroom settings.

Furthermore, Ushioda (1994, p79) argues that ‘behavioural outcomes of effort’, as examined by questionnaire studies, are not necessarily a transparent reflection of learners’ motivation. After all, if one were to observe an individual learner even within a timeframe as short as a single lesson, one could not but notice “motivational flux rather than stability” (Ushioda, 1996, p241). This points to the complexities of SLA whereby investigating motivation requires the understanding of a large number of other factors affecting the teaching and learning experiences, factors which are generally unpredictable and difficult to identify through a cross-sectional investigation (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). Since 1998, when Ushioda published her pioneering, qualitative study of students’ *motivational thinking*, qualitative studies have been on the rise.

Qualitative approaches, especially interviewing, have become ‘more appropriate to uncover the complex interaction of social, cultural, and psychological factors within the individual learner’ (Ibid, 2011). As a result, although quantitative methods continue to be prominent, a growing number of studies adopting mixed-methods or qualitative approaches have led to a ‘revitalisation of the research environment’ (Boo et al., 2015, p153). Dörnyei (2020) suggests that a clear sign of the strength in adopting a qualitative paradigm was that mainstream motivational psychology has also started to acknowledge the benefits of qualitative inquiries. Pintrich and Schunk (2002, pp11–12), for instance, maintain that “Interpretive research yields rich sources of data that are much

more intensive and thorough than those typically obtained in correlational or experimental research.”

This last decade has seen the emergence of innovative approaches which have creatively espoused the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms with an eye to doing justice to the complexities of researching motivation. The volume *Motivational Dynamics* (Dörnyei, MacIntyre and Henry, 2015) is a collection which looks at innovative methodologies such as *idiodynamic methods* (MacIntyre & Serroul, 2015) able to document moment by moment motivational change or the *social-network analysis* (Mercer, 2015) which promotes investigations of relationships between students acting within a group/‘network’. A more recent contribution is the forthcoming volume *Complexity Perspectives on Researching Learner and Teacher Psychology* (Sampson & Pinner, 2020) which offers new insights to researching L2 motivation from a complexity perspective.

I now focus on the core theoretical frameworks which informed this study.

#### **4.2 Classroom-relevant motivation research**

In 1994, Crookes and Schmidt challenged the L2 research motivation community with a call for more educationally relevant research indicating the need to understand motivation in relation to the language learner and the learning settings. This marked the shift from the social-psychological period (Lambert & Gardner, 1959) to the cognitive-situated period. Crookes and Schmidt highlighted various levels of motivation i.e. micro, classroom, syllabus/curriculum and extracurricular thus suggesting avenues for research with strong pedagogical implications. This led to the proliferation of publications on motivational strategies (Chambers, 1999; Williams and Burden, 1997) which culminated in Dörnyei’s (2001) seminal volume focussing on four main categories of strategies: (a) *creating the basic motivational conditions*, (b) *generating initial motivation*, (c) *maintaining and protecting motivation*, and (d) *fostering positive self-evaluation*. Although Dörnyei noted the value of theories about motivational strategies, with this ‘what-to-do’ book, he offered a practical guide which would support teachers as opposed to overwhelming them with a myriad of new teaching techniques. After all, he recognised teachers’ heavy workloads and

therefore proposed the notion of ‘good enough teacher/motivator’, a concept derived from Winnicott's (1965) analogy of ‘good enough parent’.

With this work, Dörnyei proposed new opportunities to generate ‘motivation-sensitive teaching’ but without the burden of being a ‘super teacher/motivator’ (p135), rather, someone who cares enough for small changes which down the line may make a great difference to the classroom climate. As such, the numerous strategies offered in this volume are framed as tentative opportunities for teachers to try out through a ‘stepwise approach’(p136) whereby quality is more important than quantity and teachers need to choose those strategies which suit their personalities, teaching approach, learners and context. This last point is crucial because these strategies and their implementation are strictly dependent on the classroom environment where they may be employed as well as the core actors within such classroom spaces. For instance, Kubanyiova (2012) shows that the same motivational strategies may have different effects on different groups of students. Therefore, it is imperative to understand motivational teaching practices in relation to students and their interpersonal interactions. This has led to the concept of group dynamics.

### **4.3 Group dynamics**

The notion of group dynamics has been devised to conceptualise motivation at *group level*, therefore moving away from a concern for the individual learner. Murphey et al. (2012) highlight the importance of *group(s)* in relation to *social learning*, a principle of Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory” (221). In particular, they refer to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD, Vygotsky, 1962) whereby a learner is able to perform a task successfully with the support of a more knowledgeable peer and role modelling (Bandura, 1997). The phenomenon of group-level synergy can be conceptualised through *emotional contagion*, which refers to the catching of the cognitions and emotions of other group members (Barsade, 2002). The effects of emotional contagion have the capacity to enrich a whole group with positive mood, thereby impacting positively, or at times negatively, on the *collective motivational level* of the group (Sampson, 2016). Barsade and Gibson (2012) thus suggest that group affect is an essential element of a group’s development, and a group positive mood can lead to *group-level efficacy* (Gibson, 2003).

Furthermore, Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) indicate that an awareness of the principles of group dynamics can make classroom events more teacher-friendly, helping teachers develop efficient strategies for classroom management, and ultimately lead to a motivational learning environment. On the assumption that boredom in the classroom may impair long-term motivation to learn, Dörnyei and Muir (2019) argue for teachers to foster *group cohesiveness* and *group norms*, where the former refers to finding ways to bolster the relationships between group members and the latter concerns the rules (official or implicit) which govern the classroom environment. For instance, given that the ‘language classroom is an inherently face-threatening environment because learners are required to take continuous risks’ (2019, p724), the norm of tolerance is one which teachers need to foster to guarantee a motivating learning environment.

However, there has been relatively little empirical evidence to support these notions of group dynamics. As an exception, Sasaki, Kozaki and Ross (2017), with a mixed-methods study, have noted that L2 reading abilities amongst their sample of students evolved at different rates over the course of a year and explained these differences through learners’ perceptions of their classmates’ career aspirations, among other factors. The researchers thus conclude that a common ethos or set of norms shared between class members will provide a motivational force to support learners in the understanding and respect for each other’s goals and skills. Thus, while group dynamics is relatively unexplored, the influence which a group may have on the individual learner remains a strong theoretical concept (Dörnyei, 2020). In the same category of motivational theories which have a strong impact on the individual learner as an active agent is the concept of *self*.

#### **4.4 The *Self* in L2 motivation literature**

A further research avenue promoting a focus on the learner was opened up by Dörnyei’s (2005) *L2 motivation self system* which rested on Markus and Nurius’s (1986) *possible selves theory* and Higgins’s (1987) *self-discrepancy theory*. This framework suggested that people’s motivation can be understood through the interaction of their *ideal self*, who they wished to be, *actual self*, who they are at present, and *ought-to-self*, who they should be in light of social responsibilities, duties and obligations. Therefore, unlike the *ideal self* which is concerned with the individual’s vision/image of oneself through hopes and aspirations, the *ought-to-self* represents other people’s visions/images reflected on the individual. Crucially, according to Magid (2012), this ‘reflected’



self-image is particularly relevant to Asian students whose motivations are often driven by the duty to honour the family or fulfil parental obligations. According to this system, the interplay between these multiple and somewhat contrasting identities energises (motivates) people to act.

This model has been transferred to the L2 motivation research arena as *L2 ideal self*, *L2 ought-to self*, *actual L2 self*, and Sahakyan et al. (2018) have recently proposed the notion of *feasible self*, alluding to the need for learners (and teachers) to be realistic about the configuration of one's ideal self. The *self system* has been explored in diverse contexts such as Hungary (Csizér & Kormos, 2009), and across Asia and areas of the middle east (Matthew et al., 2017; Ryan, 2009; Taguchi, Magid & Papi, 2009), with participants ranging from secondary school students to adults (Lamb, 2012; Ryan & Dörnyei, 2013) or teachers (Kubanyiova, 2009). The self system has enriched our understanding of L2 motivation and offered strong support to pedagogical applications to foster L2 motivation. However, as indicated by Lanvers (2016), Dörnyei himself remains critical of the self framework and has called into question the 'fitness' of the model.

For instance, drawing on Boo et al. (2015) who point to a prevalence of motivation research investigating *learners of English*, Lanvers suggests that this skewedness 'might have - inadvertently - contributed to a bias in conceptualizing L2 motivation' (p89). This has led to a re-evaluation of the notion of *Other* because in our globalised world, motivation concerning identification with a *specific* other (L2) community is increasingly critiqued (Dörnyei, 2005). For example, Ushioda and Dörnyei (2017) suggest that the motivational dynamics of learning Languages Other Than English (LOTE) require a different approach whereby the prevalence of a perspective focussing on an imagined English-speaking community may be replaced by a construct more pertinent to the LOTE learning experiences. Therefore, a major challenge for any investigation following the self system is the integration of contextual dimensions (Lanvers, 2016). Nonetheless, the framework remains very popular within the SLA community and has developed connections with other motivational constructs, such as *Vision* (Dörnyei, 2020). For instance, Markus and Nurius (1987, p159) suggest that "possible selves encompass within their scope visions of desired and undesired end states", and therefore can be seen as the "vision of what might be."

Vision is a highly personalised goal which is accompanied by a vivid mental image of the experience of successfully attaining the desired objective. Therefore, learners' vision as ideal L2 users is one of the most reliable predictors of long-term motivation (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014). This is because by focusing on the goal, a vision energises one's persistence to attain such a goal. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova have designed a *visionary training programme* to capitalise on the power of imagery and visualisation. The key components are: (a) *creating the vision* (encourage learners to construct images of who they may become as L2 users including the benefits of such possibility); (b) *strengthening the vision* (helping learners see their desired selves with clarity); (c) *substantiating the vision* (helping learners anchor their desired selves in realistic expectations); (d) *transforming the vision into action* (helping learners develop a set of concrete action plans); (e) *keeping the vision alive* (helping learners activate their desired self-images frequently); (f) *counterbalancing the vision* (reminding learners of the undesired consequences of not achieving their goal).

Several intervention studies (Mackay, 2019; Magid & Chan, 2012; Sampson, 2012) have demonstrated that visionary thinking can be fostered in L2 learners and that such visionary training can enhance various aspects of learners' motivation. However, despite the promising potential of this framework, there remain some questions and shortcomings. For instance, I should like to highlight that learners may struggle to embrace the experience of 'visualisation' if their belief system or individual abilities may go against such practice. This connects with Dörnyei's (2020) critique that while the *L2 ought-to self* concerns *someone else's* vision for a person's future, the way such vision is 'imported' or internalised remains unclear. Similarly, drawing on Hessel (2015), Dörnyei calls for further empirical research that may examine learners' ability to access and activate ideal self-images in order to better understand the potency of such a strategy. Therefore, despite the currency of the L2 self model, some challenges and unexplored questions remain for the research community to take forward (Dörnyei, 2020).

From a discussion of theoretical concepts which may explain motivation in relation to the classroom and the individual learner or groups of learners, I now turn to an examination of research perspectives which may account for the complexity of motivation more holistically.

#### 4.5 A relational view of motivation

As discussed earlier, it has been difficult, if not impossible, to define motivation in a way which captures the concept holistically. This is because motivation, like other complex-dynamic phenomena, not only fluctuates in nature, quality and form over time, but also shifts in relation to a myriad of other factors and variables which may be relatively internal or external to a human being (e.g. identity, emotions, social responsibilities). Thus, motivation exists in relation to several *other* phenomena which interact with each other. In order to make sense of this complex reality, Ushioda (2009) proposes a *Person-in-Context Relational View*, which encourages us to regard research participants as ‘real persons’ as opposed to ‘theoretical abstractions.’ This theory highlights that to study motivation we need to adopt ontological approaches which do not analyse learners through individual differences but, rather, understand them more holistically as human beings. This is reminiscent of Kramersch’s (2006, p251) call for an ‘ecological turn’ whereby we understand that ‘learners are not just communicators and problem solvers, but whole persons with hearts, bodies, and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties, identities’. Significantly, learners are ‘inherently part of, act upon and contribute to shaping the social, cultural and physical environments with which they interact’ (Ushioda, 2015, p48), a stance which echoes Kramersch’s (2002) invitation to no longer view learners as ‘computers’ but ‘apprentices’ within a community of practice.

This view is in line with mainstream motivational psychology. Paris and Turner (1994) argue that a “person’s motivational beliefs and behaviour are derived from contextual transactions” (p214) and therefore motivation studies should account for such individual characteristics. Similarly, Pintrich (2000) argues that motivation frameworks should help us ‘understand how the individual and context work together to facilitate or constrain learning (...) highlighting the ‘individual in context’ (p223). In this vein, similarly to Kramersch (2006), Ushioda (2009, p220) suggests a focus on “the agency of the individual person as a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, a person with goals, motives and intentions”. This framework highlights the interaction between self-reflective intentional agents (e.g. learners and teachers), and “the fluid and complex system of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro- and macro-contexts in which the person is embedded, moves, and is inherently part of” (Ibid, 2009, p220). Crucially, Dörnyei (2020) suggests that Ushioda’s *relational view* is

compatible with Complex and Dynamic System Theory (CDST). However, Ushioda distances herself from this perspective because the discourse used by CDST researchers often seems to conceptualise people in ‘abstract’ terms with a focus ‘on self-organizing ‘systems’ and their components and processes, and where we seem to lose sight of the individual agency and reflexivity of the person whose motivation is under focus.’ (Ushioda, in press). I therefore choose to approach the complexity of motivation through an ecological methodology and now discuss how this paradigm may support ‘*a-person-in-context*’ framework.

#### **4.6 Ecological research approaches**

The concept of ecology is borrowed from the environmental sciences wherein researchers understand phenomena through the framework of ecosystems. Ecosystem, in this discussion, is a metaphor that illustrates the symbiotic and co-adaptive relationship between the individual and the context where they find themselves. In order to define ecology, van Lier (2010) utilises the analogy of utterance and argues that an utterance has several layers of meaning, as it may embed elements of the speaker’s history and background, their way of looking towards the future, their interaction(s) with the outside world, and interactions with their inner world relating to identity, personal cognition and emotions.

According to Kramsch (2002, p22), ecology aims to ‘encompass the totality of the relationships that a learner, as a living organism, entertains with all aspects of his/her environment. As such, it is a relational ‘way of seeing’ that enables researchers and practitioners to account for phenomena that would otherwise go unnoticed or be unaccounted for.’ Kramsch argues that an ecological research perspective “opens up possibilities of embracing the paradoxes, contradictions, and conflicts inherent in any situation involving semiotic activity, rather than rushing to solve them” (Ibid:22). In this light, a classroom-based or practitioner-led approach to research motivation appears suitable to shed some light on the complex and, somewhat obscure, interactions between human beings and their inner and outer worlds. By interaction, here, I do not necessarily mean utterances, in van Lier’s terms, but refer to the interdependent relationships between the meanings which individuals attach to their experiences and all aspects of their world, whether internal or external. These meanings, in turn, shape the individual on other dimensions such as their behaviour or motivation. Therefore, to investigate motivation from such a nuanced perspective, I would

recommend an approach which deploys a ‘small-lens’ focus (Ushioda, 2016) with a view to illuminating those aspects of motivation which would be lost, if noticed at all, by doing a study that attempts to selectively separate this complex phenomenon from its natural context(s) (e.g. the classroom, the learner’s mind). Therefore, this means becoming able to understand the actual nature, shape and quality of learners’ motivation whilst this may be pulled, shaped and remodelled by various socio-cultural, emotional, historical, and psychological forces embedded within the learner and their context(s). This line of inquiry was somewhat initiated by Sampson (2016) who conducted an autoethnographic study of L2 teaching motivation relying on rich data from his research journal and student learning diaries. He offers a fine-grained analysis of classroom episodes from both the teacher’s (himself) and the students’ perspectives at different temporal contexts, thereby showing that events have different implications on different timescales.

Whereas ecology seems a suitable approach to investigate a complex phenomenon such as motivation, researching from this perspective requires due consideration and pragmatic decisions. Ushioda (2015) raised the following questions: a) If learners are ‘persons-in-context’, how can we meaningfully differentiate between the learner and the context?; b) How do we deal with the psychological and historical elements of the evolving context which are internal to the learner (e.g. memories); c) How do we define and circumscribe the external, internal and temporal boundaries of ‘context’ relevant to the specific learner? And given the multitude of ‘nested’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) contexts and sub-contexts that we need to identify, how do we know which ones of these interact directly or not with the phenomenon under investigation, in this case motivation? In order to address these questions and gain ecological insights into motivation, I adopted Exploratory Practice (EP) as a methodology for my pre-sessional teaching. I now offer an overview of EP and its core guiding principles with emphasis on its suitability for research within an EAP context.

#### **4.6.1. EP and EAP: a compatible match**

The compatibility between EP and EAP was first explored by Hanks' (2013) doctoral project which investigated the principle of integrating research and practice through the process of puzzling. EP originally emerged as a reaction against assumptions about traditional approaches to research in Applied Linguistics (Allwright & Lenzuen, 1997), and as such, Hanks was determined to investigate this practitioner approach in discussions with practitioners (i.e. teachers and learners) in her UK pre-sessional context. Following Miller's example (e.g. Miller, 2009), Hanks ensured that her study brought together both teachers' and learners' perspectives; this was compatible with EP's principle of working together for the development of mutual understanding(s) (e.g. Allwright, 2005a). This study revealed that EP can be successfully incorporated in an EAP context, but that this may require a re-assessment of the notions of research and pedagogy. Hanks brought to the fore questions of relevance, ownership of research as well as the principle of *puzzling* rather than problem-solving. She proposed that EP be reframed as a form of pedagogy rather than research and that the notion of academic research be redefined to recognise practitioners' locally meaningful, co-constructions of knowledge (or understandings). Therefore, Hanks showed that EP would work well within the high-stakes context of a pre-sessional programme in the UK.

Elsewhere, in a Japanese EAP context, Pinner (2017) used narratives as he engaged his learners in understanding their relationship to the English language and sense of learner autonomy. Pinner chose EP because of the approach's focus on 'quality of classroom life' (Allwright, 2003, 2005). Crucially, though, he noted the compatibility of this Practitioner research with his EAP context thanks to EP's emphasis on Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs), or data arising naturally from the teaching and learning practices (Allwright and Hanks, 2009). Salvi (2017), in a study drawing on two UK EAP programmes and one in China, investigated the connections between EP, criticality and learner autonomy. Through a variety of student artefacts, her study revealed signs of criticality including students' investigations of their own 'epistemic doubts' whilst engaging in dialogue for understanding.

Therefore, Hanks (2013), Pinner (2017) and Salvi (2017) have demonstrated that EP is well-suited to EAP as an educational context and research arena. Their findings unpack and support the notions of collegiality, of learners and teachers working together whilst highlighting dilemmas, and raising

questions which contribute to the organic development of the EP framework. Following from this line of inquiry, in chapter 5, I will articulate my own approach to EP for a UK EAP pre-sessional context and will illustrate my doubts, challenges and opportunities. For now, given my professional and research interests in EAP, I turn to a discussion which brings together traditional L2 motivation research and EAP.

#### **4.7 EAP and L2 motivation research**

While EAP pre-sessional and foundation programmes represent the first stage of HE for a growing number of international students (Woodrow, 2013), current research on international students has mainly focused on their progress in tertiary education rather than transition/EAP programmes (Dooey, 2010). Furthermore, while previous research has offered important considerations for international students in an English-speaking university, the emphasis has always been on teachers' and/or students' perceptions of motives. In a qualitative study, Harvey (2013) explored EAP teachers' perceptions of students' motivation and concluded that students' levels of engagement are contingent upon a good teacher/student relationship, a finding which is echoed by Pinner (2019). In Australia, Woodrow (2013) looked at EAP learners' motivation and documented the fluctuating nature of their academic engagement over a two-year period through a mixed-methods approach. Woodrow, however, was an 'external' researcher and therefore this study lacked the ecological and fine-grained perspective discussed in 4.6 which may be gained by a practitioner researcher involved in the learning setting.

More recently, Wilson and Phakiti (2016) conducted a quantitative study to examine the relationship between teacher motivational practice and student motivation. They therefore answered a call for empirical research on L2 motivation at tertiary level (Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012) and went some way towards filling the gap within the L2 motivation research, which has generally investigated English for *general* purposes rather than *academic* purposes. This study aimed to test Dörnyei and Otto's (1998) motivational model through the use of the Motivational Orientation of Language Teaching (MOLT) observation scheme, the Post-lesson Teacher Evaluation System (PLTES) and the Students' Motivated State (SMS) questionnaire. The first two instruments were used by the first author to rate the students' and the teachers' motivational behaviour. The researcher would observe the lessons and complete the observation schemes. The

students would then be asked to complete the SMS questionnaire with a view to triangulating the data.

The quantitative nature of the study reveals limitations in relation to the ability to capture a comprehensive picture of the interaction between teachers' and learners' behaviour. As a result, the authors argue that a qualitative or mixed-method approach with a longitudinal framework would yield more insightful findings. However, while they maintain that future research should 'design a more strictly controlled environment in class, in which various conditions of teacher motivational practice are manipulated', I believe that the classroom environment should be observed naturally without attempting to control or distort the classroom life for the sake of research. Also, I would take their suggestions further and support Ushioda's (2016) call for a 'small lens' approach to researching L2 motivation through practitioner-research. I strongly believe that an 'insider' view of the educational and motivational dimensions of the classroom as opposed to the 'external' researcher perspective, could yield more complex and holistic insights.

#### **4.8 Summary review of the literature**

In chapter 2, I unpacked the concept of internationalisation of HE and illustrated the core critiques of its current implementation in the English-speaking world. This raised the questions: Are university curricula and cultures of learning truly international? and Are international students' expectations fully met throughout their expensive study-abroad experience? (Ryan, 2013). I then illustrated the dimensions of the term *Chinese* and established that this thesis specifically focuses on mainland Chinese students. I reviewed the few studies that examined this student population's motivation to study in Britain and concluded that studies about Chinese students (or other international subgroups) tend to examine motivation from limited or peripheral perspectives. Therefore, one of my contributions is to shed more light on mainland Chinese students' motives to study in the UK.

In chapter 3 I illustrated the origins of EAP in the UK highlighting critical ideologies on whether EAP should be generic or subject-specific (Hyland, 2002), accommodationist or critical (Bruce, 2011). I explored the British EAP landscape with emphasis on pre-sessionals and foregrounded the core debates about Chinese students. These included a discussion on IELTS training against



the requirements of the academy, and an understanding of students' adjustment and struggles throughout pre-sessionals (Copland & Garton, 2011). I also raised important questions about the ideological view which portrays EAP as a deficiency-remedial provision promoting the dominance of English in the academy.

In the second section of chapter 3, I reviewed studies about Chinese students completing postgraduate programmes at English-speaking universities. The focus was on issues concerning the use of English in the lecture theatre or seminar room which differed from the language problems encountered on pre-sessionals. I unpacked assumptions about Chinese students' cultures of learning, indicating that these students' struggles are not to be associated with their academic capabilities but rather with their (mis)understanding of UK cultures of learning. This led to the debate on cultural/academic adjustment which I framed through Holliday's grammar of culture. I therefore established that whilst we cannot deny the influence of 'large culture' (e.g. Confucianism), I would push for a 'small culture' approach whereby the researcher deCentres the intercultural experiences in question and aims to understand the individual in light of their unique cultural features and cultural affiliations within the context of 'small culture formation on the go' (Holliday & Amadasi, 2018).

In chapter 4, I explored the construct of L2 motivation in applied linguistics and illustrated the core theoretical frameworks which have stemmed from Crookes and Schmidt's call for pedagogically relevant motivation research. I noted that, despite the efforts to capture the dynamic and complex nature of motivation, investigations have generally approached the phenomenon in broad perspectives through external researchers gaining access to cross-sectional data. However, my contribution is to offer a longitudinal understanding of motivation and heed Ushioda's (2016) call for a 'small lens' approach by using Exploratory Practice.

Overall, this analysis of the relevant literature has led me to identify the following gaps:

- a) the lack of research on mainland-Chinese students at pre-sessional level, which I address by focussing on this specific population, thereby expanding the L2 motivation literature

which has normally targeted English for *general* purposes rather than English for *academic* purposes (focus of my study);

- b) the lack of research on mainland-Chinese students at Master's level in the UK as opposed to the current literature grouping various nationalities into heterogenous cohorts of international students;
- c) the dearth of studies targeting the UK as a research context whilst maintaining a focus on mainland-Chinese students;
- d) lack of methodologies able to offer a 'fine-grained' understanding of motivation in an educational context, which I address by drawing on Exploratory Practice during phase-1 of my study.

## Chapter 5: Methodology

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I first articulate the evolution of my research questions and continue with a discussion of my epistemological stance, research design and account of fieldwork. Finally, I share the ethical considerations which shaped my conduct throughout the investigation.

### 5.2 Research Questions

Given Norton's (2000) notion of 'investment' in learning as well as Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2009) work on motivation and identity, I was initially determined to explore the trajectory of my student-participants' motivation and sense of identity from the time before they arrived in the UK, throughout their pre-sessional and MSc experiences. As a result, the RQs I formulated before my PhD upgrade panel were as follows:

**RQ1:** What types of identity do EAP pre-sessional students show within a UK University?

- **RQ1.1.** How do they present themselves in the early stages of the EAP programme?
- **RQ1.2.** How do they present themselves at the end of the EAP programme?
- **RQ1.3** How do they present themselves when they progress to their degree programme? (the focus will be on year 1 which for Masters students may also be their only year here)

**RQ2:** What type of motivation drives them at the start of the EAP programme?

**RQ3:** What happens to their motivation throughout the EAP programme?

**RQ4:** What happens to their motivation when they progress to their degree programme?

- **RQ4.1** what is their motivation like after a term in their tertiary programme?
- **RQ4.2** what is their motivation like after a year in their tertiary programme?

**RQ5:** What can I, as an EAP practitioner, offer to the EAP community, by drawing on my EAP teacher-researcher experience?

While I was collecting my data during the pre-session I developed a growing interest in Exploratory Practice (EP) and became determined to investigate my own experience using this approach with an eye to sharing my insights with the wider EAP community. Thus, I reformulated the RQs as follows:

**Research Aim 1): Gaining insights into the identity of postgraduate international students in a UK university**

- **RQ1** What do I understand about their identity in the early stages of the EAP programme?
- **RQ2.** What do I understand about their identity at the end of the EAP programme?
- **RQ3** What do I understand about their identity throughout the course of their degree programme?

**Research Aim 2): Gaining insights into the motivation of postgraduate international students in a UK university**

- **RQ4:** what do I understand about the motivation(s) of postgraduate international students at the start of the EAP programme?
- **RQ5:** What happens to their motivation(s) throughout the EAP programme?
- **RQ6:** What happens to their motivation throughout the course of their degree programme?
  - **RQ6.1** what is their motivation like after a term in their tertiary programme?
  - **RQ6.2** what is their motivation like after a year in their tertiary programme?

**Research Aim 3): Understanding the use and impact of my research methodology**

- **RQ7:** What insights can we gain about the use of Exploratory Practice in this study?
  - **RQ7.1:** What were the challenges and benefits of this methodology from the teacher-researcher's perspective?
  - **RQ7.2:** What were the challenges and benefits of this methodology from the students' perspective?
  - **RQ7.3** What impact did the use of EP have on the students' motivation? (This question is possibly irrelevant and somehow implied in RQ5.1? but it is one I explore quite explicitly in some interviews).

- **RQ8:** What insights can we gain about the teacher-researcher and student-participants relationship within a longitudinal framework?

Naively I presented the above 8 RQs to my progress review panel, and following this, I became confident that having two separate foci on identity and motivation as well as my other areas of interest (i.e. EP and teacher-researcher/participant relationship) would constitute too large a scope for a PhD. Therefore, I removed the emphasis on identity knowing that aspects of students' identity would feature my discussion; after all, it was perhaps unrealistic of me to think that the two constructs could be treated separately. Also, my reviewers advised that it would be cautious to keep the thesis' message narrow and focussed reserving other interesting data for future publications and/or concluding remarks. This referred to my methodological interest in EP and the student-teacher relationship; thus, I removed RQs 1,2,3,7 and 8, leaving the following as the main RQs guiding this PhD.

**RQ1** What was these Chinese postgraduate students' motivation like prior to their arrival in the UK?

**RQ2** What happened to these Chinese postgraduate students' motivation during PS6?

**RQ3** What happened to these Chinese postgraduate students' motivation during their MSc in project and programme management?

These final RQs highlight my main interest in motivation, the core theme of this thesis, which I used as a catalyst to discuss issues of practice in EAP and HE as well as students' intercultural experiences. Equally important is the focus that these questions put on *Chinese* students, as opposed to *international* students in the previous RQs.

In the next section, I illustrate my epistemological stance.

### **5.3 Epistemological stance: Interpretivism**

Interpretivism seeks 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations' of the social world (Crotty, 1998, p67), and with a central 'concern for the individual', the key interpretive 'endeavour is to understand the subjective world of human experience' (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2011, p18). According to Dilthey, Makkreel and Rodi (1989), interpretivism is often associated with Weber's (1864-1920) notion of *Verstehen* (understanding), a concept used to contrast the interpretive approach to study human and social sciences with the 'explicative' approach (Erklären) which focuses on causality.

Interpretivism recognises that social reality is meaningfully 'constructed and interpreted' by people rather than something which exists 'objectively out there' (Carson et al., 2001; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015). Thus, interpretivists examine how participants make sense of the world, aware that the meaning they seek is made by members of the researched phenomenon; hence one would privilege those members' *meaning-making* over the researcher's (Denscombe, 2001, p121). This is congruous with my belief that motivation manifests distinctively from individual to individual.

Interpretivism promotes empathic understanding of the participants' position (Tracy, 2013, p41), which consists in 'learning the language of the setting and its customs' in order to understand the 'stranger-ness' of the 'unspoken, tacitly known, commonsensical, taken-for-granted, local rules of action and interaction' (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015, p20). The notions of *language learning* and *stranger-ness* are particularly relevant to the study of motivation, a construct that is difficult to observe and define, and which necessitates 'sustained empathic inquiry' (Stolorow 1995, p395), where empathy refers to the 'intentional embracing of the other's meaning' (Ibid, 2015, p23).

Crucially, interpretivism fosters reflexivity which refers to the researcher locating oneself within the research process and noticing how their presence may affect the social reality under investigation (Fook, 2002, p44). Reflexivity is required not just for the researched phenomenon but also for the ‘worldmaking’ strategies (Goodman, 1978, p7). The researcher does not present their participants but ‘represent[s] – constitute[s]- construct[s] them’, making explicit the tacit knowledge of their lifeworld (Schutz, 1967). This concept tied in well with my aim to **a**) elucidate motivation, often invisible in observational terms, and **b**) understand how it may fluctuate and evolve for each individual.

I now discuss my journey towards the research design supporting this study.

#### **5.4 The path which led to this research project, contexts and designs**

Efforts have been made to reconcile the academic world of applied linguistics research and teaching practice. These include, among others, the University of Leeds’ BAAL-CUP (2019) event putting the spotlight on *the value of practitioner research in Applied Linguistics*, and the Irish Research Scheme for Teachers (IRST), which funds Irish language teachers to conduct classroom-based inquiries. However, there still seems to be misalignment between the two camps, and this has led to Rose’s (2019) call to ‘dismantle the ivory tower’ of academia and foreground the centrality of *T* in TESOL. Similarly, McKinley (2019) has called for a *teaching-research nexus* whereby the research agenda is shaped by teaching practice needs and, in turn, teaching is informed by academic research. This background was the impetus for my study to bring together the worlds of *research* and *practice*.

The scope was to capture the complexity of motivation in a small group of pre-sessional Chinese students transitioning to MSc studies. Therefore, the adoption of multiple phases of data collection, involving practitioner research (phase-1) and more traditional research approaches (phase-2), would allow me to chart the longitudinal dimensions of these students’ experience(s) and trajectory of their motivations. The structuring of data collection into the two phases will be discussed in 6.12. I now illustrate the pre-sessional context of this study.

## 5.5 My pre-sessional course

The pre-sessional was delivered by the linguistics department at a university in England. The programme started in the late 80s, when the cohort consisted of approximately 100 students, with virtually no Chinese students, but the student demographic has changed over time. These days the department exclusively recruits pre-Master's students who have received a conditional offer or wish to bolster their language and study skills. In 2017, year of my data-collection, there were 512 students on this six-week pre-sessional (PS6 henceforth). These students represented the following nationalities:

- China 417 (82%),
- Thailand 26 (5%),
- Taiwan 25 (5%),
- Japan 15 (5%),
- South Korea 8,
- Turkey 7,
- 3 from Kazakhstan;
- 2 from Saudi Arabia;
- 1 each from Chile, Germany, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Oman, Peru, Italy and Mexico.

Therefore, in 2017, first-language Chinese students (China + Taiwan = 442) represented 87% of the programme. This had implications for the cultural mix of students on the course. For example, 91.5% of the students destined for the MSc course (focus of the second phase of my study) were first-language Chinese.

PS6 ran from mid-August to September, giving students who progress to the prospective department a two weeks' break before beginning their Master's. In order to be eligible for PS6, students must have obtained an IELTS scoring 6.5 overall with no component less than 6. A typical week on PS6 is represented in Table 6.1 below, and students took the following three modules:

- e) **Listening and Speaking:** a module that develops oral and aural academic skills (e.g. lecture listening, note-taking) – this module consisted of 5 classes a week.



- f) **Text-based studies (TBS):** a module which focused on academic reading and writing skills such as skimming and scanning, and academic integrity (e.g. referencing, paraphrasing) – this module typically consisted of 8 classes a week.
- g) **Living in the UK:** a module delivered by the text-based tutor on a Thursday afternoon for an 1h30 in weeks 2, 3 and 4. This module aimed to enhance students’ understanding of British society.

In 2017 I taught TBS and Living in the UK.

	9.00 – 10.45		11.15 – 13.00		14.00 – 15.30
<b>Mon</b>	Listening and Speaking		Text-based Studies		Text-based Studies
<b>Tue</b>	Listening and Speaking		Text-based Studies		Text-based Studies
<b>Wed</b>	Listening and Speaking		Text-based Studies		
<b>Thur</b>	Text-based Studies		Listening and Speaking		Text-based Studies (Living in the UK: Weeks 2,3, 4 only)
<b>Fri</b>	Listening and Speaking		Text-based Studies		

**Table 5.1: Typical timetable for PS6**

### 5.5.1 PS6 Assessment

Students were required to complete formative assessment throughout PS6 (e.g. short presentations and writing tasks). Summative assessment consisted of a 2,000-word essay and a 15-minute oral presentation. The essay was an argumentative text based on secondary research about a topic related to the future MSc content – in the case of my participants, this was project and programme management (more details below in 6.8). The academic presentation was based on the same topic. Throughout PS6 students received feedback on drafts these two pieces of work.

The students also took final language examinations on all four skills and were expected to pass all the assessment components to progress onto the Master’s. However, if they failed one or two of

these, they would progress with the proviso that they attended in-sessional lessons starting in October. If they failed more than 2 components, they may not satisfy the requirements of their conditional offer, but PS6 course director would liaise with the relevant MSc course office to discuss each individual case.

### **5.5.2 PS6 teachers, administrators and management team**

The teachers are practitioners with minimum 2 years of EAP experience on pre-sessionals. This experience on pre-sessionals is a requirement to teach on PS6 because the expectation is that they use their EAP skills to design subject-specific materials. As such, they are responsible for the planning and delivery of lessons by following a scheme of work with weekly language and study skills objectives. While they have access to relevant resources, they also need to spend some time researching their students' future courses to devise materials relevant to the specific subject(s). In order to facilitate this task, PS6 teachers are given access to the Master's programmes' reading lists.

The Listening & Speaking teacher sees two class groups (5 times a week, each), and the text-based studies teacher sees one class group (8 times a week). This difference in class group and contact hours is determined by the expectation that reading and writing teachers offer daily feedback on formative writing tasks, hence they only have one class – this was my role on PS6. Finally, all PS6 teachers are assigned up to 16 students as personal tutees to offer them pastoral support.

PS6 is overseen by the Director of Studies and an Assistant Director of Studies who prepare the syllabus and resources as well as the academic induction for the students. They are responsible for the overall quality of teaching, and support the teachers throughout the course with observations, group meetings and one-to-one meetings. The management team work closely with the administrators to ensure the smooth running of the programme and monitor students' welfare.

I now turn my attention to the participants of the study.

### **5.6 Focal participants**

My PS6 Reading & Writing group comprised 15 Chinese students who, at the start of PS6, did not know each other. They came from different parts of mainland China and had either finished their undergraduate degree recently or left a professional position. They were all going to progress onto

the same MSc. Relevant information concerning participant recruitment is in the ethics discussion (7.1). Here I limit myself to illustrating the students on PS6 who consented to becoming research participants.

All students offered consent on PS6, but only the following eight students volunteered to complete interviews after the end of PS6, Alita, David, Xiaoxin, Amber, Velika, Ivan, Megan, May. However, I selected four focal participants to discuss in this thesis: *Alita, David, Megan, May*; who were chosen because they offered rich data for both phase-1 and phase-2 of the study. The other participants, too, provided valuable data but they did not complete all the interviews in phase-2 or the member-checking because they seemed busy with other priorities and I did not wish to impose on them. Xiaoxin who, like the four focal participants, completed all interviews and member-checking, was excluded from this thesis because her data was published elsewhere (Consoli, 2020a).

As a teacher-researcher, during phase-1 on PS6, I considered myself a participant as well as the narrator, throughout the thesis. Although I am not the focus of the study, I acknowledge my presence as a participant as well as researcher.

I now discuss the research design for phase-1.

## **5.7 Research Design for Phase-1 (PS6)**

In order to investigate my student-participants' motivation throughout PS6, I adopted Exploratory Practice (EP), and therefore, the research design for this phase of the study was informed by this practitioner research approach.

### **5.7.1 Exploratory Practice**

EP is a form of practitioner research that integrates learning, teaching and researching. It was first developed in the early 1990s by Dick Allwright in Rio de Janeiro where teachers and teacher educators in a number of institutions began to devise new strategies to 'understand' what was going on in the classroom (Allwright, 1993; Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Furthermore, EP encourages the idea of teachers and learners 'puzzling' about their language learning and teaching experiences, using "normal pedagogic practices as investigative tools" (Allwright, 2003, p127). Many varieties of EP have emerged based on the argument that there is no single approach to

teaching and learning and that only teachers and learners can take ownership for *how* learning and teaching occur. These considerations thus empower teachers and learners by recognising them as ‘best positioned to research, and report on their own teaching and learning experiences’ (Hanks, 2017).

EP may appear similar to other forms of practitioner research (e.g. Action Research and Reflective Practice). While there are indeed similarities (e.g. aim to empower practitioners, they all include elements of reflection, and claim the ‘arena for research’ should be the classroom), EP is not centred on solutions of problems but *understanding*. Inspired by Allwright (2006, p15), EP expects ‘teaching and learning [to be] done so that teachers and learners simultaneously develop their own understandings of what they are doing as learners and teachers.’ Learners and teachers as well as all the other social actors of the educational context (e.g. administrators) are defined as ‘practitioners’ with equal degrees of agency.

Another concept connected with this notion of understanding is *Puzzlement* which, in EP, is intended as a means to develop ‘profound understandings’. It rejects ‘superficial’ changes for improvement and the burden on teachers to try new strategies to achieve targets; rather, EP focuses on ‘interrogation of practice’ (Hanks, 2017, p112). Hanks (ibid) offers a nuanced discussion to differentiate between a *puzzle* and a *problem*. A puzzled inquiry is one that is open-ended, welcomes reflections but, more importantly, does not exclusively focus on negatives (as problems do). Drawing on her own teacher experience and Johnson (2002), Hanks argues that *puzzling* is open to ‘discussions of successes as well as failures’. Puzzling thus is the starting point of EP.

There have been a number of shifts in the development of EP, especially as a result of active reflective discussions between teachers from around the world (e.g. Allwright, 2003, 2005; Hanks, 2009; Slimani-Rolls, 2005; Wu, 2004; Zhang, 2004), and the considerable influence from the EP Group in Rio de Janeiro (e.g. Kuschnir & Machado, 2003; Miller, 2009). EP has evolved because it is ‘adaptable and (...) has the capacity to grow and change in response to new ideas, yet retains a strong core of principles which inform and support EP activities, relationships and approaches’ (Hanks, 2016, p22). I draw on Allwright and Hanks (2009) to inform the methodological decisions within my PS6 context.

EP aims to:

1. Focus on *quality of life* as the fundamental issue.
2. Work to *understand* it, before thinking about solving problems.
3. Involve *everybody* as practitioners developing their own understandings.
4. Work to bring people *together* in a common enterprise.
5. Work cooperatively for *mutual* development.
6. Make it a *continuous* enterprise.
7. *Minimize the burden* by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice.

(adapted from Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p260 original emphases)

Below in 5.11 (fieldwork), I show how I implemented the above guiding principles during my pre-sessional experience. For now, before illustrating the research design for phase-2, I turn my attention to the context of the MSc in programme and project management (PPM) which all my participants completed after PS6.

### **5.8 MSc in PPM**

This programme invites prospective applicants to reflect on how modern companies organise and manage their resources through programmes, projects and portfolio systems. This MSc offers input into the methodologies and philosophies of managing various types of projects whilst gaining practical experience through case studies.

The entry requirements for international students are an undergraduate degree with a 2:1 or equivalent and an IELTS with 6.5 overall and no less than 6 on any individual component. If students do not meet these language requirements, they need to successfully complete PS6. Crucially, this MSc department accepts students whose academic background may be in a completely different subject area, as was confirmed, for instance, by May who had completed a degree in geology.

This MSc consists of 7 core modules and 2 electives as well as a dissertation project. The programme promises a diverse repertoire of teaching strategies including lectures, seminars, and practical exercises (e.g. case studies and simulations). Except for lectures which may include up to 200 students, class sizes for all other activities are kept small with approximately 30 students in each; this is to encourage interaction. Each module is generally delivered in one week of 40 hours (9.00am – 6.30pm), but, occasionally, modules may be split over two weeks. Between modules, students may be required to attend workshops, supervisor meetings, industrial visits and work on Post Module Assignments (PMAs) and the dissertation. Each PMA consists of 3,000 or 4,000-word essays and the dissertation is a 20,000-word report.

Given the differences between PS6 and this MSc, I was curious to find out how my students' motivation was shaped within each context with its different influences. I now describe the research design for phase-2 of the study.

## **5.9 Research Design for phase-2**

At the end of PS6, I followed my participants to research their motivational trajectories throughout the MSc, and I chose interviewing as data-collection practice for this phase of the study.

### **5.9.1 Why interviewing?**

Kvale (1998) regards the interview as an instrument to see the world from the interviewee's perspective. Since my epistemological approach, interpretivism, accepts that reality is subjective and can only be understood by tapping into the participants' inner world (Denscombe, 2001), the interview lent itself to uncovering my participants' experiences and meanings. Furthermore, Kvale's (1996, p5) metaphor of interviewing as a 'travelling' process resonated with this study because I envisaged this PhD project as my own research journey intersecting other multiple journeys, my student-participants'. This in turn leads to a prime consideration surrounding the notions of 'authenticity' or 'realness' of interview data. In line with Mann (2016, p50), I welcome Potter's 'test' insofar as this argument encourages researchers to interrogate 'the role of the interviewer in the co-construction of data'. Thus, I qualify interviewing as an insightful journey fraught with dilemmas, difficulties, but also pleasant surprises and rewards. I discuss these below in 6.12.

### **5.9.2 What mode of interview is best?**

Whilst many interviewing modes are now recognised (e.g. phone, online interview), a face-to-face interview offers better opportunities to build a healthy relationship with participants (Thomas & Purdon, 1994) leading to richer data. Also, one may choose to do either synchronous or asynchronous interviews. Synchronous interviews are particularly useful because by happening 'in real time' the researcher can gain insightful understanding(s) of the interviewee by asking for clarification, elaboration or even unforeseen follow-up questions (Gatson & Zweerink, 2004). Given the access to my participants, I chose to conduct synchronous, spoken, face-to-face interviews. One possible danger of using this interview mode, as evidenced by my preliminary study (5.11), is that some Chinese students might struggle with certain questions or topics because they might lack the vocabulary to express their ideas. However, I was aware of strategies that could address such shortcomings (e.g. giving them as much thinking time as needed or using online dictionaries during the interview).

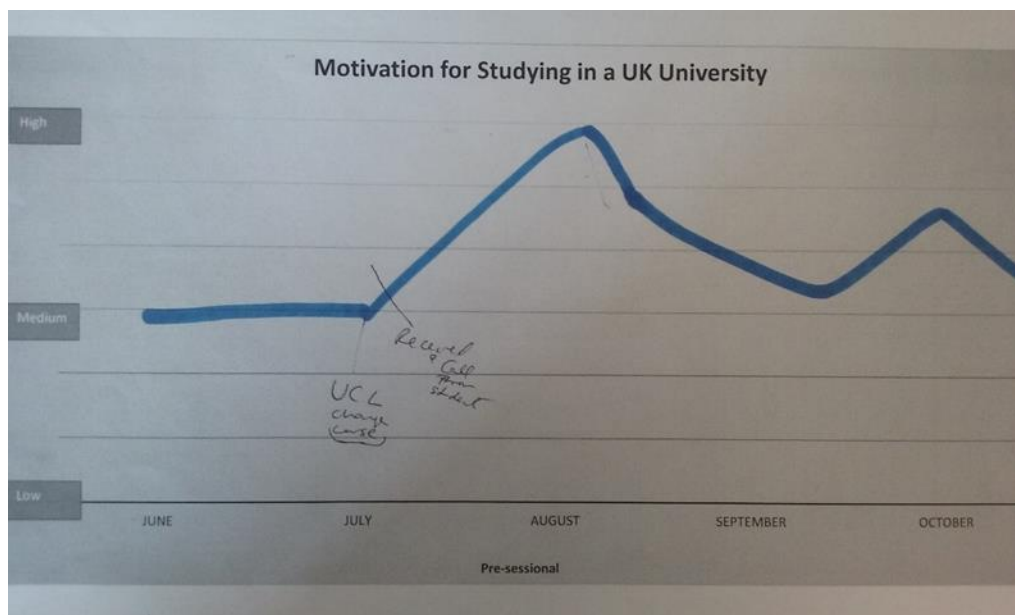
Although a research interview is a conversation, it is nevertheless a 'professional conversation', and thus requires a structure and driving purpose (Kvale, 1996, p5). This highlights the usefulness of an interview schedule or guide (Bryman, 1988) and the need for direction as an important element of the interviewing process (Spradley, 1979). Therefore, despite my wish for the participants to speak freely, I envisioned some form of guiding 'structure'. However, strictly 'structured' interviews are not suitable for in-depth qualitative work as they offer a very limited scope for 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). This notion of structure should not conflict with the critical features of qualitative interviews, such as focus, emphasis on what matters to the participants, and emergence of unexpected themes (Kvale, 1996). This last argument resonates with my rationale for using interviews to uncover my participants' meanings and, to some extent, 'what matters' to them (Kubanyiova, 2011), whilst following overarching research aims.

I now discuss another data-elicitation instrument which supported many post-PS6-interviews: the motigraph.

### **5.9.3 The motigraph**

The motigraph was initially designed by Letty Chan to collect doctoral data published in Chan, Dörnyei and Henry (2014). This instrument was conceived at the time when *complex dynamic system theory* was introduced to study its relationship and applicability to the construct

of motivation. On the assumption that motivation is a complex and dynamic construct deemed difficult to illustrate empirically, Chan developed the motigraph with the aim of guiding her participants in plotting their motivation on a line graph (see figure 5.1). The motigraph helps identify different levels of motivation throughout learners' learning history and afford them the opportunity to 'focus on possible underlying reasons for their motivational evolution' (Chan et al, 2014, p242). This motivational line chart thus supports the argument that 'the behaviour of a complex system is not completely random, but neither is it wholly predictable' (Larsen-freeman and Cameron, 2008, p75). Indeed, according to a complex dynamic perspective, each such system is equipped with a regulating force of 'self-organisation' which affords the opportunity to map 'more than one but less than too many' possibilities (Byrne and Callaghan, 2014, p197). This leads to what Dörnyei calls the system's signature dynamics.



**Figure 5.1 Sample motigraph**

While the precision of a motigraph is debatable, this instrument offers a systematic opportunity to map the direction of students' motivation. As evidenced by Chan and Lamb's (2016) follow-up study, interviewing students about their motigraphs leads to an understanding of the quality and



trajectory of the students' motivational force behind their experience(s). Therefore, I intended to ask my participants to draw motigraphs about their UK experience and probe the meanings embedded within these line graphs. As argued by Ushioda (2009), motivation is connected to other complex constructs such as identity, emotions and experiences which go beyond the specific goal of studying in the UK. In this regard, the motigraph offers the opportunity to obtain an ecological picture of students' motivation because by inquiring why the line 'goes up or down' I would elicit information about the student's life *around* their motivational lows and highs, thus uncovering *persons-in-context* (Ibid, 2009) or tapping into *part* of what Kramsch (2002) would call the 'totality' of complexities of human behaviour.

I now discuss another important research tool which I used throughout the study, the teacher-researcher journal.

#### **5.9.4 The Teacher-Researcher journal**

A teacher-researcher journal can be couched as an instrument to record insights, questions and reflections (Banegas, 2012), and I kept one to log the key episodes of my research journey. I began my journal at the start of the PhD programme (Oct-2016), almost a year before collecting data on PS6. It could therefore be argued that my journal was written by an author wearing multiple hats, PhD student, PS6 teacher, teacher-researcher, and experienced PhD student towards the end. One could maintain that these different identities sit on the same loose spectrum and tend to be pulled towards either end (teacher or researcher) at different times. My intention was to produce journal notes that would help me reflect on my research and teaching realities in such a way to weave an honest, transparent yet nuanced narrative of my experiences.

Consideration must be given to the question of 'authenticity' of journal entries. Whilst reading back over journal notes, should one edit or revise these, thereby 'tampering' with the data? This applies to any researcher working in their L1, L2 or Lx (Dewaele, 2018). After all, preserving non-standard use of English in a journal entry may be telling; for instance, it could reflect specific aspects of the teacher-researcher's life (e.g. teaching workload). Therefore, I chose to preserve my journal writing style despite 'inaccurate' use of English or diversions from a standard variety. This is not to say that editing or commenting on journal entries, at a later stage, is not possible. In fact, these processes, too, can be revealing. One could observe, for example, how, over time, their stance may have developed in relation to what was reported in the journal previously. These days

technology supports these processes. For instance, a simple strategy which affords opportunities to record the ‘natural history’ (Silverman, 2013, p358) of one’s research journey is using a word document with the option of adding comments on the margins which usefully show the date of the edited/added commentaries. I used this function to capture the development of my thinking and reflections, figure 5.2 illustrates an example:

**Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2017**

**Session one**

We started off the session with a Presentation I made which was conducive to a debate on the difference between ‘descriptive and critical writing’. I asked the students to work in pairs. Then we moved on with a Group activity: the students reviewed their own titles and with reference to a set of given criteria (to assess the plausibility and viability of their proposed titles) gave each other feedback. Next I showed the sts how to access and use the reading lists specific to their MSc programme, and demonstrated a few strategies to navigate Google Scholar. I also did a sample activity to show them how to select a source from a database with a specific essay title in mind.

**My impressions:** the first activity started off with a bit of internal frustration on my part as they wouldn’t respond to whole class open questions. I therefore stopped the activity to tell them that it is essential that, in a UK HE context, they have an active dialogue with their tutors during seminars and sometimes lectures. I told them they may not always find people who show as much patience and caring attitude as me, mainly because these people may not have the time and they won’t be spending as much time with sts as I do now with them. I also emphasised that it does not matter whether their answers are correct or wrong but what is essential is communication between the sts and the teacher during an activity. I felt this talk worked really well, maybe because I used my friendly and humorous Self to convey the message.

**Session Two:**

I was going to start this session by asking the sts to work further on their titles, finalise them after checking they have sources to support their essay and then send them to me for approval the day after

CS

**Consoli, Sal**

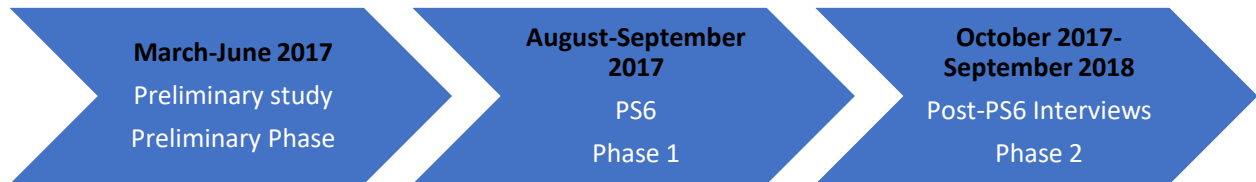
On reflection, I think that the friendly and supportive rapport which underpins the space of safety that I normally promote may have had an impact on their ‘positive’ reaction to my perhaps negative or ‘serious’ comments.

**Figure 5.2 Sample journal excerpt**

I now discuss the data collection sequence, and how the above research design and instruments were implemented during each phase of the study.

## 5.10 Data Collection

Figure 5.3 illustrates the sequence of data generation beginning with a preliminary phase, followed by the pre-sessional teaching (phase-1) and my post-pre-sessional interviewing throughout the academic year (phase-2).



**Figure 5.3 data-collection phases**

**Preliminary Phase:** *Preliminary study* – this phase lasted approximately 3 months. During this time, I familiarised myself with my future pre-sessional context (PS6) to learn about potential teaching/research issues/themes which I could encounter later.

**Phase 1:** *Pre-sessional programme* – this phase lasted 6 weeks (time of PS6). I adopted Exploratory Practice (EP) as research approach. The aim of this phase was to tap into the motivation(s) these students carried with them to the UK and identify the key shifts throughout PS6.

**Phase 2:** *Post-pre-sessional life* – I followed the students in my new capacity as *researcher* as opposed to *teacher-researcher*. This phase lasted until when the students returned to China.

I now discuss the preliminary study with emphasis on how this informed my methodological decisions in phase-1 and 2 of the main study.

## 5.11 Preliminary Study

I conducted two rounds of interviews with six pre-sessional alumni who completed the same pre-sessional as my future students. These interviews were analysed through manual thematic analysis

which was followed up by member-checking with some of the six participants. For reasons of space, I now limit myself to outlining what I learnt from this preliminary study.

### **5.11.1 Assumptions and beliefs**

In line with Hanks (2017), I maintain that a researcher's belief system will affect what 'they are able or willing to see and what they will choose to research and how'. Therefore, I sought to achieve a degree of reflexive introspection from this preliminary stage of my inquiry. I first identified my beliefs about EAP and produced the following points at the end of a 4000-word reflective statement written on 20/03/17. I shared and discussed these with my supervisor before commencing data collection for this preliminary study.

My then beliefs about EAP in the UK were as follows:

- a) EAP teachers need to understand the academic requirements of their given teaching context. In other words, EAP students should not be treated like EFL learners, and efforts should be made to ensure their learning is geared towards the academy. This contrasted with some EAP colleagues who still use EFL games which are more relevant to a language school setting rather than a university community of practice.
- b) EAP teachers should identify and respond to their students' motivation as this may affect the students' learning outcomes. For instance, many students fail to see the relevance of some modules. Therefore, EAP teachers need to raise awareness about these and generate a vision (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014) which may motivate the students to study.
- c) EAP students may arrive in the UK with good grades or strong IELTS scores but without the self-confidence and/or motivation to study in the new academic context.

### **5.11.2 What I learnt about PS6**

I identified the following themes:

- a) All six participants were required to complete PS6 as a condition from the university;

- b) All six participants reported high levels of motivation before moving to the UK and starting the pre-sessional;
  
- c) Some participants reported being disappointed with PS6, and the main issues were: (1) dislike of tutor's use of English (e.g. accent or speaking too slowly), (2) dislike of tutor's methods (i.e. not sufficiently planned lessons – the students who reported this claimed that by talking to other class groups, they realised their own tutor was not sufficiently prepared); (3) too many students from the same nationality in the same group, (4) other students' English being lower than expected, (5) some lesson topics were repeated throughout the pre-sessional, (6) some students expected to work harder but this was impaired by class activities lacking a sense of challenge (e.g. singing in class); (7) a student would have liked to work on writing skills which went beyond basic essay writing (e.g. literature review); (8) a student reported that her teacher 'destroyed' her motivation by assuming that she did not work with her group when she actually had, albeit quietly.
  
- d) The students reported the following positive thoughts: (1) appreciation for the University's effort in offering all the relevant information prior to their arrival (e.g. representative giving them a phone call); (2) weekly trips around the country, (3) living in the same residence as other pre-sessional peers who then became friends, (4) friendly tutors; (5) some students reported enjoying interactive lessons.

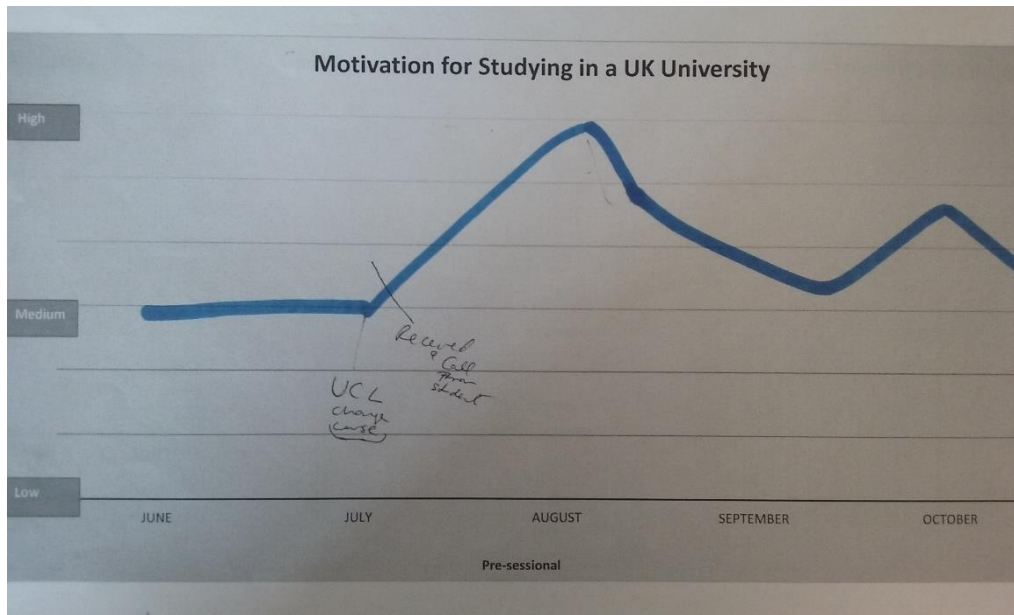
These findings raised critical questions about the practices of teaching EAP in this pre-sessional context, thereby challenging both the curriculum, and the individual teachers' (in)ability to align with the context's pedagogical requirements. These findings highlighted useful motivation-related debates such as the students' satisfaction (e.g. appreciation for groupwork). I also arranged an interview and various email exchanges with the pre-sessional director to discuss the above points and obtain a fuller and crystallised picture (Tracy, 2010) of this context. By *crystallising* I refer to the opportunity to enrich my understandings about PS6 by adding the course director's perspective.

This was also an opportunity to offer some useful data which may inform the running of the programme.

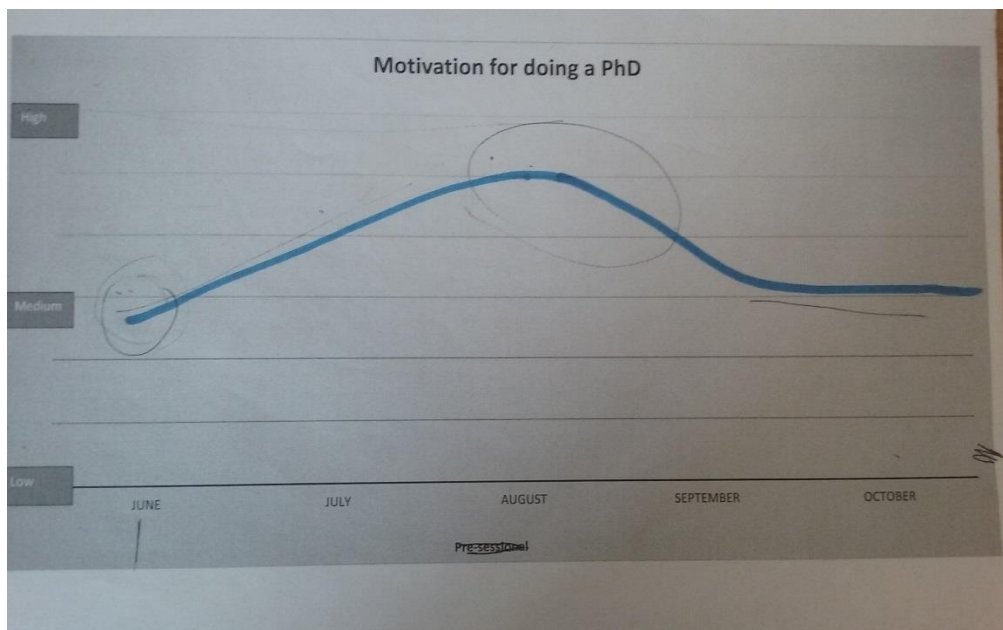
### 5.11.3 What I learnt methodologically

This preliminary study allowed me to make the following observations:

- a) Students appreciated my friendly approach and thoughtful planning of interviews as well as my compensation for their time and commitment (i.e. £10 per interview plus up to 30 minutes of academic support);
- b) Students found the interview process(es) straightforward. However, one of them confessed that she would have preferred knowing the specific interview aims in advance in order to prepare the language necessary to make her points. I thought this was revealing because while I noticed a level of difficulty when transcribing these interviews, I never observed any major linguistic strains. However, I kept this consideration in mind when arranging interviews with my student-participants during phase-2;
- c) When preparing for a follow-up interview, I normally listened to the previous interview several times and transcribed it in detail. However, when I realised that the student's speech was considerably 'broken' and meaning difficult to extract, I transcribed the whole interview and highlighted specific sections which were unclear and could lead to misunderstanding. On these occasions, I would bring the detailed transcript to the meeting, show the students the exact words they used and give them time to think. For example, a student had said '*deplore* the campus' when she meant '*explore* the campus';
- d) Using a motigraph (fig. 5.4) to help the students structure their thoughts about their motivation was beneficial. However, my way of guiding this activity was to first show them my own PhD motigraph (fig. 5.5) and explain this in relation to my own motivation. They also appreciated that I gave them as much time as needed to think and draw their own motigraph.



**Figure 5.4 sample student motigraph**



**Figure 5.5 my own motigraph**

- e) While I had an interview guide with some prompts to remind myself of the key aims for each meeting, I often found myself veering off to follow the direction taken by the student. This was beneficial in promoting natural and pleasant interactions, but, at times, I found myself thinking that perhaps I could have found a way to re-direct the conversation where

I wished. I noted this as a need for ‘balanced’ interactions and my duty not to lose track of the interview aims.

Whereas the above themes and research considerations were preliminary, they strongly contributed to bolstering my confidence as researcher and teacher on PS6 only two months later.

I now discuss my fieldwork during PS6, illustrating how I implemented EP in this context.

### **5.12 Fieldwork in Phase-1: Exploratory Practice during PS6**

EP suggests that data should come from pedagogic sources and fulfil pedagogic purposes (Allwright, 2003; Allwright & Hanks, 2009). This is achieved through Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs), which normally involve a certain degree of reflection and analysis in the classroom. Based on my previous pre-sessional teaching experience, I realised that several activities I normally use as part of my own practice lent themselves well to becoming PEPAs. Amongst these were *Day one short essay*, *Class reflective discussions*, and *Weekly reflective reports* (further details below in 5.12.1).

Despite my interest in EP and the reading I had done around this methodology, I had serious concerns about how I would implement it in my short and intensive pre-sessional. I first thought that a Listening & Speaking teacher may have an advantage over a Reading & Writing teacher (my case); after all Hanks (2013) shows that a speaking/listening module offers several opportunities to integrate EP. While some EP experiences (e.g. Hanks, 2017) show that it is indeed possible to incorporate EP within a pre-sessional writing module (e.g. collaborative writing projects), in PS6 we worked under the strict guidelines that students would produce individual essays about specific topics related to their future MSc. I do not wish to claim here that it is impossible to fully embrace EP under such circumstances; however, at that time, I was an enthusiastic proponent of EP, who had never actually *done* EP before, and it was a struggle because I did not want to compromise my teaching responsibilities. Significantly, I was doing this as part of my doctorate, which certainly compounded my apprehension.



### 5.12.1 How I did EP

At the beginning of PS6 I did not tell my students that I would be researching their motivation. Although I was already collecting certain forms of data (e.g. post-class reflections on my teacher-researcher journal), I was determined to prioritise my students' learning needs (see ethical discussion in 5.14). Nevertheless, I began turning pedagogical activities into PEPAs. Since at this initial stage, they did not know I was doing EP, I call this *implicit EP*. I now illustrate sample PEPAs.

#### Sample PEPA 1

*Out-of-class activity: Learning about students' writing skills*

I always ask my new students (normally on day 1) to write about themselves, their interests and expectations of the course. This task generally entails very broad guidelines to write freely, but this time, and in the spirit of EP, I formulated the following instructions to ensure they tapped into their motivation:



Write a paragraph for each question:

- A. What are your reasons for choosing to study at [name of university]? Describe your personal motivation for coming here and what you hope to achieve.
- B. Why are you doing the pre-sessional?
- C. What are your expectations of the pre-sessional?
- D. What are your expectations of the Text-based Studies module with me?



I share here some sample answers to these questions from one student (Megan):

**A: What are your reasons for choosing to study at this University? Describe your personal motivation for coming here and what you hope to achieve.**

The reasons of me to choose to study at this university are quite simple. First of all, MSc is necessary for the future due to the fierce competition in the society. So the tertiary education is a plus for young person. Secondly, I will have more opportunity to get a higher position in a company after learning the methodologies of programme and project management, comparing to my past time. Last but not least, learning makes me happy. This means that studying at [name of the university] and making friends here are fabulous things in my life, and this would be a great memory in my life. In conclusion, I want to study here to get promotion and enjoy my life. I dream a lot about the life in [name of the university] and I do hope I can learn the practical knowledge here. Then, I want to know and analyze things in different ways and angles. Moreover, I hope I can find a good job after learning and acknowledging all the contents in this major.

This question was strategic in encouraging the student to explain the main reasons to study in the UK and at her chosen institution. We learn plenty about her motivation as well as her own understandings, needs and desires. She begins by articulating the value of cultural capital in society and the relevance of this in a young person's life. She reveals her inner motivation and joy for learning by stating that this contributes to her happiness; but this happiness is linked to her wish to make friends in the new university context. She also highlights her intention to learn practical skills throughout her future MSc. This PEPA thus offers an initial picture of Megan's expectations and hopes, based on her past experiences, and indicates how these intertwine with her motivation. In other words, this pedagogic activity functions as a mechanism to obtain an ecological picture of this student's life experiences whereby we can appreciate the impact which certain experiences (or elements of these) may have on this person (e.g. her notion of competitive society in China motivated her to leave home and study in the UK).

### Evaluation of this PEPA

I would normally set this task by asking one generic question such as ‘*write about yourself and why you are doing this course*’; and this would allow me to evaluate the students’ writing competences at the start of a pre-sessional. However, by turning this generic task into a PEPA, I formulated each question with the aim of guiding the writing process and encouraging students to write something about their motivation. Megan, for example, was able to express some critical thoughts which show how her motivation connects to a wide web of needs, hopes and experiences or, as Ushioda (2009) calls them, *contexts*.

With this PEPA, I, the teacher-researcher, gained an understanding of Megan’s motives for embarking upon this postgraduate experience whilst also learning some critical knowledge about Megan as a human being with her idiosyncratic traits and story. Crucially, understanding the tapestry of her motivation alongside her life experiences (e.g. fear of poor writing performance) allowed me, as a teacher, to respond ecologically. By ecologically, I mean that this information about Megan’s experiences, hopes and expectations, and how these influenced her motivation, made me alert and sensitive to her specific needs. In other words, seeing the connection or interdependence between Megan’s previous experiences and her present motivational wellbeing allowed me to understand more clearly her behaviour at that specific point in time.

### **Sample PEPA 2**

#### *Out-of-class activity: Learning about the students’ weekly experiences*

During a pre-sessional, I normally ask students to produce weekly writing to reflect on their learning and social life during each week. I tell them not to worry about academic conventions and that this is an opportunity to write in English freely without fretting about academic style, register and lexicon. I still find these activities conducive to useful feedback on various aspects of written expression, and I can also learn about how they are coping with the course. When I turned this activity into a PEPA, I formulated the following instructions:

### *Weekly writing task*

*Write about this past week. What did you like about your lessons? What did you dislike about your lessons? What did you like or dislike about your life outside the classroom? Share what you want and write as much as you want.*

Here is a sample answer (from Xiaoxin) to the above instructions:

I felt upset because I realized how my poor oral English was. That's true, I know how smart I am in Chinese, but I am really stupid in English. I cannot adequately express myself well in English, therefore I can only choose very simple words and sentences to communicate, even though when I have complex emotion and deep thought.

Besides, I feel that my poor oral English make me become a rather boring and dull person. Although I can understand some jokes, I cannot find a right way to respond in English just choose to smile or don't say anything. I really don't want to be that! In addition, on Friday, a group of young people organised a party at the residence next door, they called me to join them when I passed by and glanced at them. I just refused them because I had no idea how to respond to them, at the same time I was afraid they would be unfriendly when they see me communicate with difficulty. Then I heard someone called me 'CHING CHONG'. You know it sounded like a kind of prank, but for me, a Chinese, it sounded more like discrimination, which made me feel uncomfortable and angry. Nevertheless, I was disappointed soon when I found I didn't know how to fight back. That's why I felt depression this week.

As for my pre-sessional classes, I find it is quite difficult for me to organize and conclude the information and resources of essay I collected, which took lots of my energy and time. Thus, for next four weeks, I am determined to improve my English as fast as I can, both in speaking and writing. I hope I can have a huge change after the pre-sessional courses!

This PEPA allowed me to learn plenty about Xiaoxin's academic experience on PS6. I discovered how her UK life was unfolding and which critical episodes may directly impact on her personal and academic wellbeing. This writing shows that she began the week with a low appreciation of her speaking skills, leading to her feeling 'stupid'. She recognised the struggle to function as a social and academic being in another language thus highlighting her frustration for not being able to express herself as well as she could in her mother tongue.

This self-evaluation of her linguistic competence was exacerbated by the emotional impact it was having on her. She was sensitive to how other people in the UK perceived her inability to communicate adequately which clearly affected her adjustment to the new life. These negative

feelings and perceptions about her language competences affected her so deeply that she even used the word ‘depression’ after describing herself as a ‘dull person in English’.

### Evaluation of this PEPA

This PEPA shows several factors which affected Xiaoxin’s enthusiasm to achieve her academic goals (e.g. fear of not being sufficiently good). Also, her motivation to live happily in the new country was compromised by her interactions with other people in the new social context. Crucially, as a teacher, when I read this PEPA, I immediately offered Xiaoxin advice about the UK law in relation to hate crime and signposted her to people who may be able to assist further. In other words, I was drawn to the ethical duty that we somehow fulfil by welcoming these students in our country and universities.

Therefore, this PEPA, like many other weekly reflective PEPAs, served multiple purposes: a) give the student an opportunity to write in English in a relaxed manner without academic restrictions whilst still receiving feedback on written expression; b) gain an understanding of the student’s perception of PS6 and progress; c) identify the student’s motivation either in explicit statements or, more implicitly, in relation to the experiences and thoughts shared; d) offer me the opportunity to provide support on issues that may go beyond the academic remit but which may easily affect personal and academic wellbeing.

For reasons of space, I cannot share more sample PEPAs here, but I wish to add that during PS6 I did not use EP just as methodology to learn more about these students’ motivation. Although my learning about their motivation allowed me to inform my teaching, and therefore ensure the best possible experience for them, I felt that by using EP to solely fulfil my research interests would have been selfish. Rather, I wanted the students to learn about EP to explore their *own* puzzles.

Therefore, when I realised that, as the Reading and Writing tutor, I was expected to devote a few hours a week to the teaching of British Culture, I formally introduced the students to EP as a research practice and showed them some strategies to implement the approach within PS6. This is

what I call *explicit EP*. I encouraged them to identify puzzles they may have about their new life in the UK and therefore ensured that these hours about ‘British Culture’ addressed specific topics which were meaningful to the students as opposed to making arbitrary choices just because I was the teacher. Here I share some sample British culture puzzles:

**Megan:** Why do people in the UK like make appointment to do nearly everything?

**Alita:** Why don’t Chinese students make new friends with the western students in the UK?

**David:** Why do we always write essays and papers instead of taking exams in the UK?

Students used a variety of PEPAs to explore these puzzles including interviews, google searches, classroom discussions. After gaining some practice exploring their puzzles about British culture, I encouraged them to identify academic puzzles. These are some examples:

**Amber:** why is critical thinking very important to write an essay?

**May:** why does academic writing need formal expressions?

**David:** Why are our own opinions required to be supported by references?

They explored these puzzles through web searches, interviewing students from other class groups, and doing mini debates in class. I do not share the details of how the students explored their own puzzles because they do not pertain to my own investigation of motivation here described. However, I thought I would give the reader a flavour of the rich and diverse experiences which arose from enabling these students to *do EP*. Also, I should point out that EP did have some form of impact on these students’ motivation (this will be discussed in the findings chapters, 7, 8, 9, and 10).

### 5.12.2 Summary of data sources from PS6 (Phase-1)

In sum, the data from this phase of the study came from:

- 1) **PEPAs:** weekly pedagogic activities which I turned into investigative tools;
- 2) **Teacher-researcher journal:** where I recorded all my daily post-lesson reflections and reflexive notes,
- 3) **Audio-recordings of the lessons:** these supported my writing of journal entries,

- 4) **EP reflections:** these were short voluntary reflections I asked the students to write at the end of each EP-related activity. However, these did not form part of PS6 pedagogy and therefore I did not chase students if they did not produce these.

In the next section, I discuss the fieldwork I completed with my focal participants *after* PS6.

### **5.13 Fieldwork in Phase-2: *Interviewing***

Initially I had planned to conduct three rounds of interviews after PS6:

- *October* (start of MSc), an opportunity to reflect on PS6 and gain further insights into students' motivation prior to their arrival in the UK and throughout PS6,
- *January*, an opportunity to chart the evolution of their motivation throughout the MSc
- *May/June* (end of MSc), an opportunity to gain a fuller picture of their motivational trajectories and final impact of the MSc.

The interviews generally took place in a classroom at the university where the students were based. However, following Mann's (2016, p63) advice, I always asked the students to suggest alternative places. Sometimes they chose a local café or restaurant but we always selected areas without much noise or distractions. This variety was to ensure that they were fully comfortable with the arrangements (Palmieri, 2019).

#### **5.13.1 The first interview**

In the first interview I asked my students to draw a motigraph to represent their motivation to study and live in the UK from the time before their arrival and throughout PS6. Like in the preliminary study, I first drew my motigraph charting my motivation to do a PhD. This served two purposes, showing each participant what I expected them to do, and creating 'interview' rapport as they took a keen interest in my PhD motigraph which generated various discussions. When they were clear about what to do, I would give them time to think and draw their motigraph, and when ready, ask them to tell me the story and reasons behind the 'ups and downs' of their motigraphs.

#### **5.13.2 Transcription**

My plan was to describe each interview in its entirety, and I had envisioned to listen to the recordings several times (Richards, 2003). I began transcribing each interview the day after each meeting. This was to ensure that I could send my transcription to my participants within a week or

so from the actual interview day. I failed to meet this goal many times as the process turned out to be more laborious than expected. However, I was very pleased with the quality of the audio and never encountered the issue of unintelligible sound. The main problem, at times, concerned my misunderstanding of the interviewee's pronunciation. I devised a simple set of conventions for transcription because my interviews were not intended for fine-grained discourse analysis (see Appendix 1).

From the experience of the first interview transcription, I noted the complexity of transcribing substantial 'broken' English (i.e. utterances with numerous false starts and unclear repetitions or phrases). I should highlight that this was something both myself and the interviewees did. This realisation was captured in my post-interview journal reflections below. Throughout the first interview with Megan I was concerned about this 'broken' English and how I would interpret and represent it:

I came away from the interview feeling very tired. I noticed a dual action in my engagement with the student-participant. This was due to my awareness that I was going to interpret and analyse that data at some point. My main concern was that the student often produced utterances with so much broken English that I was worried I may be in a very uncomfortable position when analysing and 'interpreting' that data. I therefore made a lot of effort in the process of managing my internal frustration knowing that many sections of that data were unclear and likely to produce 'messy' interpretations leading to more confusion than clarity.

(TRJ/290917)

Therefore, like Harvey (2015), I chose to work on the meaning embedded in the interactions rather than transcribing word by word. I decided to write *interpretive summaries* for each interaction in the interview. When doing this, I listened several times to capture the meaning and write it down but preserving, where possible, students' phrasing. For instance, Megan described her writing as 'babyish' and 'out of logic' which I reported in the summary. See below as an illustration of interpretive summary.





### Interview summary

These are the key sections of our first interview. Please read the summary of our interactions and let me know if you agree or disagree with any statement. You can tell me about your thoughts at our next interview, or you can send me an email – it is your choice.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> part: talking about your time before arriving in the UK**

- I told you about my time as a teacher before coming to Warwick and saying what I do now at Warwick explaining my various identities as teacher and PhD student.
- I showed you my motigraph for doing a PhD (I reiterated that I am interested in your motivation to study in the UK – hence my example of my motigraph of my motivation for doing a PhD) – I explained the scale of this motivation graph (low, medium, high) – explaining the ups and downs of my own motivation to do a PhD.
- I gave you some time to think about your motivation before arriving in Warwick, during and right after.

#### **You drew your line graph**

- You explained your motigraph and started off saying your motivation in June was a little low because of your tooth problem. You couldn't manage to make an appointment with a good dentist therefore you were not in a good mood, and therefore you didn't think much about 'studying in the UK'.

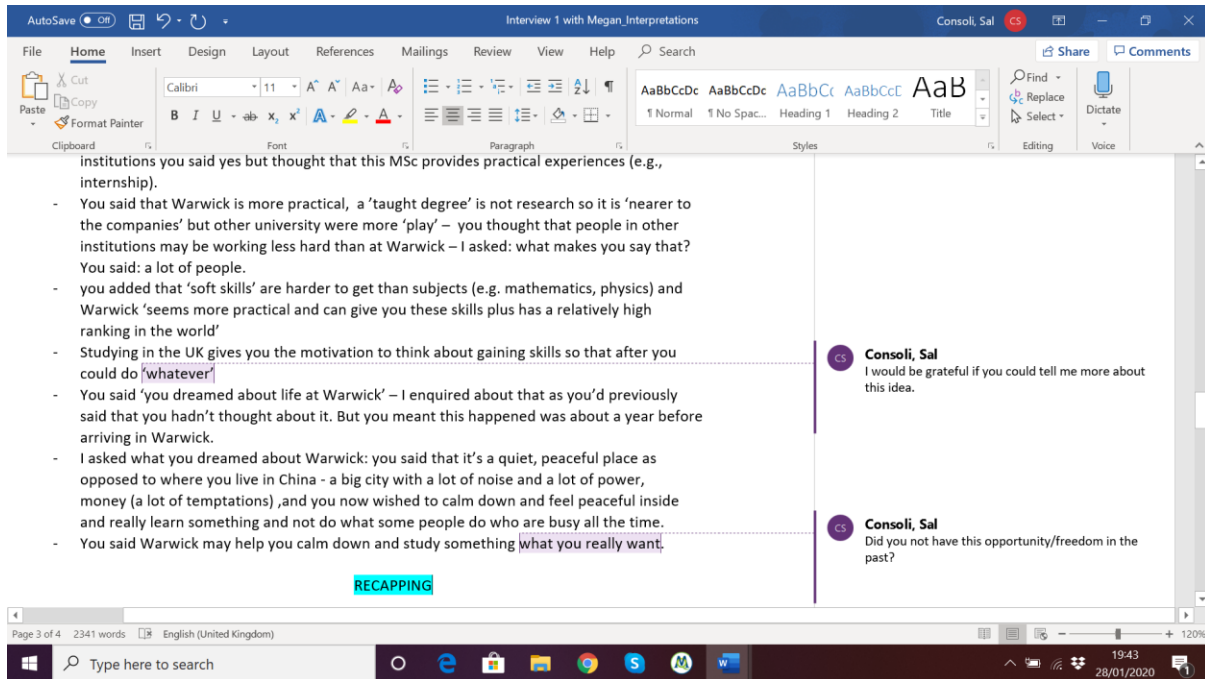
(...)

#### **You re-adjusted the motigraph (identifying specific dates)**

- 1<sup>st</sup> August was not a very good time for you as you tried to write an essay and looked up some info on how to write an essay but actually took you a lot of time. Also, you mentioned a friend in China – this friend had completed an undergraduate course in Canada. You wanted to practise with her. However, you didn't have enough time to do this as you were busy preparing for the trip to the UK. You were not happy with your essay because your essay writing seemed 'babyish' – your friend said this. Also, you felt your essay was 'out of logic' and other people may not understand it. So, your motivation for studying in the UK went down and you even thought that you could've done a postgraduate in China and not struggled in an English-speaking country. However, you said that although the UK is hard you decided to study here in order to spend less time completing a postgrad course.

(Megan-Interview-1)

I usually sent the interpretive summary as a word document to the student within three days, or at times, a week later. In this document I would include some messages on the margins highlighting those sections which may need clarifying or elaborating at the following interviews (see figure 5.6 as an example).



**Figure 5.6 sample reflections on interpretive summary**

Therefore, given the above considerations about transcription and interpretations, I revised the planned rounds of interviews illustrated in 6.12 because it became clear that I would be conducting several more interviews. In the end I completed approximately 6 interviews per participant with each lasting around one hour. These interviews can be classified as follows:

- a) **Primary data interview:** I elicited data for the first time;
- b) **Follow-up interview:** I elicited elaboration on a previous interview by sharing, examining the interpretive summary and/or listening to the recording on F4, the audio-transcript software I used alongside MAXQDA (further details in chapter 6);
- c) **Narrative-checking interview:** I used all interview and PS6 data to build a story about each participant. This was my own *meaning-making* and *narrative knowing* approach and I provide more details about this in Chapter 6. For now, it suffices to say that I arranged some interviews with each participant to check whether they liked and agreed with the interpretations I wrote about them and their motivation.

### **5.13.3 Interviewing as social co-construction**

'Interview talk is inevitably a co-construction between the interviewer and the interviewee' (Mann, 2016, p50), therefore, interviews are conceptualised as interactional events where the interviewer and the interviewee jointly create meaning. Notions such as the *interviewer neutrality* and the *uncontaminated* nature of knowledge have been critiqued substantially (e.g. Gubrium and Holstein, 2012; Rapley, 2001). Recently, the spotlight has been put on the interviewer's positioning in the interview processes, and how this may affect such process(s) and the data (Baker, 2004, p163). Therefore, interviews are now viewed as social interactions where meaning is co-constructed by all involved in this social practice (Garton & Copland, 2010).

My students seemed very relaxed, often trying to involve me in their talk even when I tried not to interfere. For example, during interview-2, when Megan was criticising her knowledge of British culture and I asked '*but you certainly knew a lot about the UK before arriving here?*' she replied '*well hmm is that a serious question?*', at which point, we both burst out laughing. This led to an interesting opening about her perceived lack of understanding of UK culture prior to PS6, and I presume that if I had not responded to her question with warm laughter, she may have not continued with the same in-depth answers she offered. On another occasion, she reviewed an interpretive summary and commented on the expression '*like an 18-year-old girl*' referring to her enthusiasm to be on PS6, and she asked me to delete that because she thought she had not said it. I chose to play the interview recording where she said this which ultimately led to Megan revealing her concern that this may not be relevant to my work. Had I not decided to play the recording she probably would have not said anything about her concerns about that particular topic or her fear that her ideas may not be relevant to my PhD. Thus, my active participation in these interactions was conducive to an enriched interview practice.

### **5.13.4 Interview Feedback**

After completing each interview, I sent the students an email asking to give me some feedback on the experience and used our former teacher-student relationship to say that it was now their turn to give me feedback and help me improve my interviewing skills. This resulted in insightful comments. Here are some sample extracts:

1. The whole atmosphere is smooth and relaxed (compared to first interview, some previous unclear points are clarified in order not to cause misunderstanding and confusion)
2. When you have some unclear points about my opinions, this is a good way to make me give you an example to elaborate them
3. The more interviews, the deeper opinions and understanding create

Alita's feedback on 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview

I feel you're really a good listener. The record you wrote corresponded very closely to my first time thoughts. What's more, you could catch many details I mentioned. It was good. To sum up, I like your second interview and I don't feel there was anything bad.

Xiaoxin's feedback on 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview

Sometimes students preferred to give me feedback at the end of an interview. As well as the above useful feedback from the students, I gave myself some form of feedback each time I listened to an interview for the first time. I categorised these as '*reflections whilst listening*'. Here are some illustrations:

Interesting point here is that while he was talking about his motivation to do a degree in the UK, as opposed to doing one in China, I resisted my temptation to mention whether he'd chosen the UK because of the length of the programme (fact I had learnt from the previous interviews with other students).

Interview-2/David

I also noticed during this interview that at times when I was not able to grasp the meaning of an utterance or the flow of ideas, rather than pulling a puzzled face and asking to repeat, I would ask for specific examples – this would normally lead me to an understanding that there and then I would summarise to seek confirmation from the student. If after this I felt still unsure about the meaning of the specific interaction then I would elicit more details/examples to aid my understanding – perhaps the challenge in all this is keeping a clear, happy face that shows that one is following (to not discourage the interviewee) while inside I may be twisting with frustration for not accessing the full meaning.

Interview-2/David

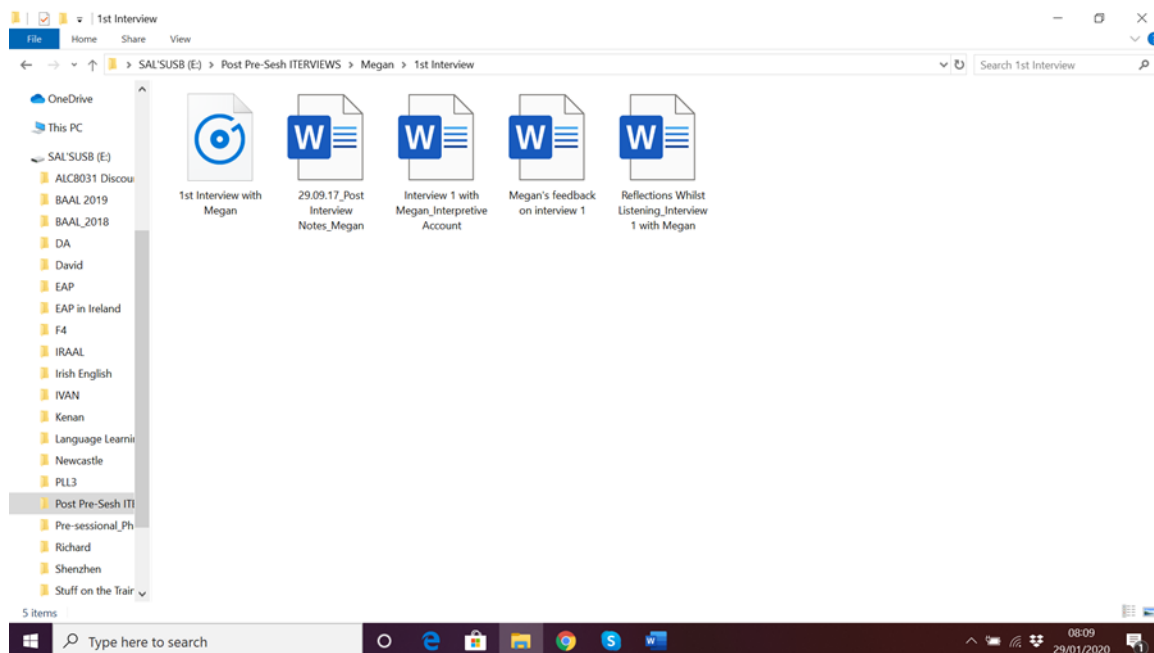
### 5.13.5 Summary of data sources from Phase-2

Therefore, the data collected during phase-2 of the study stemmed from the following sources:

1. **Interviews**
2. **Students' feedback** on interviews
3. **Post-interview notes** (written by me after the students left)
4. **Whilst-listening reflections** (written by me while listening for the first time)

I should note that I chose to archive all relevant data from the above four sources, including journal entries, into folders which I created for each individual interview within each student's folder.

Figure 5.7 offers an illustration:



**Figure 5.7 file categories in a sample participant-folder**

So far, I have illustrated the research methods which I chose for each phase of the study, discussing how I implemented these. I now turn to a discussion of the ethical considerations sustaining both my practitioner research, in Phase-1, and the interviewing approach, in Phase-2.

## **5.14 Ethics in Applied Linguistics**

Much of the ethics literature in applied linguistics centres on concerns articulated by *best practices* protocols (e.g. Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), The British Association for Applied Linguistics' (BAAL) *Recommendations on good practice in Applied Linguistics*) (De Costa, 2015, p46). Nonetheless, these protocols remain broad in their scope known as *macroethics* (e.g. Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Kubanyiova (2008, p504) suggests that these macroethical guidelines be strengthened by considerations which go beyond the core principles of respect and avoidance of harm. She suggests addressing everyday ethical dilemmas that arise from the specific roles and responsibilities that researchers and research participants adopt in specific research contexts. This type of ethical governance has been named *microethics* and is increasingly seen as crucial to ensure ethical research (Ngo, Bigelow & Lee, 2014). Importantly, though, the notion of micro-ethics needs to be understood alongside the concept of virtue(s) whereby a researcher asks themselves important ethical questions about their research participants, sponsor, research conclusions and dissemination (Pring, 2001). Below I show how I addressed both macro and micro ethical matters.

### **5.14.1 Recruiting participants**

At the end of week 2 of PS6, all students in my class group were given an information sheet (appendix 2) which outlined the key research aims with a specific focus on the use of EP thus highlighting that PS6 material and coursework as well as lesson notes and recordings would count as data. They were also told that if they wished to continue to support my PhD work after PS6, they may be invited to take part in a series of interviews throughout their MSc programme. The students had the weekend of week 2 to read and process the information sheet and ask questions about the project the following Monday (week3). They were then given the consent form and a couple of days to look at this (appendix 3) and confirm if this made sense, and whether they had any questions.

It is crucial to note here that both the information sheet and the consent form clearly stated that their voluntary participation could be terminated at any point in time during PS6 or after and that this possible decision would not affect them as students on PS6 or on their MSc. I reiterated this point in class when discussing the aims of the project and their possible involvement. As I argue in Consoli and Aoyama (2019), drawing on Lamb (2016), even when participants choose to join a research project, especially a longitudinal one like mine, it is important to run regular checks to

ensure they are still happy to participate or whether their circumstances may have changed. Therefore, during phase 2, I kept asking the students whether they were happy with their involvement in the project and if they wished to continue. As a result, three students decided to stop half-way through the MSc year because they did not have the time for this research engagement.

#### **5.14.2 Anonymity, confidentiality and identity**

I ensured that anonymity and confidentiality were kept if the students wished so (as advised by the IRB); however, I gave them the option of maintaining their identity as integral as possible by keeping their first name in my work, if they ticked the relevant box. Also, I ensured understanding of the information sheet and consent forms by writing these in as simple English as possible. I had previously asked my supervisor and other fellow PhD researchers (two of them being Mandarin speakers) to check the wording and clarity of the text. I tried to keep the language simple as recommended by De Costa (2015, p248); however, these students had an IELTS averaging 6; therefore, this did not appear as critical a problem as it would be with lower-level English users.

#### **5.14.3 Prioritising the students' needs**

Although I did not start audio-recording PS6 lessons immediately (as this would depend on obtaining consent from the students), I began, from day-1, to turn my normal pedagogic activities into PEPAs (as discussed in 5.12) and started storing all PS6-related material (e.g. formative feedback and journal entries about episodes of classroom life). I did this with the caveat that if the students refused to provide consent, I would not use any data related to those expressing such a wish. The main reason why I decided not to tell the students about my PhD on day one of PS6 was because I wished to prioritise the programme's academic outcomes and place the focus on establishing good first impressions and forge a sound teacher-student rapport.

I did not want the students to see me as someone interested to teach them with the sole aim of collecting PhD data thereby disregarding their needs to complete PS6; after all, I was an EAP teacher by profession. Also, I felt that it would be useful to observe any changes in their behaviour between the time when they were unaware of my PhD work and the time when I may be audio-recording lessons and storing pedagogic material as data. As mentioned above, the teacher-

researcher journal was of paramount importance in this respect, as it was the main tool where all such observations were recorded and revisited by myself at the end of every day of PS6.

#### **5.14.4 The concept of time**

Much reflection revolves around the notion of time availability and how research participants might be affected by their involvement in the research, as they could have 'far more important things to do and think about' than joining a research project (Holliday, 2015, p56). As far as PS6 was concerned, there was no real issue because, thanks to the EP principle of integrating pedagogy and research through PEPAs, the students did not have to do anything 'extra' as research participants. Although on three occasions during PS6, I asked the students to write short reflective statements on their experience of EP, this was not compulsory. This notion of time availability became more complex when the students progressed onto the MSc.

De Costa (2015) suggests that researchers should be mindful of the time allocated to interviews or other strategies with a view to keeping the process as little time-consuming as possible. I cannot admit to calculating the time to complete tasks such as the motigraph or the interviews because this would vary depending on the student. However, I was vigilant of time and would constantly check if the students wished to continue with the next stage of the interview. This attitude was useful. On one occasion, for example, May explained that she needed to leave by a certain time to join a gym class. On another occasion, I noted a degree of strain in Velika, who seemed tired on that day, therefore I finished the interview earlier without covering all the ground anticipated but waited for a later interview opportunity.

#### **5.14.5 Participant benefits**

To show appreciation and generate some kind of 'benefits' for the students, I offered a compensation of £10 for each post-PS6 interview as well as 30 minutes of tutorial-like interactions at the end of each interview or other convenient time for them. These tutorial-like interactions were intended to offer the students an opportunity to voice their academic concerns, doubts or questions with someone in whom they may have academic trust. However, I made it clear both in writing and orally that I did not wish to provide advice which might conflict with the guidance from their new academic department. Rather, these were opportunities for them to articulate their thoughts with a sympathetic listener who could help them make sense of their own thinking or offer alternative views on academic matters (e.g. how to prepare a dissertation proposal). With only a



few exceptions, most students took up the opportunity of these tutorial-like exchanges at the end of each interview. They often had questions about their coursework and dissertation.

#### **5.14.6 Methodology chapter summary**

I began this chapter by illustrating my adherence to interpretivism which supported my inquiry throughout. I outlined the pre-sessional context where I conducted practitioner research using EP and briefly examined the MSc programme which my participants completed after PS6. I continued with a discussion of the research design for both phase-1 and phase-2, which was followed by an account of my fieldwork to illustrate how I implemented EP and how I conducted the interviews. I concluded with the ethical considerations which shaped my conduct at both macro and micro levels.

In the next chapter, I discuss my analytical approach and offer a detailed audit trail of my procedures.

## Chapter 6: Analytical Approach

### 6.1 Introduction

I begin by illustrating the path which led to my analytical model drawing on traditions of narrative analysis. I then offer a detailed account of my procedures using MAXQDA, a software that facilitated my reflexivity and interpretations throughout.

### 6.2 Laying the foundations

During my first year of the PhD, I was required to submit an upgrade panel report with an outline of the envisioned approaches to data collection and analysis. I had already completed a preliminary study, which entailed some data analysis. I also engaged in conversations with senior researchers, and whilst grateful for their insights to my questions about data analysis, these generated even more confusion. Below is one sample reflection from my research journal:

I just talked to a final year PhD colleague about my dilemma for finding an analytical model. He advised me on breaking the data and putting it back together and playing with it. My main dilemma with the analytical model is that I feel the need to read about other projects but often they don't really offer a clear and transparent step-by-step account of what they did to achieve the analysis approach adopted. At times, they do but I can easily see that it may not work the same way for me. Maybe I just need to start doing it and decide along the way whilst 'playing' with the data.

Research-journal 11-05-17

### 6.3 Towards clarity

When reading Bazeley (2013, p10) who recommends to 'be informed by methodology, but not a slave to it', I began to grasp that methods may be more of an ex post facto experience which one recreates as they go through what they did to arrive where they got (Sandelowski, 2008, p11). After all, one may need to 'bend the methodology to the peculiarities of the setting' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p5). Therefore, I found some relief in the understanding that 'no abstract processes of analysis, no matter how eloquently named and finely described, can substitute the skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, diligence, and work of the qualitative analyst' (Patton, 2002, p432). To this list I should like to add flexibility, as well. When I encountered Barkhuizen's (2011) notion of *narrative knowledging*, a form of sense-making through storytelling, I decided to draw on narrative inquiry; however, my procedures were not set in stone. These evolved as my reading about narrative approaches developed alongside my engagement with my participants.

#### **6.4 Narrative inquiry**

Doing narrative inquiry means documenting humans' stories to make sense of human behaviour (Murray, 2009). Therefore, stories or narratives, and more specifically, the 'configuration' (Polkinghorne, 1988, p150) and sense-making of them (Bruner, 1990) allow us to understand people's experiences (Duff and Bell, 2002, p209). Furthermore, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p2) draw on Dewey's concept of *experience* emphasising that experience is 'both personal and social'. In other words, people need to be understood within the specific social context(s) where their behaviour is rooted, a notion echoed by Ushioda's (2009) *person-in-context relational view* of motivation. Therefore, experience is not static; rather, it is fluid and one specific experience will connect with or lead to another one in a continuous evolution. This understanding of narratives, mediated through the fluid evolution of experience(s), tallied well with my research aim to understand the trajectories of my learners' motivation throughout their year in the UK.

#### **6.5 Narrative analysis**

Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes between 'analysis of narratives' and 'narrative analysis'. The former refers to the conventional thematic analysis which entails a search for codes and patterns that ultimately become themes. On the other hand, 'narrative analysis' consists in examining the data, whether in story-form or not (Barkhuizen, 2016), with a view to transforming it into a 'coherent storied whole' whereby the outcome of the analysis is the *story*. However, while the story is the process of analysis i.e. 'writing as analysis' (Benson, 2018), this story product can be analysed further through thematic analysis; therefore, the researcher revisits the configured story looking for specific themes and categories. The latter is the approach I chose; in other words, I turned the multiple data from each participant into a coherent story and then analysed this thematically to extrapolate the key insights into their motivation.

A recent example of this approach is Ngo's (2018) study about a teacher's L2 writing cognition development. Ngo collected data from interviews, institutional artefacts (e.g. exam papers, textbooks) and policy documents. These multiple sources were then analysed and re-configured into a story which was then analysed thematically with a focus on the teacher's major cognition shifts. Ngo's article, however, does not offer step-by-step guidelines about this narrative analysis; this was probably due to journal restrictions on word count. Therefore, in order to inform my approach, I drew on Benson (2013, 2018), a leading proponent of 'writing as analysis'.

## **6.6 My Analytical model**

I now illustrate the steps and rationale which led to my ultimate analytical model, and how I capitalised on MAXQDA, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) Software, which was compatible with my transcription software, F4.

### **6.6.1 Establishing a temporal structure**

Looking at the RQs with an eye to guiding my analysis, I used these to establish a macro-structure of the big narrative for each participant. Thus, in order to frame the longitudinal dynamic nature of my research I generated the following macro-structure:

**Life before the pre-sessional,**

**Life during the pre-sessional,**

**Life after the pre-sessional** (with separate sections October2017- March2018, April-August/September2018)

Defining this temporal macro-structure of the narrative helped me arrange the multitude of data (stemming from various sources) and represent it in a more orderly and meaningful fashion, and in a way which mirrored the longitudinal dynamic nature of each story.

### **6.6.2 Reading the data to write narratives**

In order to proceed with the writing of a coherent story for each participant, I adapted Benson's (2013) procedures:

- 1- I read the data several times and if unclear or unsure about any element of the dataset I retrieved further support from the audio-recordings, teacher-researcher journal or reflective/reflexive comments made throughout. Although I was familiar with the recordings because I listened to them for long hours, I found it confidence-building to listen to these even more during the narrative-writing process. The level of confidence a qualitative researcher can sense is, in my experience, noticeable when reading participants' data one can hear their voice with the exact features of their idiolect as well as elements of their social character. This resonates with Benson's process of working 'himself into the participant's way of thinking'.

2- In the next step, unlike Benson, I decided not to delete any data which was not 'relevant to the research issues'. Although I had an overarching research interest in motivation, I wished to cast some light on any element of my student-participants' life experiences which they foregrounded. This strategy was necessary to follow Dewey's notion of *experience* which consisted in unearthing the *social* and *personal* of each character in the narrative whilst representing the *continuity* of each experience i.e. the interdependence between past, present and future embedded within each story lived, re-lived, told, and re-told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This interdependence at temporal and social levels gave my approach its ecological perspective.

3- Whilst reading the data, I had the following questions in mind: **Who is the main character? Who are the other characters and how do these influence the main character? What are the events narrated?** These questions were useful in understanding even the smallest unit of data (e.g. a reflective statement about EP written during PS6) which, albeit not narrative in its elicitation or form, can be regarded as a narrative element containing certain details about the student-participant (the storyteller) and their experience (the narrative) and motivation (main object of the narrative). I read the data line-by-line identifying characters and events, trying to understand how these could be framed within a meaningful unit. The strategy to identify the boundaries consisted in characterising an event, a short story (Barkhuizen, 2016) with a beginning, middle and end.

After identifying these features, I would code the data with the above questions in mind. This procedure was not only useful to understand the narrative as I read through a multitude of fragmented data from different sources but also helpful in weaving a plot. Using a software helped in assigning more than one code or even comments on segments of data thereby preserving the idiosyncratic uniqueness of each data segment (further details about how this worked with MAXQDA below in 6.7).

4- After identifying short narratives in the data and conducting initial coding of these, I used MAXQDA to visualise the instances where the same code appeared and read these again several times. The process of comparing, contrasting and interrogating codes pertaining to

meaningful units of data was helpful in generating an interpretation that may answer my RQs about students' motivation but also offer a rich representation of the data. This is a form of weaving groups of meaningful units into thematically structured paragraphs (See 6.6.5 below).

- 5- The next step consisted in creating coherent texts by weaving the above short narratives into a coherent whole for each student-participant.

I now illustrate each step of this narrative analytical approach using MAXQDA.

### **6.7 MAXQDA: building the individual narratives**

As shown below in fig 6.1 MAXQDA afforded me the opportunity of browsing, interrogating and coding several documents per student simultaneously within the same browser tab (right-hand side). Below is an example of Alita's *interview1*, *interview2* interpretive accounts, her *Expectations composition* (a PS6 PEPA) and her *feedback to interview2*.

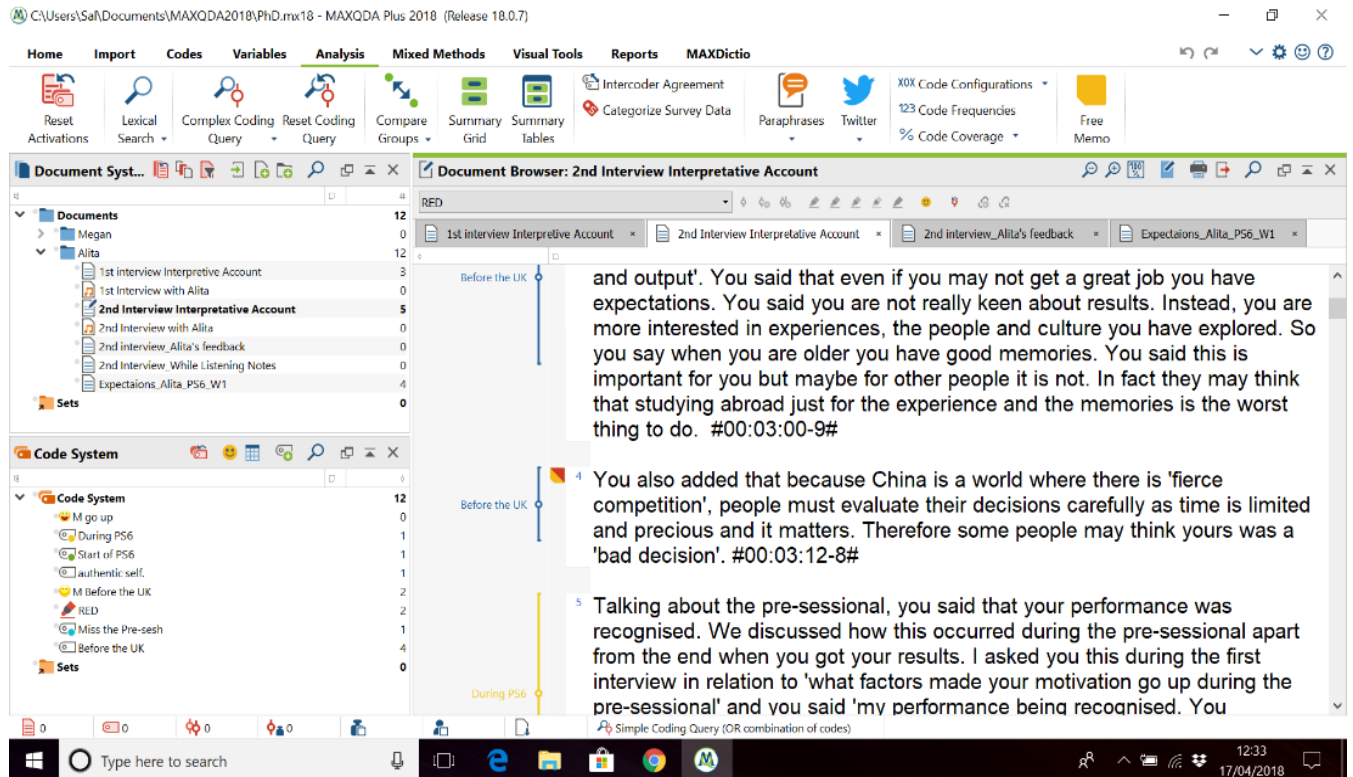


Figure 6.1 Sample MAXQDA interface

The above function not only allowed me to easily jump from document to document in order to explore the data generated on different occasions, but I was also able to create *document links* which would then function as hyperlinks between segments of data within the same document or between different documents. See figures 6.2 and 6.3 for an illustration. The segment highlighted in red is a phrase which Alita produced during the first interview. However, when listening to the interview and writing my interpretation of it, I could not understand the meaning embedded within this statement; thus, in interview 2 I asked Alita to elaborate. I created a link between these two interview documents which allowed me to connect the data about the same concept from different interviews – this was helpful while I was writing a coherent narrative drawing on 'fragmented' data from multiple datasets. See figure 6.3 for the elaboration which is linked to interview 2.

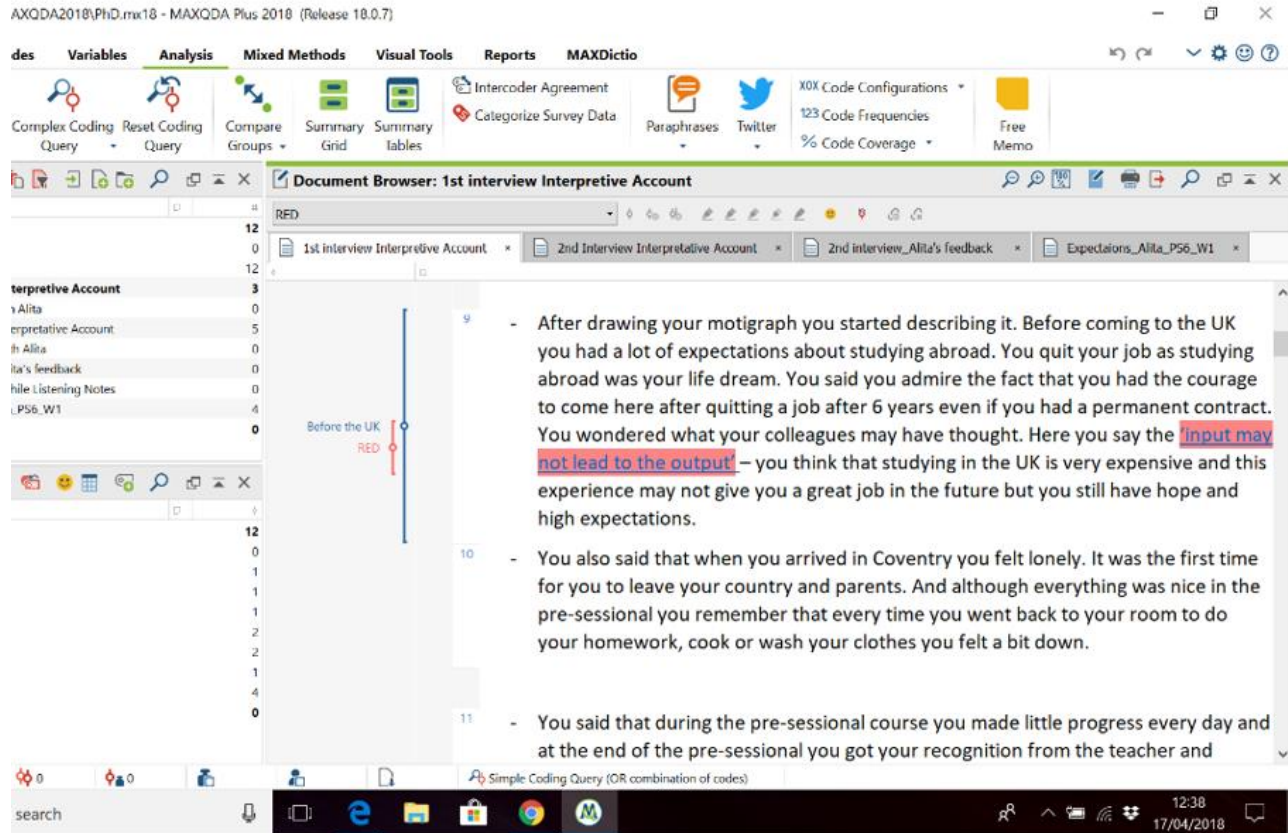
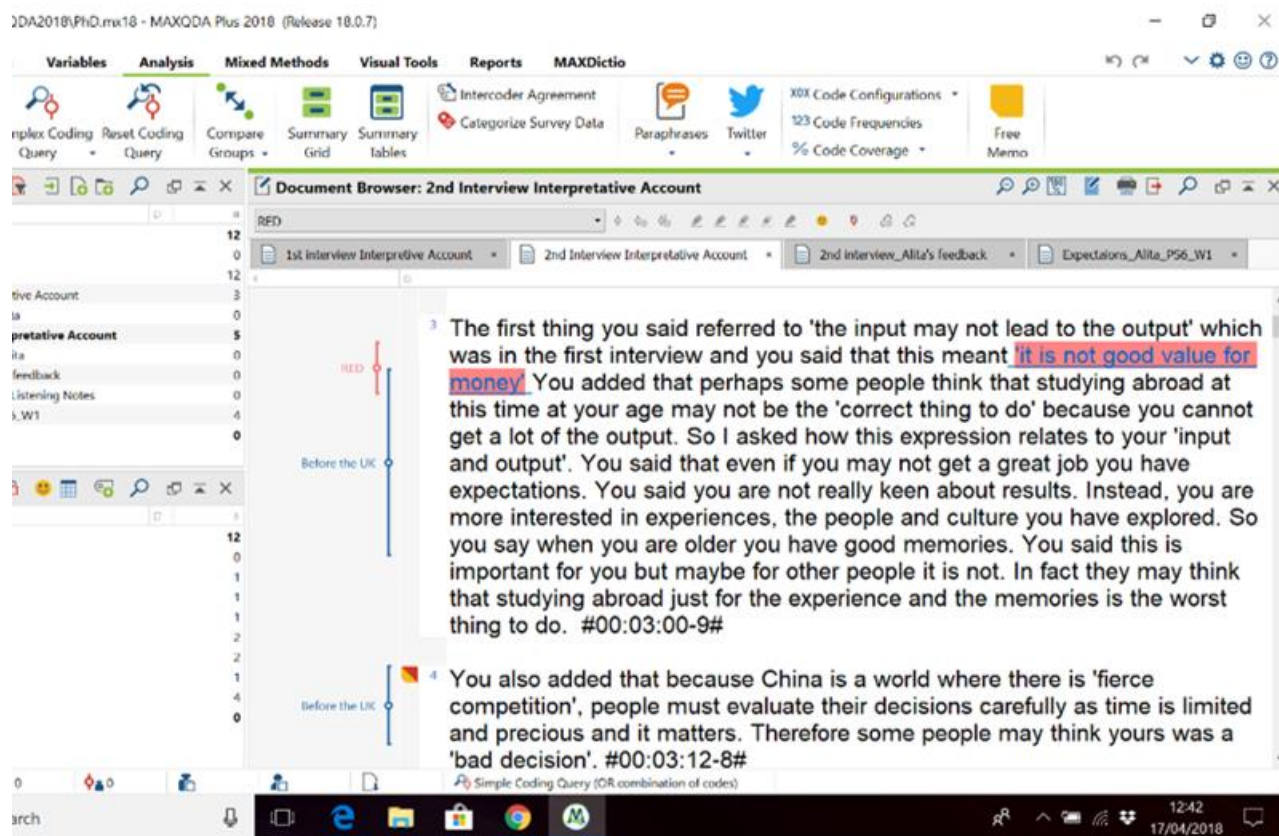


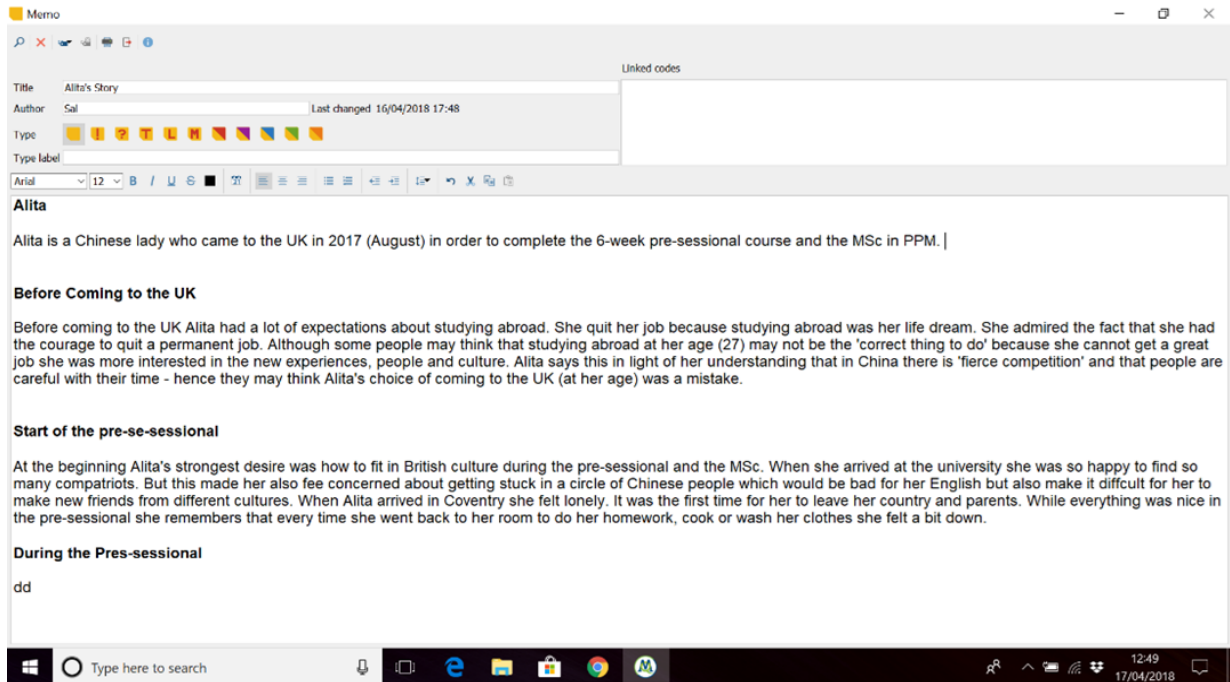
Figure 6.2 Sample interview-1





**Figure 6.3** Sample interview-2 ‘*elaboration of input and output*’

Furthermore, MAXQDA has a function called FreeMemo. I initially used this to have a space within the software interface to write the student-participant’s narrative alongside my sense-making of the data. Below (figure 6.4) is an example of Alita's emerging narrative. As mentioned earlier, I pre-determined the temporal structure of the narrative with the aim of organising the fragmented data into some orderly unified, coherent whole.



**Figure 6.4 Sample emerging narrative**

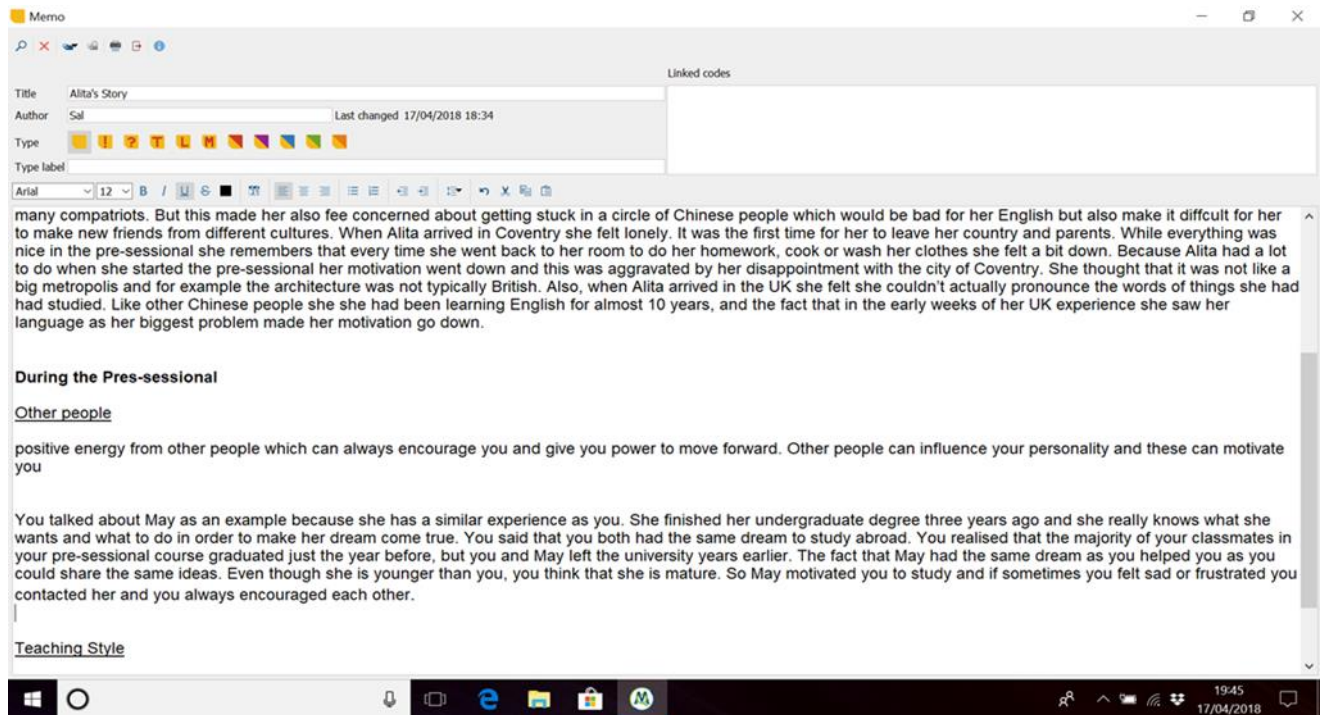
### **6.7.1 How I wrote the unified whole out of fragmented data**

During the first cycle of coding, I identified segments of data related to *the time before the UK*, *the beginning of PS6*, *during PS6*, *end of PS6*, and *the beginning of the MSc*. This was in line with the above temporal structure I had pre-defined before starting the *narrative knowledging* process with MAXQDA. While conducting this first cycle of coding I also identified other meaningful data, which were content-specific codes as opposed to time-specific codes. Some of these content codes were driven by my research interests (e.g. motivation, EP), other codes emerged from the data itself (e.g. Alita's concept of authentic Self). However, after realising that I could not easily juxtapose the FreeMemo text with the other documents for each participant I decided to create a 'new document' within MAXQDA which was even more helpful than the FreeMemo function because a 'new document' would work just like a word document therefore permitting easy writing and editing throughout the narrative-building processes.

### **6.7.2 Constructing meaningful units of narrative**

After several readings of each data source/file and a first cycle of coding, I proceeded with new readings with the aim of ensuring sound understanding of the emerging coding system. I would

then create temporary thematic headings to structure the bigger narrative within the temporal macro-structure. Fig 6.5 shows the macro-structure *During the Pre-sessional* and the emerging thematic unit *other people*.



**Figure 6.5 Sample thematic unit within temporal narrative structure**

After identifying a thematic unit (e.g. *other people*) and bringing together relevant data from different sources, these were condensed into one coherent paragraph (or more depending on length). Here is an example. From reading each document from Alita's case, it became clear that her narrative harboured a special place for the notion of Other(s) (e.g. classmates, people in China, the teacher). After identifying specific units of meaning around the concept of Other(s) within the temporal section *during PS6*, I brought together related segments of data:

#### Other people

You mentioned again the 'positive energy from other people which can always encourage you and give you power to move forward. Other people can influence your personality and these can motivate you'. (Interview 1)



I asked you to think of any example of when any of your classmates motivated you. You talked about May because she has a similar experience as you. She finished her undergraduate degree three years ago and she really knows what she wants and what to do in order to make her dream come true. You said that you both had the same dream to study abroad. You realised that the majority of your classmates in your pre-sessional course graduated just the year before, but you and May left the university years earlier. The fact that May had the same dream as you helped you as you could share the same ideas. Even though she is younger than you, you think that she is mature. So May motivated you to study and if sometimes you felt sad or frustrated you contacted her and you always encouraged each other. (Interview 2)

I asked if you could remember how May helped you exactly. You said that she 'emphasised your feeling' as she had a similar experience because you both wanted to become the 'better you' but you still needed time for this. You were always very anxious as you were afraid you did not have enough time but you then realised that when you are learning a new language you do need time and it is impossible to 'speed up' the process. (Interview 2)

After reading and interrogating these, I condensed them into the following:

Alita believes that positive energy from other people can always influence her personality and motivate her. For example, her classmate May influenced her because they shared similar experiences. They both had the same dream to study abroad. Also, like Alita, May finished her undergraduate degree a few years before coming to the UK - this was not the case for the majority of classmates in the group who had finished their undergraduate course just the year before. The fact that May had the same dream as Alita helped because they could share the same ideas. Even though May is younger, Alita thinks that she is mature. Also, May motivated her to study because if sometimes Alita felt sad or frustrated she contacted May and they always encouraged each other. May 'emphasised Alita's feeling about 'wanting to become a better Self' - they both wanted this. However, at times during the pre-sessional, Alita felt very anxious and afraid that she did not have enough time but then realised that when you are learning a new language you do need time and it is impossible to 'speed up the process'.

At times, with certain student-cases, after reading and gathering data segments relating to the same thematic unit, I noticed the emergence of a sub-theme within the theme. For instance, when coalescing David's data under the heading *Teaching Style*, I noted that some of these segments foregrounded the concept of *guidance* which stood out amongst the other ideas about teaching methodology. Thus, I decided to create a mini-theme about 'guidance' within the overall thematic unit *Teaching Style*.

### **6.7.3 Half-way through the narrative**

As the narrative shaped up, and given the fragmented nature of the data, I found myself in the position of encountering new segments of data which may relate to a section of the narrative already written. In this case I would interrogate the new segment of data to establish whether this

would add anything in terms of content or reflective/reflexive nuances to what was already in the fledgling narrative. Here I share an example. Whilst half-way through Alita's narrative, at the stage of narrating her experience *during PS6*, I found some new data concerning her experience *at the start* of PS6 (highlighted in blue).

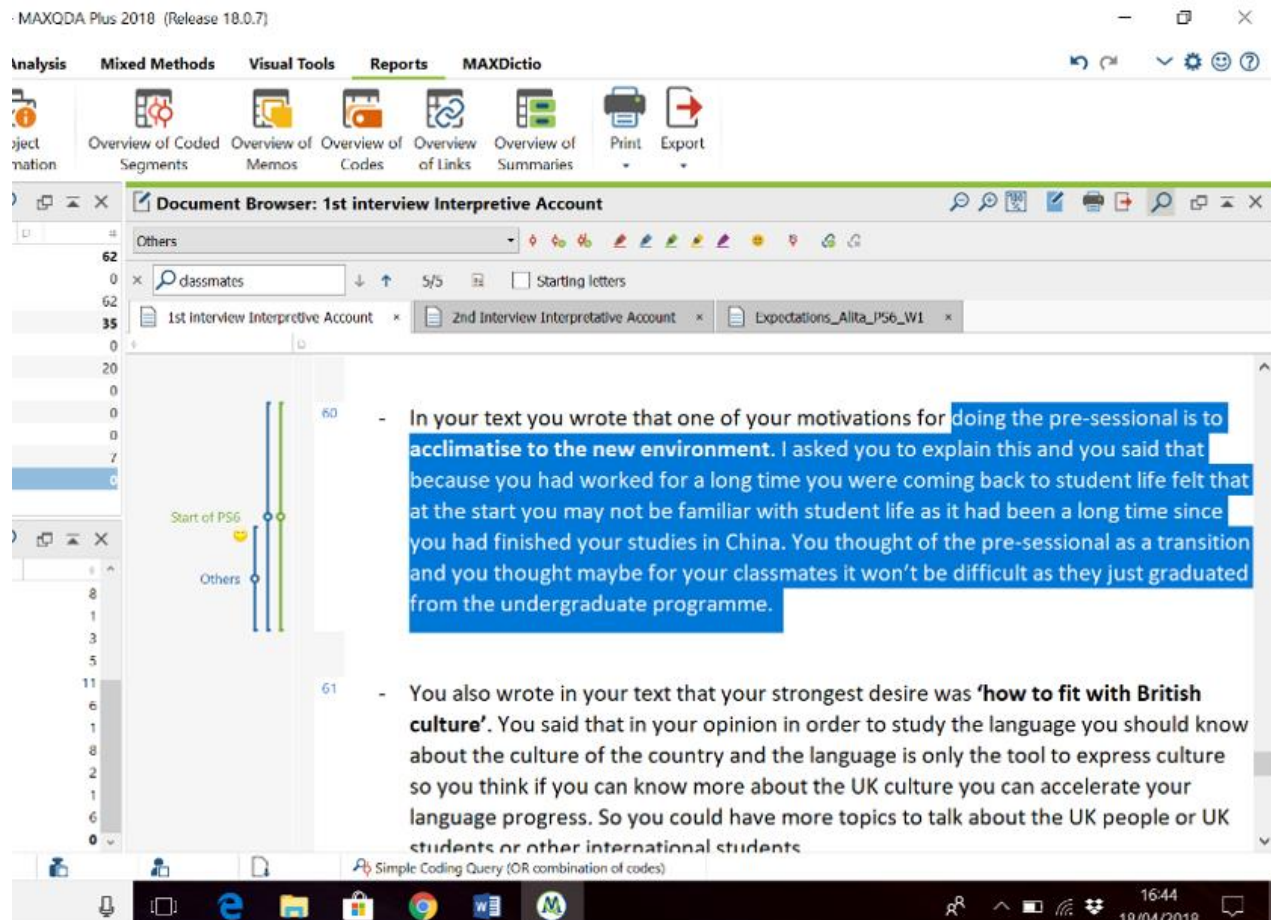
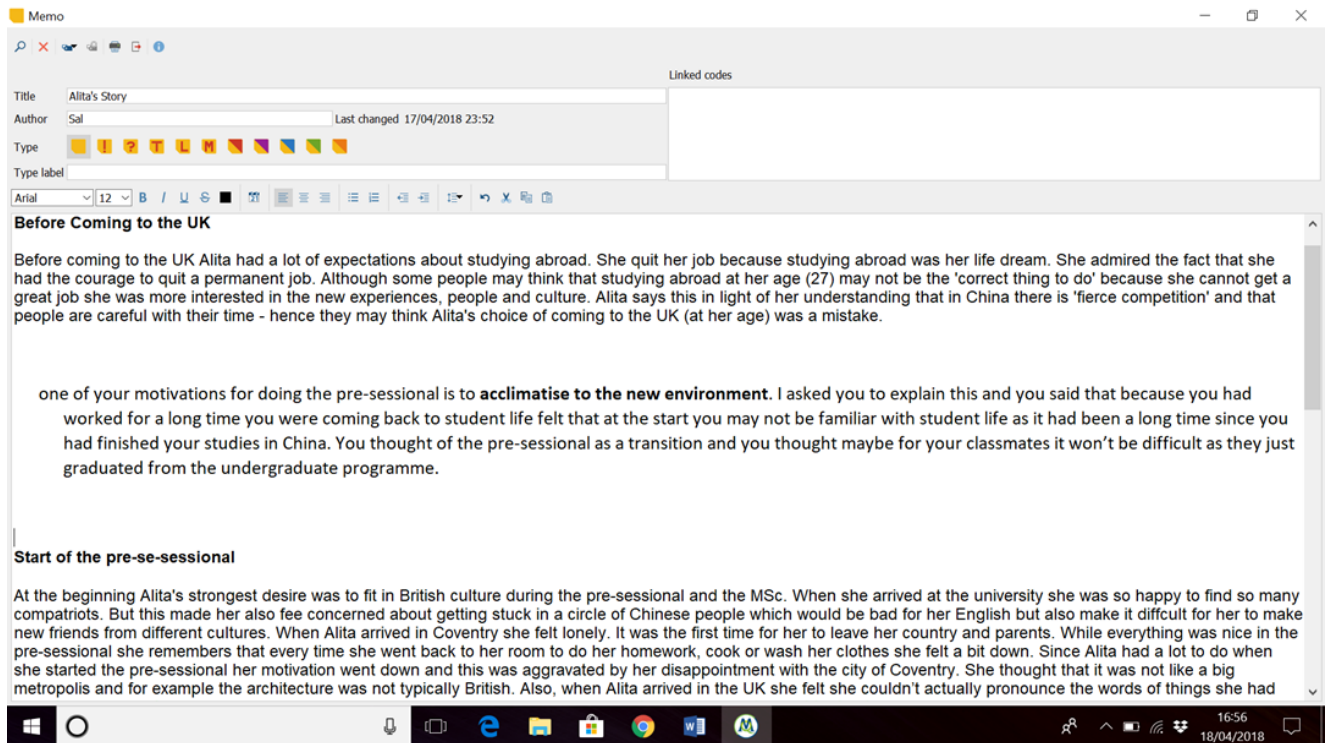


Figure 6.6 Half-way through Alita's narrative

Therefore, I copied and pasted this highlighted segment into the relevant thematic section of Alita's emerging narrative (fig 6.7):



**Figure 6.7 Merging new data into existing thematic unit**

Below I show how I integrated the new segment of data into the already formed thematic unit:

### **Before Coming to the UK**

Before coming to the UK Alita had a lot of expectations about studying abroad. She quit her job because studying abroad was her life dream. She admired the fact that she had the courage to quit a permanent job. Although some people may think that studying abroad at her age (27) may not be the 'correct thing to do' because she cannot get a great job she was more interested in the new experiences, people and culture. Alita says this in light of her understanding that in China there is 'fierce competition' and that people are careful with their time - hence they may think Alita's choice of coming to the UK (at her age) was a mistake.

(New segment)

one of your motivations for doing the pre-sessional is to acclimatise to the new environment. I asked you to explain this and you said that because you had worked for a long time you were coming back to student life felt **that at the start** you may not be familiar with student life as it had been a long time since you had finished your studies in China. You thought of the pre-sessional as a transition and you thought maybe for your classmates it won't be difficult as they just graduated from the undergraduate programme.

What I added to the story:

Alita saw the pre-sessional as an opportunity 'to acclimatise to the new environment'. Given the number of years between her last university experiences, she expected to be unfamiliar with 'student life'. Thus she saw the pre-sessional as a transition but she felt that this transition would not be as difficult for those classmates who had just finished their undergraduate degree.

The section highlighted in yellow indicates that I was not sure what was meant by 'at the start'. It could have been *at the start of PS6* or *before coming to the UK*. Thus, I listened back to the recording and made a memo to ask Alita during our next interview.

#### **6.7.4 Meshing not only words but concepts**

While writing about Alita's opinion on my teaching style I drew upon various segments of thematically relevant data including the excerpt below. In this case, however, I did not simply rewrite the data into a coherent whole thematic paragraph; in fact, by interpreting the data I was able to add some information to the 'episode' she described. I was able to do this because I was the *Other* actor of the same experience, which without my additional details, might not be fully clear to the reader.

What Alita reported:

You remembered an episode when I asked an open-class question and nobody answered so, because you knew that I wanted people to interact with me, and this was something that I asked of you many times, you noticed the atmosphere was a bit weird. However, I broke the ice by repeating 'I don't care many times' and gave you a second chance. #00:16:50-9# (Interview-2)

I integrated the above into the following and enriched it with details which Alita did not produce during the interview presumably because I told her that I remembered the specific classroom event.

Alita would describe Sal's teaching style as 'active' and illustrate it through the following example: one day Sal asked an open question and nobody answered so, because she knew that Sal wanted people to interact with him, and this was something that he had talked about many times, she noticed the atmosphere was a little weird. However, Sal broke the ice by saying 'I don't care' many times and gave the class a second chance. Sal said 'I don't care', for example, about the fact that the students' answers may be wrong. This sequence of 'I don't care' phrases was said in a funny raising voice and exaggerated facial expressions. Alita thought it was smart that Sal broke the embarrassment of silence and hesitation and used this special strategy to remind the students to interact with him. Alita could tell that Sal was a little sad about it but thought it was good humour.

Apart from coalescing factual details as in the above case, with some degree of interpretation, I also encountered cases where I openly and intentionally added an interpretive element to the story which came directly from my own voice not just as the researcher but also as the teacher-researcher, again, as the *Other* actor of the same scene. Below is an example. Under the thematic



unit of *Perfectionism* I merged not only Alita’s fragmented data from different sources but added some reflective/reflexive data coming from my own experience of this teacher-researcher journey with Alita. I did so with the aim of offering a fuller representation of the co-constructive nature of this pedagogical research project, the section highlighted in yellow is what I added:

Perfectionism

After some time in the pre-sessional, Alita realised that one needs to 'confess [their] errors and weaknesses' which, in her view, means 'that nobody is perfect' and 'people's energy is limited' so if you pay too much attention on accuracy maybe you then lose focus of the content of what you say. Everybody has weaknesses and nobody is good at everything, but becoming aware of such weaknesses and vulnerability can help move on. Therefore, she thought that if one adopts a 'relaxed mentality' to deal with things they will not feel stressed'. Alita thought that when someone wants to be a perfectionist then your muscles are tense but if you relax and accept your weaknesses and the fact that you are not perfect then you can make more progress. **During the pre-sessional Sal talked to Alita about perfectionism and the concerns he had about Alita being a 'perfectionist' - perhaps this influenced her in her ideas about perfectionism.**

**6.7.5 Using memos**

As well as multiple quick and efficient coding possibilities, MAXQDA offers a number of reflexive tools, *memos* with different icons. This means that one can use different types of memos throughout the analytical process. Fig 6.8 shows a sample overview of memos created throughout the coding process, or *narrative knowledge*, of Alita’s story:

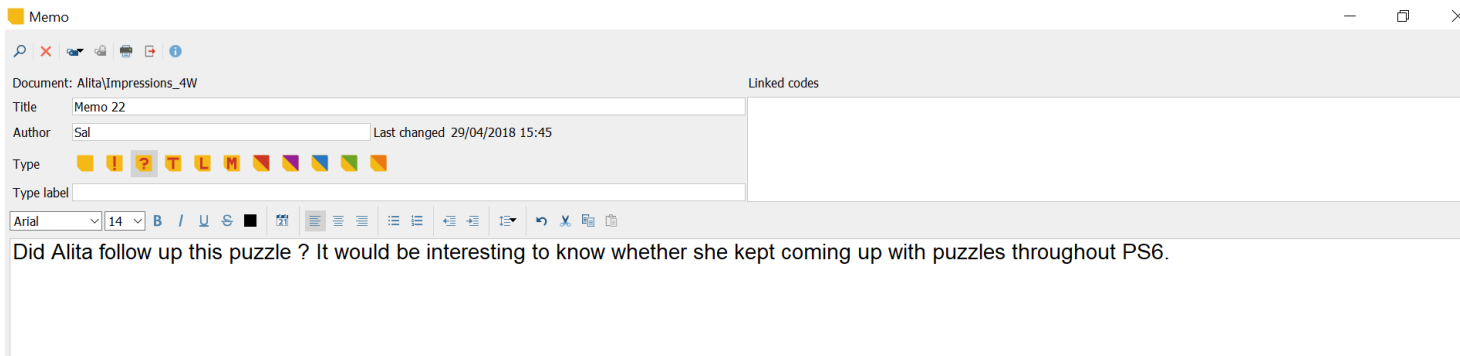
Document group	Document	Code	Document set	Title	Author	Last changed	Preview	Origin	Begin	End
Alita	2nd Interview Int...			Memo 10	Sal	18/04/2018 16:10	It is interesting AL...	In-document	8	8
Alita	1st Interview Inte...			Memo 13	Sal	19/04/2018 17:37	Alita used the wo...	In-document	46	46
Alita	2nd Interview Int...			Memo 15	Sal	19/04/2018 22:49	Alita keeps referri...	In-document	33	33
Alita	Impressions_3W			Memo 16	Sal	29/04/2018 14:57	It is difficult to es...	In-document	3	3
Alita	Impressions_3W			Memo 17	Sal	29/04/2018 14:56	It is a shame that...	In-document	4	4
Alita	Impressions_3W			Memo 18	Sal	29/04/2018 14:58	Is Alita expressin...	In-document	4	4
Alita	Impressions_3W			Memo 19	Sal	29/04/2018 15:09	I may guess som...	In-document	6	6
Alita	Impressions_4W			Memo 20	Sal	29/04/2018 15:20	Stress can also be...	In-document	3	3
Alita	Impressions_4W			Memo 21	Sal	29/04/2018 15:44	It is promising to ...	In-document	6	6
Alita	Impressions_4W			Memo 22	Sal	29/04/2018 15:45	Did Alita follow u...	In-document	6	6
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 23	Sal	30/04/2018 08:15	this was 'will' in h...	In-document	16	16
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 24	Sal	30/04/2018 08:32	This may connect...	In-document	20	20
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 25	Sal	01/05/2018 13:12	It took me some t...	In-document	23	24
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 26	Sal	15/05/2018 10:33	I will leave this h...	In-document	28	28
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 27	Sal	15/05/2018 10:37	This too runs aga...	In-document	34	34
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 29	Sal	02/05/2018 12:34	I could ask her at...	In-document	41	41
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 30	Sal	02/05/2018 14:10	This is my own e...	In-document	54	54
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 31	Sal	03/05/2018 20:33	Is this something ...	In-document	45	45
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 32	Sal	03/05/2018 20:42	I wonder how?	In-document	60	61
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 33	Sal	03/05/2018 20:46	Grow in what wa...	In-document	61	61
Alita	Alita's Story			Memo 34	Sal	15/05/2018 12:32	It would be good ...	In-document	66	66

Figure 6.8 Sample memos overview



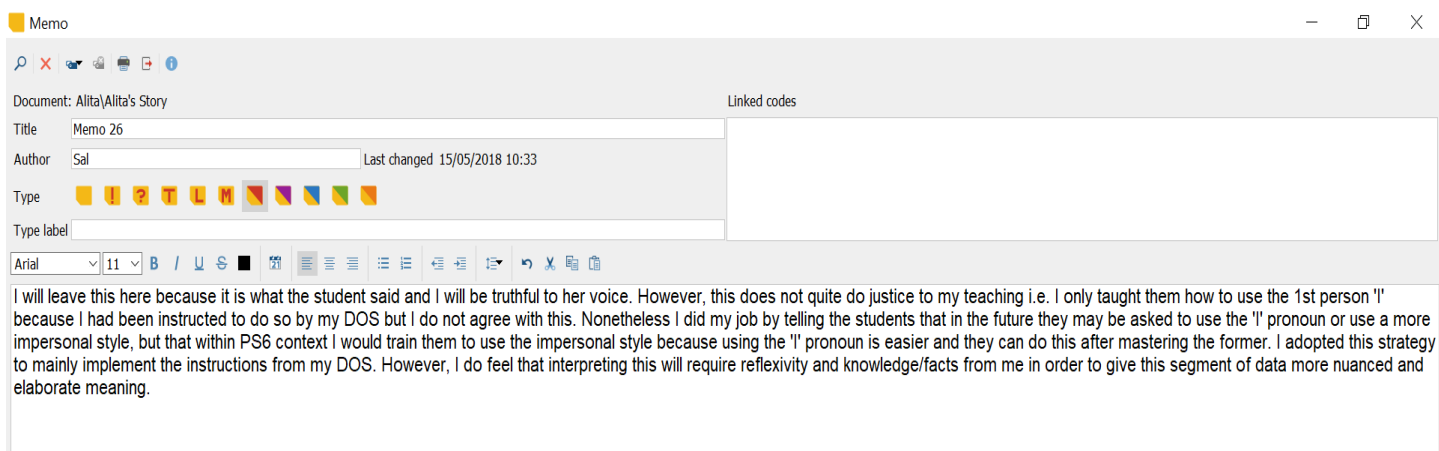
I assigned a specific function to each memo and each icon reflects such properties:

- **Question mark:** relates to a question I had about the meaning of the data. For instance, in one PEPA Alita mentioned a puzzle about living the UK which, I recalled, differed from the one explored in classroom. Fig 6.9 shows this memo:



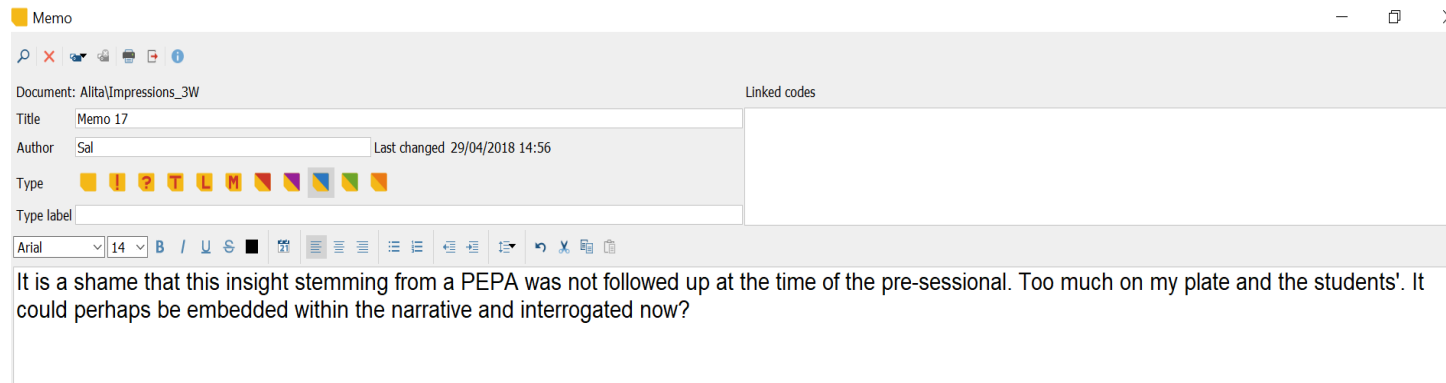
**Figure 6.9 sample question-mark memo**

- **Icon with red stripe:** indicates a note/comment of interpretive nature which relates to my sense-making of data. For example, in one PEPA Alita said that using the pronoun 'I' is a mistake. Although I never phrased it like that in my teaching, I kept her wording but made the following memo (fig 6.10):



**Figure 6.10 Sample interpretive memo**

- **Icon with blue stripe:** concerns a methodological question about how I elicited previous data or may elicit additional data. Fig 6.11 shows the instance of a memo made when reading a section of a PEPA where Alita mentioned the notion of self-motivation.



**Figure 6.11** Sample methodological memo

- **Icon with green stripe:** indicates reflexive/reflective comments about my beliefs, potential biases and influences stemming from my teacher and/or researcher persona. Fig 6.12 shows an example of one of Alita's thematic units which I hesitated to call 'English Language' because I normally see EAP as more than just English language skills:



**Figure 6.12** Sample reflexive/reflective memo

Memoing is particularly important because the decision to create a code and assign a data segment to that specific code is in itself an interpretative process. As Glaser (2004, p45) puts it "There is always a perception of a perception as the conceptual level rises. We are all stuck with a "human" view of what is going on and hazy concepts and descriptions about it". Therefore, an immediate

recording of the interpretive, methodological decisions made during the analytical journey as well as reflexive/reflective comments that influence the process of turning raw data into findings is useful. As shown above, MAXQDA offers valuable opportunities in this regard. Also, it is possible to click on any memo and instantly identify the source text within the relevant document (as in fig 6.13). This function is particularly useful when dealing with volumes of rich data stemming from various data sources, as in this project.

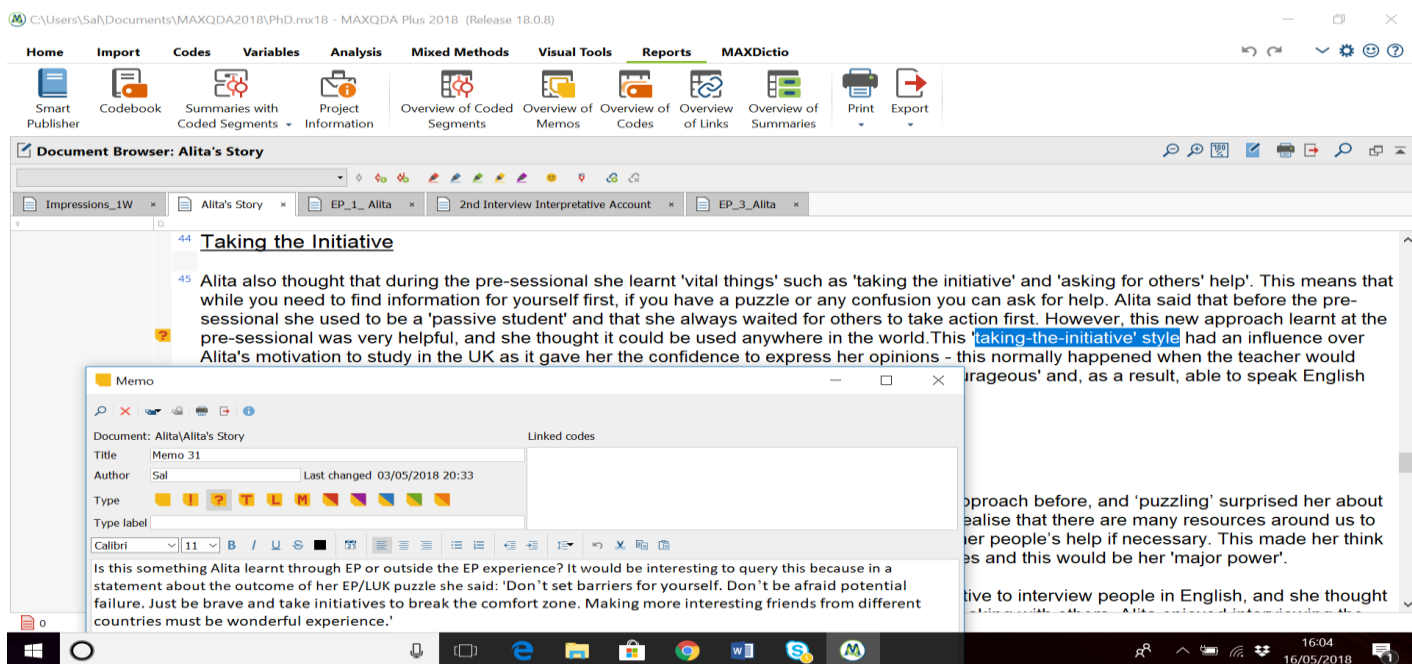


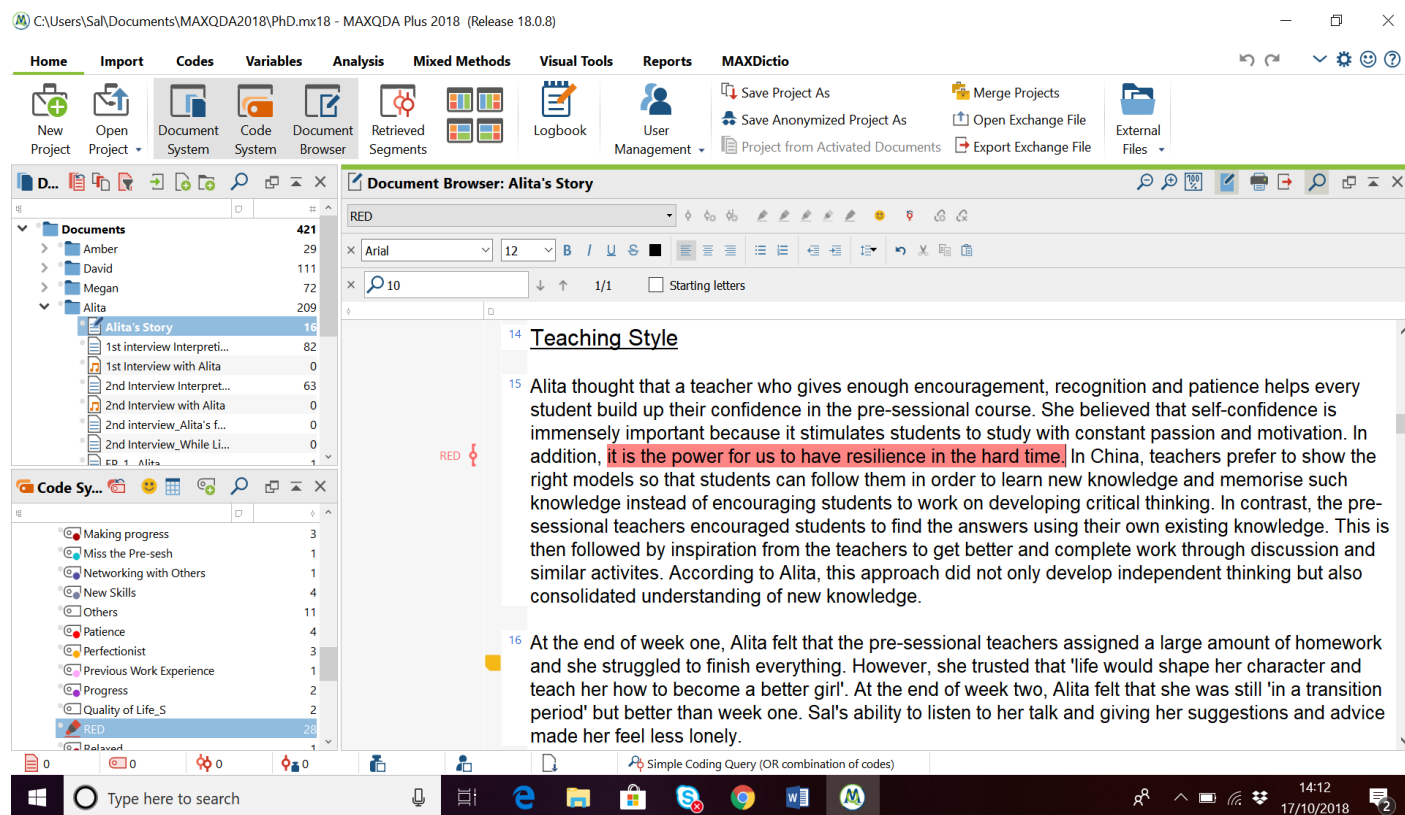
Figure 6.13 Sample memo intertextual link

## 6.8 Building the bigger narrative

After writing the first part of the narrative, going from 'Before coming to the UK to End of PS6', I would then share this emergent story with the relevant student via email and arrange one-to-one meetings with them at a mutually convenient time. The aim of these meetings was for me to check if they agreed with the content of the emerging story and could see themselves portrayed in these accurately. This was to add an extra layer of trustworthiness to my interpretation at this level of *narrative knowledging*.

The memoing work described above was instrumental and critical in my preparation for these *narrative-making* interviews. During these meetings I would first allow the students to freely

express their views and reactions after reading the story. I would then take some time to explore my own questions or needs for elaboration and/or clarification. I was able to easily do so by referring to each memo on each participant's file in MAXQDA. Fig 6.14 shows a sample section of Alita's story just as it looked on my computer screen during the meeting. Alita had a paper version without any marks or memos.



**Figure 6.14** Sample story used at a follow-up interview

At the beginning of each meeting, I would first ask the student-participant if they had been able to read the narrative at home or if they wished to take some time to read it in situ with me. On most occasions, they decided to take some time to read the story during the meeting even if they had read it beforehand. I would thus ask them to read a few sections at a time and discuss these with me before carrying on reading the rest of the story. This was helpful in focussing their attention on specific parts of the narrative thereby enabling both the student-participants and myself to express all possible thoughts with a degree a detail. This would not only keep the discussion focussed but

also offer a sense of chronological direction which often intrigued the student-participants even more as they could see the trajectory and evolution of their experiences tangibly on paper.

It must be noted that the students normally began these meetings expressing strong levels of interest in the narratives I had written, and they used phrases such as *'this is really important for me. None has written a story about me before'* (Alita/27/04/18), *'this is really good. I can learn more about myself with this [story]'* (Megan, 21/04/18). What happened during each meeting was unsurprisingly unique to each occasion, and it would be hypocritical of me to offer here an exhaustive report which could do justice to how each meeting unfolded with each participant and their own idiosyncrasies. However, I can certainly affirm that I followed the procedure of letting the students express their views before revealing my own questions and thoughts in order to enrich the fledgling narratives further. I now report here the main patterns of behaviours that the students displayed during the 'narrative-checking' meetings, which ultimately shaped the emerging narratives, thereby continuing the process of co-construction.

- **Opportunities to enrich the narrative:** this refers to the student-participants wanting to add some details which were not in the story and which may have not been revealed on previous occasions. For instance, after reading her story, Alita noted the following section about the study-abroad experience and how Chinese people relate to this:

Before coming to the UK Alita had a lot of expectations about studying abroad. She quit her job because studying abroad was her life dream. She admired the fact that she had the courage to quit a permanent job. In China some people may think that studying abroad at her age (27) may not be the 'correct thing to do' because it is too late and would not help her get a better job; however, she was more interested in the new experiences, people and culture. Alita said this in light of her understanding that in China there is 'fierce competition' and that people use their time carefully to get a job at a younger age - hence they may think Alita's choice of coming to the UK (and quitting her job) was a mistake.

Whereas Alita did not dispute these ideas, she added that nowadays Chinese people think that studying abroad might not be sufficient to 'stand out of the crowd' because more and more people go abroad to study at an English-speaking university and therefore spending so much money on such an experience may no longer be as 'valuable' as in the past. This was enriching because

although my interpretation of Alita's data resonated with her, reading the final product prompted her to elaborate and offer an even more nuanced picture.

- **Opportunities for additional co-construction:** this refers to the student-participants touching upon something that I had not noticed in other datasets. This normally stimulated an interest in me and led me to seek more understanding by asking for further details. For instance, during the above conversation about *study-abroad experiences*, Alita mentioned that parents also have significant influence over the choice of studying abroad. At this point she mentioned that her mother always encouraged her to be 'content' with life, and here I showed my interest by laughing and saying '*hmm yes I think I may agree with your mother*'.

The already-established rapport and sense of familiarity with Alita allowed me to make this light-hearted commentary which was instrumental in encouraging her to articulate this thought further and add that while she trusts her mother, she sometimes feels the need to 'fight against her mother's opinion'. This is because in her 'mother's eyes she is still a baby' and thus she needs to prove herself all the time thus recognising herself as 'brave'. Alita then adds that life in the UK has helped her become more independent and, as a result, her mother has changed her view over time. At this point, given that Alita had solely focussed on her mother, I asked about her father thereby generating another opportunity to co-construct additional knowledge.

- **Opportunities for further clarification:** this refers to sections of data that I had reported in the narrative but which, to me, remained unclear. At times these instances related to my need to further understand the concept, already clear linguistically, but somewhat obscure conceptually. For example, in Alita's section about *teaching style*, I reported one of her quotes from a previous interview when she had said '*it is the power for us to have resilience in the hard time*'. While I had an idea of what this might mean within the context of the interview, I was not sufficiently confident when reporting it in the narrative.

This is what the data looked like before seeking clarification:

Alita thought that a teacher who gives enough encouragement, recognition and patience helps every student build up their confidence in the pre-session course. She believed that self-confidence is immensely important because it stimulates students to study with constant passion and motivation. In addition, **it is the power for us to have resilience in the hard time**. In China, teachers prefer to show the right models so that students can follow them in order to learn new knowledge.



The highlighted section was then expanded upon by Alita as shown in the newly written section below:

If you believe then you can overcome difficulties, but when people around you do not believe in you it is very difficult to believe in yourself and they think that you are just daydreaming. Alita sees this as a difference between the West and the East in that people in the West would normally encourage you to try new things even if you are not sure about succeeding whereas people in the East are afraid of failure so they do not want to take any risks and instead prefer to stay in their comfort zone. Thus if one believes one can do what they believe in despite other people's opinion then this is a sign of resilience and this is relevant according to Alita because Chinese people normally lack such sense of resilience.

Other types of clarification related to sections of data which were unclear because of my inability to fully grasp the student's use of English. Some may argue that this is unsurprising given that I was working with non-native speakers of English. Nonetheless, while I will not deny the challenges experienced as a researcher because of this, I wish to highlight that this does not mean defining the student-participant's use of English as deficient because I would like to think that an ethical researcher would always want to check his or her understanding of what participants say, irrespective of the variety of English being used. In fact, as shown in the extract below, I understood the terms used by Alita in relation to her lifestyle, but her word choice remained unclear to me thus making my interpretation unreliable without further clarification. I asked her to explain this, and she re-framed her ideas in such a way that they became much clearer:

#### Stress

During the pre-sessional, Alita found that she was able to 'recharge her batteries' by cooking with her friends and chatting with each other - this helped her **forget the stress from the study and make the life more dynamic or vigorous**.

The highlighted section was unclear to me and my lack of understanding was mainly driven by the use of the words 'dynamic' and 'vigorous', thus I asked for further elaboration and after this conversation with Alita, the following is what I produced:

#### Stress

During the pre-sessional, Alita found that she was able to 'recharge her batteries' by cooking with her friends and chatting with each other. The good human interaction Alita had with her tutors and classmates (both in class and out of class) helped distract her from the stress of her academic work, and as a result she felt she had a happy lifestyle in the UK with a balance between work and social life.

The above section shows that thanks to my initial lack of understanding of Alita's word choice, we were able to unpack more than just new linguistic terms and, in our new interaction, she took the opportunity to illustrate her ideas in much more detail.

- **Opportunities to acknowledge the evolution of concepts:** this refers to instances when the student-participant contributed some new piece of information which was stimulated by what they had read in their story but carried new meaning, thus reflecting the evolution of their experiences. The example below shows that after reading this extract about 'cultural differences', Alita felt the need to add something new. What she previously called 'trivial activities' and would take a lot of her time leading to a negative connotation, in later months, became instrumental activities which helped her focus on her studies and turned into healthy distractions from academic work. On this specific occasion, I felt the need to represent the temporal complexity as well as evolution of Alita's journey by reporting this new information in a later section of the narrative as opposed to condensing it in the already existing story (as normally happened with other cases).

#### Cultural differences

This was the first time for Alita to live alone. At the beginning she struggled to find a balance between life and study. Too many 'trivial' activities (e.g., washing, cooking and buying food) occupied her time. She said this in light of the fact that in China, parents take care of everything which means their children can focus on their studies. In this new cultural environment, Alita felt 'lost' with so many new tasks and so much study.

New added section later in the narrative:

#### Cultural differences

While at the beginning of her time in the UK, Alita struggled to find a balance between life and study, what she used to call 'trivial' activities (e.g., washing, cooking and buying food) became important for her. These activities, which were initially difficult and too many for her, now helped her focus on her studies because she was now able to organise her time around housework and study. She also felt these activities were a healthy distraction from her academic work. Therefore, Alita no longer felt 'lost' in light of so many new tasks and so much study.

All the above considerations and strategies facilitated the analytical process of 'writing as analysis' which led to full stories of approximately 10,000 words each.



## **6.9 The final stories: *from narrative knowledging to findings***

Overall, this analytical approach benefitted enormously from my use of MAXQDA and led to a thorough and detailed representation of the data whilst establishing a novel approach of doing ‘writing as analysis’ (Benson, 2018). Each final story is presented chronologically following the RQs:

**RQ1** What was these Chinese postgraduate students’ motivation like prior to their arrival in the UK?

**RQ2** What happened to these Chinese postgraduate students’ motivation during PS6?

**RQ3** What happened to these Chinese postgraduate students’ motivation during their MSc in project and programme management?

As such, each story is divided into sections which, in turn, address each RQ,

*motivation before coming to the UK,  
motivation at the start of PS6,  
motivation during PS6,  
motivation at the end of PS6,  
motivation at the beginning of the MSc,  
motivation during the MSc,  
motivation at end of the MSc.*

Within each of the above story sections are thematic units. The richness of the final stories highlights the complex and dynamic trajectories of my students’ motivations. One could argue that dividing these narratives into thematic units would break the flow and voices in the story. This is because, as shown in the findings chapters, each thematic unit within a story is followed by data extracts as evidence. However, I decided to keep this structure because these thematic units reveal the core thematic nuances of the study more clearly.

## **6.9 Analytical chapter summary**

I began this chapter by discussing the theoretical influences of narrative inquiry which shaped my analytical model. I then illustrated how I turned the dataset from its fragmented form into a coherent whole and how I identified the key thematic units for each ultimate story. This analytical work could have not been possible without the support of MAXQDA and its numerous functions, especially memos which offered many opportunities for reflexivity and reflection, thereby enriching and facilitating my interpretations. I concluded with a brief account of the constructive

feedback received by two leading narrative researchers and explained the final structure of each story.

## **Preamble to the Findings Chapters**

In the next part of the thesis, I present the findings in the shape of four chapters (chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10). Each chapter is a participant's story, *the story of their motivation to study and live in the UK*. These stories are presented with a view to highlighting the relevant factors shaping the trajectory of each student's motivation as well as the longitudinal dimension of the study. Although the stories will incorporate some references to the literature, a core critical discussion of these findings and their positioning within the literature will be presented in chapter 11.

## Chapter 7: The Story of Alita's Motivation

### 7.1 Before coming to the UK

#### 7.1.1 Study abroad to become her authentic self

Before arriving in the UK, Alita's motivation was driven by her dreams to study abroad and realise her authentic self. In China she worked in a company for six years but in this professional environment she was not able to express her opinions and had to hide her real character. This led her to thinking that because in the UK nobody knew her, she could become the person she always wanted to be.

before coming here I have a lot expectations and fantasies about studying abroad and because yes I quit my job and I can make my dream come true, so I'm very happy because erm studying abroad is my long-term dream and I always admire that I have the courage to quit my job to pursue my dream after 6 years working experience. (...) because everything here [in the UK] is new for me, I want to study everything. (...) in my 6 years work experience I repeated the same thing. I think sometimes environment is very important erm changing environment can trigger your motivation and curiosity because here nobody knows you and you can shape your character, you can shape everything and discover your authentic self.

(interview 1)

In interview 2, I asked Alita to elaborate on the notion of 'discovering her authentic self'

Because I have worked for many years and sometimes you know in order to survive in the complicated workplace you cannot express your real opinion because this is only a job and you have to maybe hide yourself or maybe change a little bit your character to survive or to earn money. So sometimes I feel unhappy in my previous job and in here none knows me and I can become that person that I want to be. (...) Yes this is the reason I want to leave the hometown and study here. I want to learn the new culture (...) I want to broaden my horizons.

Therefore, Alita's motivation was influenced by the self-guide of discovering her *authentic self* (or ideal self) which contrasted with her *feared self* conjured up by her past work experience in China. As maintained by Dörnyei (2005), the interaction between one's *ideal self* and *feared self* generated Alita's impetus to embark upon this new experience abroad. However, the configuration of this motivation to leave her job was shaped further by Alita's understanding of certain cultural beliefs in China.

### 7.1.2 Courage as motivation

Alita's motivation interacted with the belief that studying abroad at her age (27) may be too late and irresponsible.

some people think that studying abroad at my age is not the correct thing to do because you cannot get a lot of output. (...) it means that memories and experiences are so important for my own life, I am not really keen about the results...you know sometimes the process and the experience and the culture I explore are more important. And maybe when I'm older I have a lot of the happy memories about this experience so this is important for me. But maybe for some other people well this is the worse thing to do. [the worse?] I mean that it is not worth to study abroad maybe for only the memories or only for the experiences. But you know in China (...) the people want to attain their goals. (...) a lot of the population face the fierce competition so, if you want to survive you must evaluate the value about everything that you do. (...) time is very precious and limited for everyone so people can think that my decision was a bad decision.

(Interview 2)

Given the cultural belief that her decision was wrong, Alita considered herself brave because of her courage to quit her job, but also because she went against her mother's opinion.

parents have a strong influence over your choice to study abroad. I trust my mother but I still sometimes feel the need to fight against her opinion maybe because in her eyes I am still a baby erm so I need to prove myself all the time. But you know maybe she doesn't want to let me go because she will miss me when I'm in the UK, but my father was happy for me to go onto this adventure.

(interview 1)

Therefore, prior to her arrival in the UK, Alita's motivation was primarily shaped by her desire to attain her authentic self, a goal which had been energised by the dissatisfaction with her past work experience in China. One can also infer that Alita's motivation to come to the UK was very strong considering that she went against societal forces and her mother's opinion; but she was determined to give herself the best chance. However, despite such enthusiasm and determination, Alita's early days in the UK were not easy.

## 7.2 Alita's motivation at the start of PS6 (weeks 1&2)

### 7.2.1 Loneliness

Alita felt lonely as this was the first time for her to leave China and her parents. Crucially, every time she returned to her room, she did not feel too well.

When I came to [name of the university] and I do everything by myself and this is my first time to leave my parents I feel a little bit lonely, and although the classmates and the pre-session course were very happy, every time that I go back to my room yes you have to finish the homeworks and maybe cook the meals and wash the clothes but yes the motivation goes down.

(Interview 1)

Alita's initial strong motivation was affected by the sudden number of demands required by her new lifestyle. Significantly, the magnitude of these daily tasks was amplified by the lack of parental support in her vicinity which was a core element of her previous lifestyle. Parents play a big role in Chinese young people's lives (Yang & Clum, 1995) and therefore this absence was critical for Alita.

### 7.2.2 High Expectations of PS6

Alita strongly hoped to improve her reading speed, a skill she struggled with whilst training for the IELTS test. She also envisaged that PS6 would support her in writing with 'clear logic' and clear sentences.

Reading and writing make me recall the old days that IELTS tortured me. When it comes to reading, how to accelerate the reading speed is my biggest problem. In my future study, I must read many books within the limited time as well as catch the key words. In addition, how to understand some sentences with long and complicated structure is difficult for me. For instance, I cannot help reading the long sentences repeatedly, that wastes my reading efficiency.

When it comes to writing, I hope to cultivate the critical thinking through pre-session course. Because it is very useful for my study and my work. Secondly, good writing depends on the clear thought, which means fuzzy thinking will cause the fuzzy writing. Thus, how to articulate or clarify my thinking with short and clear structure is my expectation of this course.

(PEPA-1)

Alita's academic goals were strongly connected to her major difficulties with the IELTS training. This PEPA thus revealed evidence of Alita's desire to improve her skills. By looking at this PEPA

only, it would be difficult to establish whether this motive was solely instrumental, but given the bigger picture of Alita's motivation to attain her authentic self, it is safe to argue that these academic and professional goals intertwined with the intrinsic dimension of her motivation to be in the UK.

### **7.2.3 Impatience as a catalyst to change her character**

From the start of PS6, Alita revealed a sense of impatience to perform well academically. However, I advised her to be patient because good things take time.

Although you always tell me 'Alita take it easy don't be worried' but I am still a little worried when I cannot make the progress, so nowadays I always tell myself keep calm and you cannot become the one night success? [it doesn't happen overnight yeah] yes yes you need to be patient and because I am from Shanghai the city with the fast-paced you must do everything so quickly erm but in here I can try to slow down my pace and to make the progress and accumulate everything, my language and UK culture. I now tell myself slow down it's okay to slow down. (...) nothing will happen immediately so I have to wait and I just adjust myself to accept or follow the pace (...) this is always the real purpose for me to study here to change my character but although it is hard to change character the environment can shape it.

(Interview-2)

Alita's 'impatience' seemed to affect her personally as well as academically, mainly because of the dissonance between the pace of her life back in China and in the UK. I tried to improve her academic morale by helping her accept the pace of learning as I was concerned her motivation may have suffered considerably due to the contrast between her *ideal self* and her *actual self* (Dörnyei, 2005). However, the shift towards becoming less impatient did not happen until after PS6.

### **7.2.4 Teaching as empowerment**

Alita noticed that PS6 tutors would always encourage and support her. She saw this as a difference between the East and the West.

After one-week pre-session course, I found the distinct differences between the western education and the eastern education. Firstly, giving enough encouragement, recognition and patience to every student helps us to build up the confidence in the pre-session course. As we all know, self-confidence is immensely important because it stimulates us to study with constant passion and motivation, and it improves confidence to try new things.

(PEPA-3)

According to Alita, Chinese teachers prefer a transmission model whereby the students are given new information to memorise. In contrast, PS6 teachers encouraged students to work actively.

in China, teachers prefer to show the right samples to the students at first, then students need to follow the former samples to learn the new knowledge. In contrast, the teachers of pre-sessional encourage us to find the answer based on our existing knowledge, later we are inspired by teachers to get better and complete answer through discussion and so forth, which could not develop the independent thinking but consolidate understanding the knowledge.

(PEPA-3)

Alita's appreciation for a more 'active' learning style, which was aided by PS6 teachers' supportive disposition, was instrumental in mitigating her learning challenges thereby leading to a sense of achievement. This perspective with clear vision of her goals was conducive to a stronger motivation.

### **7.2.5 Becoming a Better Self**

Despite the challenges in week-1, Alita trusted this process of struggle would enable her to become her better self.

Most importantly, I get overwhelmed by the loneliness. When I come back to the quiet bedroom, I feel isolated and depressed, especially at night. Although the teachers assign a large number of homework, I cannot concentrate on finishing them. Eventually, I believe in that life will shape my character and teach me how to become a better girl.

(PEPA-3)

However, at the end of week-2, Alita felt better than week-1 thanks to the pastoral support she received.

I reckon I am still in the transition period, yet I feel better than that of week 1 with the help from you, listening to my talk carefully and giving me many useful suggestions make me feel I am not lonely.

(PEPA-4)

Despite the various difficulties reported, Alita managed to find a way forward in her belief that through such hardship she would become a better person. The teacher support she received sustained her motivation thus highlighting Karpenko-Secombe's (2016) argument that pre-sessional teachers can significantly enhance international students' experience with relevant pastoral support.



### **7.2.6 Cultural differences**

As said earlier, this was the first time for Alita to live alone. Initially, she struggled to strike a balance between life and study. This was because, in Alita's view, in China parents take care of everything which means their children can focus on their studies, but in this new cultural environment, things were different.

This is first time that I have lived and studied alone. At the beginning, I do not find a balance between life and study. Too much trivial stuff occupies my leisure time including washing, cooking, buying food. Compared to western parents, Chinese parents tend to arrange everything on behalf of their children such as their study and daily life. Thus, I lose the initiative to my life, which means, I am lost in the busy study.

(PEPA-3)

This transition to a society which differed dramatically from her understanding of life in China had a negative impact on Alita's motivation to study. This was primarily due to the lack of parental support with practical things which went beyond her academic work. Therefore, the life beyond the classroom seemed to interfere with Alita's ability to self-regulate her academic motivation.

### **7.2.7 English language**

From the beginning, Alita was concerned that PS6 contact hours were not enough for her to improve her English.

I have the concern that I do not know how to improve my English in the limited class times. The language is a fundamental element of the culture. Therefore, without understanding and learning the local culture, picking up the foreign language well cannot happen. In conclusion, I still need time to adapt to the new teaching ways and new environment.

(PEPA-2)

Although Alita's English skills were of an acceptable standard, she noticed the discrepancy between her actual skills and the future academic demands. She was also able to appreciate the role culture plays in language learning and this seemed to add to her pressure to adapt to the new environment. While these realisations weakened her motivation, learning about these concerns through a PEPA was useful for me to advise her that she was on track to academic success.

### 7.2.8 Stress over accommodation

During the first two weeks of PS6, Alita experienced some stress due to the uncertainty of securing accommodation on campus for the academic year.

I am waiting for the feedback of on-campus accommodation from the school so that I feel time goes by so slowly. I not only admire my classmates having got the ideal on-campus accommodation offer but also concern that I am not lucky enough to live on-campus. Thus, my mood is subjected by the eventual result.

(PEPA-3)

Alita's concern over securing accommodation was at the centre of her attention. As a tutor, I was able to offer some reassuring words when I saw this PEPA, but this did not prevent her motivation (or overall wellbeing) from suffering further over this uncertainty.

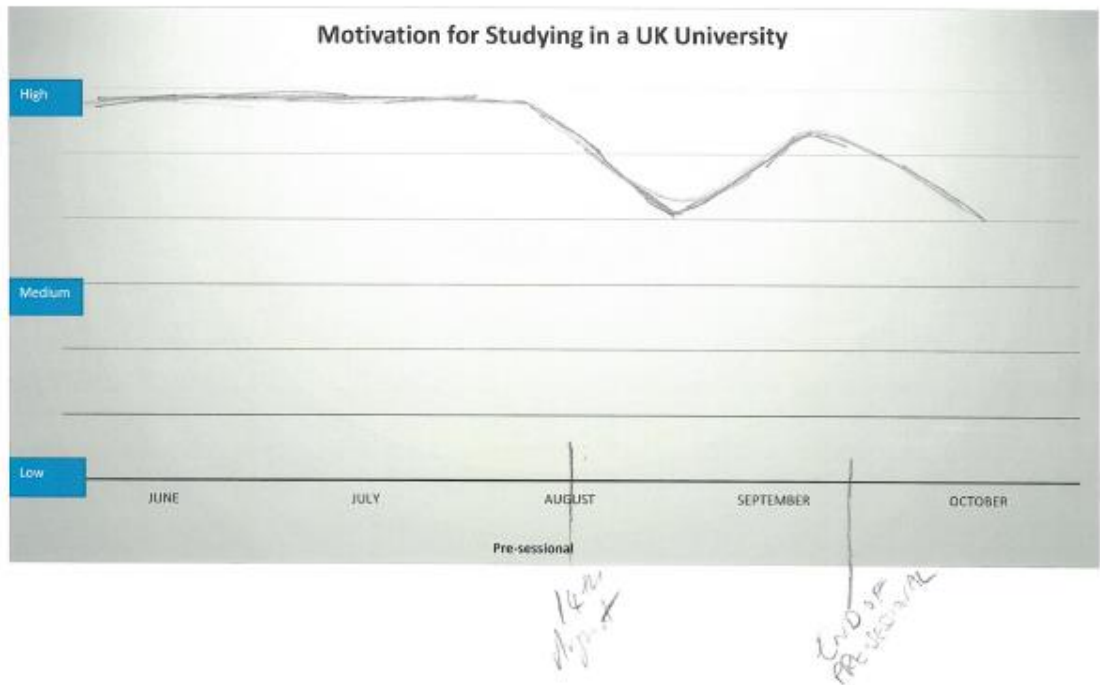


Figure 7.1 Alita's motigraph – first 2 weeks on PS6

### 7.3 Alita's motivation during PS6 (weeks 3/4/5)

#### 7.3.1 The influence of similar peers

Alita believed that other people could positively influence her personality and motivate her, which was the case for her classmate May.

The positive energy from other people can encourage me, yes give me power to move on. (...) take May as an example, because she has similar experience to me because she graduated from the University 3 years ago and she really knows what she wants and how to make her dream come true. And we have the same dream to study abroad because I think that the other classmates graduated from the university this year but we [*May and I*] left the university several years ago, and I see that one person can have the same dream with me and you can find a buddy to comfort each other. (...) sometimes when I felt sad or frustrated I always contacted with her and we would encourage each other because you know this experience is very precious but it is very hard and we face a lot of difficulties but still we need to motivate us (...) she was good she really emphasised my feelings as she had the same experience.

(Interview-2)

Alita could not easily relate to her other classmates because they came from different backgrounds professionally and academically. However, the sense of relatedness she felt towards May had a positive effect on her motivational wellbeing. To Alita's eyes, May seemed to embody the notion of a Near Peer Role Model (NPRM), a person of similar age and gender, who shares similar cultural heritage as well as professional and/or educational background (Murphey, 1996). In line with Ushioda's (2012) definition of motivation resurfacing the Latin root 'movere', Alita was 'moved' into action by May thanks to this NPRM relationship.

#### 7.3.2 Active teaching style

Like in the early weeks on PS6, Alita's motivation continued to be sustained by my teaching approach which she defined as 'active' and illustrated through the following example. One day I asked a whole-class question, and nobody answered; since Alita knew that I wanted people to interact with me, and this was something that I had highlighted other times, she noticed the atmosphere was a little awkward. I report here notes from my journal made after the relevant lesson:

A critical episode occurred about why sts do not answer whole class open questions even when they have the right answers. I called this the 'I don't care episode' because I asked an open question to the class and after 29 seconds of silence (which I think feels like ages for a teacher) I intervened and looking at Xiaoxin who seemed to have an answer ready, I said to her: *'you did it, right?'* and she said: *'but I'm not sure'* and that at point with a smile on my face but certainly disapproval tone in my voice I said: *'it doesn't matter!'* And continued saying;

*'I don't care if you're not sure, I don't care if it's wrong, I don't care, I don't care, I don't care, I DON'T CARE (4 seconds pause) I DON'T CARE [students laugh]. What I DO care about is that you TRY – all of you! It doesn't matter if it's wrong. I'm happy if it's wrong because if it's wrong I can teach you – that's my JOB. But if you don't talk it's a disaster.'*

At this point I said: *'right, I'm going to leave the room and come back in and pretend this never happened'*. [students laugh]

When I came back in I went straight into the last activity we were looking at and asked an open question – I looked at Xiaoxin expecting her to give me an answer (with a smile on my face but certainly a lot of expectation – people laughed at my attitude) and after 5 seconds she volunteered her answer. She gave a good answer so after she finished, I stopped for a few seconds and then said *'that was brilliant! See? You were not even sure and that was good. Obviously there could be other alternative answers ...and I looked at the rest of the class and Alita volunteered some answers. Then I looked at Xiaoxin again and said: 'but that was good so even when you're not sure it might be right you might just as well share your thoughts with the teacher and if you're wrong that's fine, it means that there is learning that needs to happen and if you're right you are going to impress the teacher so in either case it's a win-win situation. Okay? Does that make sense for all of you? [YES] so I don't have to go out of the door next time I ask you a question? [hmm smiling and laughing].*

(TRJ/24/08/17)

I must confess that at that time I felt concerned that I may have weakened their motivation after this episode, but their smiles and laughs reassured me. In fact, that day Alita said that this incident made her feel more motivated, and in a post-pre-sessional interview, she shared the following:

[Can you think of any example of a time during a lesson that made you think this is active teaching style?] yes for example erm although you always emphasised that you wanted interaction with the students and feedback from the students but sometimes you were disappointed because even the classmates know the answer they don't speak out, and I still remember this one time that nobody answered and the atmosphere was a bit weird [yes] and then you broke the ice and [laughing] gave us a second chance. I think erm this was a smart way to break the embarrassment and use a special

method to remind the need to interact with you [*laughing*] because you were sad although your expression was funny [*laughing*] [I do remember that day [*both laughing*] so how did that experience affect you?] yes erm sometimes although we repeat the same mistakes you have a lot of ways to tell the students the important.

(Interview-2)

Alita found that this teaching approach made her feel less stressed because the ‘positive energy’ and humour generated a connection between the teacher and students. Her belief was that ‘a teacher’s style needs to be flexible and adapt to the students, which in an interview, she illustrated with reference to her British culture ‘puzzle’.

You always surprised me. For example the puzzle living in the UK (...) you asked us to interview the people in the café, so very flexible and sometimes I cannot progress, but you give another way to do it to break our comfort zone. In addition for the puzzle of academic study I thought that you would told us to interview in the café because the first time was one-to-one interaction but the second time was a group discussion in another classroom to talk with the students erm so even in a similar way but a different style (...) I realise that I can use a lot of new flexible ways to deal with my problems or puzzles. Sometimes you need to change don’t always follow the old ways to do everything

(Interview-2)

With this ‘active and flexible teaching style’, Alita realised the need to move out of her comfort zone, and, in light of her wish to become a better self, this teaching approach fuelled her motivation to acquire new skills and learn how to deal with life problems and puzzles differently.

### **7.3.3 Encouragement to become braver**

The encouragement Alita received from both her PS6 teachers was extremely helpful to her motivation.

Even I made mistakes erm it is not a terrible thing and you welcome the mistakes so that you review the errors [yes] even when I make the mistakes, you are willing to identify our errors or mistakes to help us to correct them.

(Interview-1)

This encouragement was particularly useful in relation to the big task of writing her first essay.

Overall, I feel a sense of fulfilment this week because this is my first time to write the academic essay within 2000 words. Actually, I was afraid that I could not do it at the beginning. The encouragements from you and Sue give me strength to improve myself consistently and I find I can do better in the near future. Sometimes, I am worried about the new things because I do not know what will happen next and situations are out of my control. However, these concerns make my life interesting and I am more courageous and brave than I imagined.

(PEPA-5)

Therefore, this encouragement from both PS6 teachers allowed Alita to feel safe about making mistakes and gave her hope to achieve the challenging task of writing her first essay. This is a clear case of synergy between teacher's behaviour and student's motivation (Pinner, 2019).

On another occasion, Alita wrote on PEPA that she was homesick which, in turn, affected her ability to study. I invited her to speak with me after class and she seemed pleased that I could spare some time to listen to her and signpost her to some people who may help. In a later interview she revealed the following:

I still remember when I submitted the homework [*the PEPA*] and I expressed homesickness and frustrated and you gave me the comments and then we talked with each other after the class [ah okay] and you know sometimes, when I felt frustrated if one person erm anyone the classmates or the teacher comforted me yes this is very important because I need someone to recognise me and make me calm down.

(Interview-2)

Despite her challenges during PS6, with the support of her teachers and classmates, Alita was able to keep her vision alive (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2013). After all, in order to be brave, she just needed to be 'recognised'. This connected with her initial motivation, prior to her arrival in the UK, when she left behind the job and lifestyle in China which stifled her 'authentic self'.

#### **7.3.4 Perfectionism as a double-edged sword**

After some time on PS6, Alita realised that being a perfectionist was not healthy, and whilst this may have fuelled her motivation to work harder, it caused her some anxiety, too. In a post-pre-sessional interview, she shared the following:

I think none is perfect and sometimes you cannot treat yourself strictly because everyone has the weakness and maybe they're not good at everything so confess your vulnerability and your weakness can help you move on. (...) when you always want to pursue perfectionism you know every muscle is tense but sometimes when you relax and when you accept your weakness that you are not perfect you can make more progress.

(Interview-2)

I was aware that Alita was unhappy with her skills or performance as she made this clear in class, in her PEPAs or informal chats at the end of class. I could see her motivation to be a perfectionist was simultaneously affecting her wellbeing and, as we may infer from above, her ability to make (or recognise) progress.

### **7.3.5 Small achievements as a source of motivation**

Despite some anxiety about her performance, Alita noticed that every day she was making some progress.

Since I make progress every day, studying here is not the burden despite English is not my mother tongue. Take writing as an example. I have entirely no idea about how to write the academic writing after reading the hand-outs. However, confirming my essay title and organizing the outline, writing the introduction give me the big picture and detailed skills gradually. I feel it is rewarding.

(PEPA-4)

Alita thus felt that the small steps approach we used to focus on each stage of her writing gave her a sense of gradual achievement. This 'rewarding' process therefore sustained her motivation despite the above insecurities and anxiety. Alita's motivation was further supported by other practices on PS6, and one of these included EP.

### **7.3.6 Exploratory Practice as motivational practice**

EP increased Alita's motivation because 'puzzling' showed her that there could be different strategies to obtain new knowledge.

The puzzle is great because every time gave me the surprise, for example the second time I interviewed the British to know about their opinion. (...) maybe in the past I only depended on myself to study but maybe sometimes I ignore the resources around me and I think in the future I am willing to accept help from others.

(Interview-1)

This was the first time for Alita to interview people in English, and she thought that she performed better than expected. As a result, she began feeling confident about her speaking skills.

I was surprised by the way to interview British to find my puzzle. This method was amazing and this was my first time to leave out my comfort zone to communicate with strangers. I believe that I can do better and be more courageous to take initiatives about study and life.

(EP-Reflection-2)

Also, EP supported Alita in understanding her thinking process and behaviour.

This is my first time that I have known about exploratory practice. I am deeply impressed by the differences between problem and puzzle, which always make me think or ask why I do everything. This practice helps me to have the in-depth thinking as well as know myself better.

(EP-Reflection-1)

EP thus fuelled Alita's desire and ability to 'become a better self' by engaging with a new way of thinking and methodology to acquire new knowledge.

Furthermore, while exploring her academic puzzle, Alita particularly enjoyed the time when she discussed this with the teacher of another group because this reinforced her understanding of referencing in academic writing.

in the past I didn't understand why every opinion must have the reference and when I talked with the teacher and the other people it can help you become more conscious, because everything you do you has evidence so when you talk about critical thinking you can challenge the tutor or knowledge but the challenge is meaningless without any evidence. I think this is very important but you know next time when I want to challenge something or maybe tell others it is not the good answer, at first I must find the evidence and I cannot say sorry you're wrong but you must use examples to clarify.

(Interview-2)

Alita liked this teacher telling her that when she was a student, she had the same concerns about referencing in academic writing. Importantly, through this activity she understood the value of using references and the need to provide evidence to support arguments in academic activities. We had obviously covered this in class but undoubtedly the experience of sharing such puzzle with other peers and another teacher made a significant difference to Alita's understanding. The relief and excitement of such understanding supported her motivation to perform well academically.

For transparency, I share the only negative commentary Alita reported about doing EP which relates to the initial steps of the approach. I had asked them to do an online search about their topic



under my supervision in class. However, Alita would have preferred more discussion between classmates and less time on online search which she could have done independently.

the negative thing well I don't think it's a negative thing but more a suggestion that sometimes maybe we cannot search the internet to find the answer in the classroom maybe we can go back to the dormitory to finish it and in the classroom we can have more time to discuss with others [ah thanks good point that's very useful. Are there any other negative aspects about the experience of doing EP] no that's it I like the exploratory practice.

(Interview-2)

Overall, EP was a motivational experience for Alita because a) it helped her notice the multitude of resources and methods available to acquire new knowledge, b) pushed her out of her comfort zone which aligned with her motivation to become a better self, c) allowed her to discover a new sense of self-confidence which used to be stifled in China, d) and she became more accepting of her academic puzzle about referencing.

## **7.4 Alita's motivation at the end of PS6**

### **7.4.1 Fear of exams**

Alita was concerned about failing her exams, but both her teachers supported her.

When the exams were coming and because I know that the department had the fail rate and not everyone could pass the exam, but you and Jacquie always tell me to calm down and if we follow the instructions and listen to your suggestions it is okay and you can pass it.

(Interview-2)

Alita's fear of exams certainly conditioned her motivation as she was concerned about not being able to progress onto her degree programme. However, the reassurances my colleague and I gave her had a positive impact on her.

### **7.4.2. Feared future**

Alita knew that the MSc course would be more subject-specific than PS6 and this resulted in a decline of her motivation because she knew this would entail much more work. She also worried that her MSc tutors may not be as supportive as her PS6 teachers.

I had the happy memory of the pre-sessional period (...) I'm afraid that during the pre-sessional the teachers taught everything slowly so that we can digest and were very patient, but when I come to the full time masters maybe teachers don't have the time to teach you slowly and I have to face the fast pace because I am a PG student and I must have the ability to accept the challenge yes but I am a little worried

(Interview-1)

Thus, at the end of PS6, Alita's motivation declined because of the fear of failing her final PS6 exams and the feared prospect of being under the new pressure of the MSc course.

## **7.5 Alita's Motivation at the Start of the MSc (October - December)**

### **7.5.1 Module delivery**

Alita reported that during her MSc lessons, she rarely asked questions which I found surprising because she used to be very talkative on PS6.

In the masters I seldom ask questions to the tutors [what? really?] yes because sometimes I cannot digest the knowledge and so I cannot ask the questions [hmm but I remember in the pre-sessional you always had a question to ask] [*laughs*] yes yeah and sometimes I answered the question for the teacher [*laughs*] [so when you say that you can't digest the knowledge what do you mean by that?] because sometimes I think if you want to ask a question you need to indulge yourself in studying, you must review the module notes or need more time to think and depends on the tutor's style. For example, in the pre-sessional course the tutors are not very strict, and it is easier to build a relationship with them. (...) I don't know whether strict is the correct word but I feel relaxed in the pre-sessional (...)the tutors in the MSc are more strict because they want to create the academic atmosphere (...) that doesn't mean the pre-sessional course isn't academic but I think the pre-sessional can combine academic and the life or the daily interesting things together [ahhh] but for the masters they are always academic [ahhh] they cannot keep the balance.

(Interview-4)

Alita did not seem comfortable with the way in which MSc modules were taught, as she found that the pace of teaching was not conducive to reflection or understanding. Crucially, her reluctance to ask questions showed that she felt insecure. This resulted in loss of motivation because she lacked the support of an ecological teaching and learning space where teachers and learners interact and cooperate through dialogue and understanding.

### 7.5.2 MSc timetable

It seemed that the tutors' speed in class may be a feature of the overall MSc programme as a whole.

the master's degree is so intensive because the module setting is one whole week to finish one module. (...) everyday from 9 am to 6.30 pm and this way the study mode is not very healthy because sometimes you need a rest to think about and digest the module (...) then they would assign you the PMA the post-module assignment and you can spend the one month writing them but sometimes we have other modules

(Interview-4)

While Alita's motivation to study and do well academically was intrinsically strong from the beginning of her UK journey, the intensive MSc structure led to a sense of fatigue and lack of reflection on the work done in class which ultimately affected her motivation.

### 7.5.3 Early relationship with teachers and classmates

Alita had a closer relationship with her PS6 tutors and classmates than she did with her counterparts on the MSc.

I miss the pre-sessional because I have a lot of special and happy memories with my classmates and tutors and I think we can have the close relationship among each other and compared to the master's life I am closer to the teacher [*in the pre-sessional*]. (...)we had more interaction and communication about the life and study, but in the master's degree the tutors always impart the knowledge and seldom create the mutual communication, and there is more input so you listen and you listen and express your opinion through the PMAs and your dissertation.

(Interview-4)

Alita's happy memories of PS6 highlight her dissatisfaction with her relationship with the MSc tutors and classmates which points to the motivational benefits she had reaped from a more dialogic and supportive relationship on PS6. A cohesive class group (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019) and a classroom environment which fosters goal-orientedness (Dörnyei, 2001) is what Alita was missing at this stage of her MSc course. However, she soon found some reasons to re-ignite her motivation.

### 7.5.4 Early feedback

In November, Alita began feeling better because she received positive feedback on her first MSc assignment.

In November I felt better than before because I got the positive feedback on my first module assignment and gradually can follow the tutors and modules so it [motivation] increased gradually.

(Interview-4)

This rewarding feedback enhanced her motivation significantly, perhaps not only as a reward in itself but as recognition that her efforts were being acknowledged and her vision of academic success was becoming clear again.

### **7.5.5 Teachers' ability to understand students**

Alita believed that PS6 tutors' teaching approach was responsive to the students, and in contrast, the MSc tutors did not appear to understand Chinese students.

I think for the pre-session course the teaching style is very interesting it is very special different and I think that the tutor can put himself into the students' shoes and it is easier to understand students' concerns and what things we worry, for example some international students aren't very good at speaking English or maybe they are so shy and even they can speak English they don't want to express their opinion. So I think the tutor can realise the different personalities and the concerns of the students and use the different ways to motivate students (...) in the MSc some of the tutors don't understand (...) why your English is so poor (...) they don't understand especially for the Chinese students and their educational background erm why they [Chinese students] cannot express more opinion in the classroom (...). They [*the MSc tutors*] always use the same standard to treat every student but I think the students are different and you must use different standards to treat them and to encourage them to explore their potential and to help them find their strengths and spot their weakness and you cannot only (...) find their weakness and challenge them.

(Interview-4)

The contrast Alita drew between PS6 teachers' and MSc teachers' teaching approaches is reminiscent of Ryan's (2011) strong call for British lecturers to support international students by identifying their needs and highlighting their talents. Alita's motivation suffered because of the lack of effort, on the part of her teachers, to understand Chinese students' cultures of learning and how these differed from the UK counterparts (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

Alita returned to the notion of a close relationship between teachers and students to foster dialogue during class time.

If you cannot build the relationship between each other it is hard to ask questions even you just send email to the tutor to ask the questions and even they answer it but if you cannot understand it clearly you will never ask them again because you never built (...) the deep relationship between each other. For example, in the pre-session course through some activities I had more connection between each other so erm I think we are friends so I can ask you questions and even I cannot understand, you can understand me and you use my way to answer it. (...) you can understand us maybe according to my facial expression or previous performance and you can [say] 'ah this is because Alita didn't understand my question so I can change the word' to ask question and help her understand.

(Interview-4)

The MSc teachers did not seem to put as much effort in developing a dialogic approach to their lessons as was the case during PS6. This had a significant effect on Alita's motivation especially since she was someone genuinely interested in working hard, learning and asking inquisitive questions.

## **7.6 Alita's Motivation during the MSc (January-March)**

### **7.6.1 Relationship with classmates**

In January Alita was asked to work in a small group and complete a role-play task but her group did not perform well.

In January in one module we did a simulation [*role-play*] and we had the worst performance (...) although we communicated with each other at the beginning but just like 'how are you?' 'what did you do?' we never built the deeper relationship [hmm] we were not very close but because of the poor performance we decided to organise parties to cultivate the relationship because you know if you want to cooperate with each other effectively you have to know each other. I think emotional ties can always help you to have the better performance in later simulations. (...) because of these parties we know each other better than before and I think I have more interactions with my classmates so I have more friends and this motivator can stimulate me to make me happy because I never feel alone. At the beginning I think it is hard especially for the Chinese student to fit in with other international students but because of the parties I can know my friends and actually they are so good. Maybe in the past I thought they were distant or didn't welcome the Chinese students but I'm wrong they are so nice and so friendly.

(Interview-4)

Alita clearly suffered for the initial lack of interaction with her classmates which in turn had a negative effect on her motivation. She even assumed there may be a problem connected to her cultural heritage, but this was demystified when she finally bonded with her classmates. In fact, from January, her motivation to study and live in the UK kept improving.

My motivation for everything went up because we always helped each other and sometimes when I have a question I prefer to ask other international students because they have the language advantages and they are very patience to explain it. So even sometimes I cannot get the point they will change words in another way or give me more examples.

(Interview-4)

This improved relationship was highly beneficial for Alita at both academic and social life level. Overall, these social interactions (or initial lack of) point to the importance of group dynamics as well as the principle of tolerance in the classroom (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019).

### **7.6.2 Feedback**

Alita continued to receive positive feedback on her assignments which led to the development of new motivational dimensions.

Because I have 6 years of work experience, I think that compared to work studying is so fair for everyone because the more effort you make the higher mark you will get in the studies. (...) in work the employer has several dimensions to evaluate you and not always from the hard-work, it can also be the relationship between the employer and the employees and the colleagues...there are several factors to calculate your contributions but for studies if you make endeavours you can earn higher marks.

(Interview-4)

Alita's motivation to leave her job and past life in China came back in the picture when she analysed her strong motivation generated by the positive feedback on her assignments. It is unsurprising that the good feedback had a positive effect on Alita, but what was more significant was discovering the external influence her old job exerted on her. This is because her initial motivation to become her 'authentic self' was enhanced by the MSc assessment results which recognised her hard work as opposed to personal relationships in work like in her experience in China.

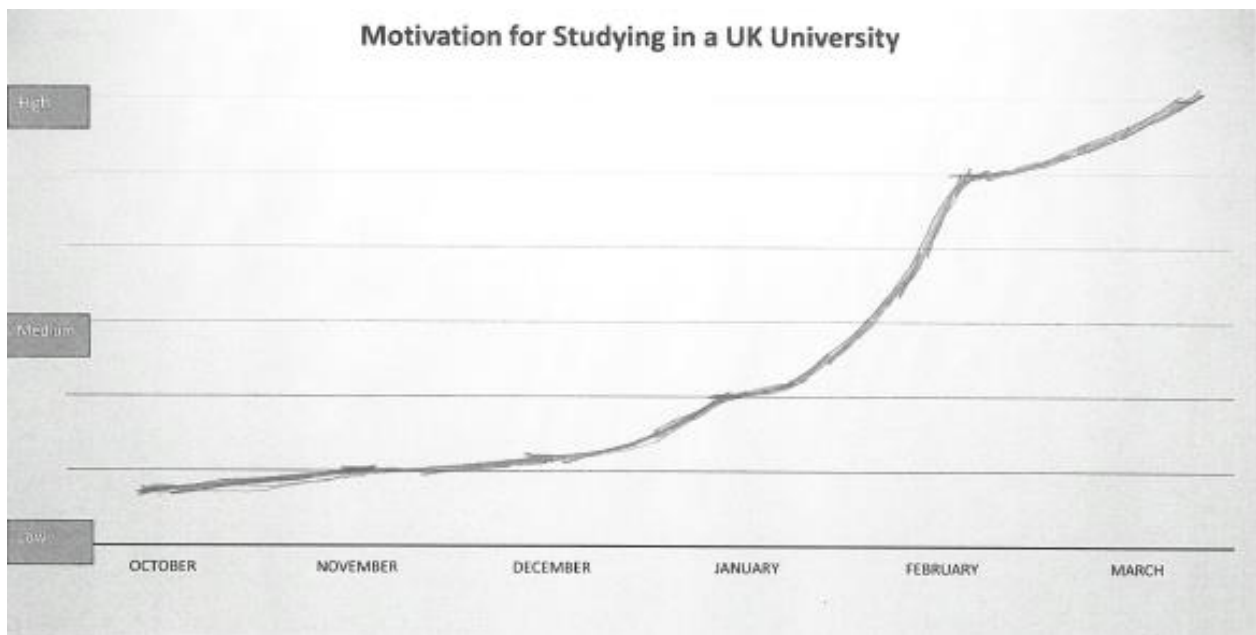
### **7.6.3 Striking a balance between social life and studies**

From February, Alita's motivation improved even more as a result of her ability to travel and take some time off from her academic work.

I travelled to Portugal and Spain [ahhh] so keeping the balance between life and study it motivates me to enjoy life in the UK, and if you have enough rest you have more chance to go out of the UK and enjoy different cultures and I think this is good for me to understand life.

(Interview-4)

Alita’s opportunity to take a break from her studies and travel outside the UK for a short time were steps to enhance her motivation to come back to the UK and enjoy her experience even more. This means that thanks to her ability to self-regulate her actions, she gained a sense of agency and independence over her goals (academic achievement) and needs (taking some time off).



**Figure 7.2 Alita’s motigraph showing improvement in February**

## **7.7 Alita's Motivation toward the end of MSc (April - August)**

### **7.7.1 Satisfaction with UK Life**

In April Alita's motivation was very high because by then she had adjusted to the UK environment both socially and academically. She had developed a good relationship with her classmates, and her assessment results were good.

From April to June I had good results for my PMAs, so I was satisfied with my performance and because in April I only have two PMAs left so I have achieved a lot and my motivation was very high.

(Interview-6)

Alongside her fuller adjustment, the ability to see her progress by having completed most of her coursework, was an important influence over her motivation. When I inquired about the nature of this high motivation, Alita explained that this related to her motivation to graduate from the university with merit or distinction.

I can graduate with merit or distinction, a goal I can achieve based on my performance and the good relationship with my classmates and have realised that my English has improved a lot so I can handle my life. (...) when I arrived in the UK I used to over-worry about the future and the uncertainties, but you know when you experience more you have the confidence and finally you can deal with it and it's just a matter of time. (...) I now know how to handle life and manage my expectations.

(Interview-6)

One of the key features shaping Alita's motivation from the early days on PS6 was her sense of impatience to acquire all necessary skills and perform well. This impatience meshed with a sense of insecurity about her work and often led to her inability to see her achievements. During the MSc, however, she understood that one may need to be patient with certain goals and this new attitude removed the anxiety which previously clouded her UK journey and motivation.

### **7.7.2 Struggle with the dissertation**

In June, Alita no longer had classes and therefore had fewer interactions with her classmates. This made her feel lonely.

In June I finished all the masters course so had less connection with my classmates because everyone was busy with the dissertation or some classmates they just flew back to their home country so less connection and so alone (...) the most important thing because of my project dissertation (...) because compared to other students my topic is a little difficult because it is about change management and this is a very new topic so you couldn't find a lot of the literature to read.

(Interview-6)



Despite her previously strong motivation, the lack of interactions with her classmates as well as the struggle of dealing with a difficult dissertation topic weakened her motivational wellbeing. Her supervisor always mentioned that she should focus on change management of project rather than organisation, but Alita did not have the professional project experience, and therefore did not wish to work on this area. However, the lack of resources in the library affected her enthusiasm to continue her research on this topic. As suggested by Copland et al, (2017), resources at the university are amongst the strongest incentives for international students to study in the UK, but Alita somehow missed this dimension.

### **7.7.3 Fear of not being able to graduate**

Alita was seriously concerned about her dissertation and the associated risk of not graduating if she failed.

I thought I couldn't graduate from the university because of the dissertation and that period I felt anxious and I couldn't focus on my dissertation and I had a lot of chats with my classmates and supervisor but you know different people gave me different suggestions (...) and I always changed my opinion about my project dissertation. It was terrible for me yeah.

(Interview-6)

At a time when Alita could no longer see the tangible *vision* (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014) of writing a successful dissertation, her *feared self* took over and she began feeling anxious about the possibility of not graduating. As a result of this anxiety, her motivation declined; crucially, other concerns led the path to this low motivation.

### **7.7.4 Financial Concerns**

Alita reminded herself that she quit her job in China to study abroad, and that this UK experience was very expensive which made the prospect of not graduating even more distressing.

I got insomnia because the living costs and tuition fees was expensive I mean studying abroad you know I resigned my job and I spent a lot of money but if finally I couldn't finish my MSc course I didn't know what to do. (...) at that time I cried everyday and I got insomnia and I don't know how to deal with it so every time when I think of the terrible result, I felt hopeless.

(Interview-6)

Alita sought help from the university counselling department to receive advice on how to cope with her anxiety. They also helped her obtain an extension for her dissertation deadline. This

episode echoes Lamie and Issitt's (2005) and Ryan's (2011) arguments foregrounding the value of university services for international students and the difference they make to the international student experience.

### **7.7.5 A new dissertation topic**

After much reflection, Alita resorted to changing her topic.

My supervisor gave me a lot of help and support but for me I think it didn't work (...)we had different opinions if you write your project dissertation you should focus on one specific area and then expand it but he wanted everything [ahh] yes because finally I focussed my dissertation about motivation and how to deal with motivation when the project members have project change.

(Interview-6)

I inquired what motivated such a change in topic, and Alita referred to her interest and goal to speak English fluently. She remembered that before arriving in the UK, she needed to motivate herself regularly. This realisation sparked her first interest in researching motivation.

I was interested in learning English and because my goal was 'I can just speak English fluently' but when I came to the UK I still erm had some difficulties because language learning takes time. This is the process so you need to motivate yourself regularly otherwise you will feel like you make a huge effort but why I couldn't see any results or the positive progress? so you always need to motivate yourself. I think this is the main source to inspire me to arrive at this topic dissertation.

(Interview-6)

Alita also revealed that my PhD work inspired her to research this topic. Initially her topic was about how people react to change but after talking to me during my interviews on motivation, she realised she would be interested to know how people's motivation changes during a project experience.

My previous topic was about how people react to change in project but when I spoke to you, I noticed the connection between the motivation and the process of change. So your PhD topic inspired me.

(Interview-6)

In September Alita experienced a burst of motivation, as she said her 'motivation exploded'(upwards) because she finished her dissertation and passed her viva achieving her academic goal. However, her next objective was to gain some work experience in the UK before her visa expired.

## **Chapter 8: The Story of Megan's Motivation**

### **8.1 Before coming to the UK**

#### **8.1.2 Imagined life at the UK university**

Megan began dreaming about her life at her chosen university around a year before her arrival in Britain. Her expectation was that living and studying in the UK would be less hectic compared to the fast-paced and busy life in Beijing.

[name of University] is a quiet, peaceful place which is different from Beijing, a big city with a lot of noise and a lot of power, money and a lot of temptations [hmm what do mean by temptations?] I mean distractions you know that you can't relax and always busy rushing but now I want to calm down and feel peaceful inside and really learn something and not be like people that are busy all the time. I think [name of university] can help me calm down and study something I really want.

(Interview-1)

Megan had clearly done some research about the location of her chosen university and her understanding of this place being in a suburb area aligned with her desire for calmness. Megan's motivation was initially shaped by a wish to become less involved with her professional life in the fast-moving world of Beijing. This in turn enhanced her imagined vision of a calmer UK life where she would engage in new learning. This emphasis on 'really learning' something indicates elements of an intrinsic motive (Gardner, 1985), but this was more complex than it seems.

#### **8.1.3 Competitive society**

Megan's main motivation to obtain a UK Master's was also shaped by her need to gain a competitive edge in China.

The reasons of me to choose to study at [name of University] are quite simple. First of all, MSc is necessary for the future due to the fierce competition in the society. So the tertiary education is a plus for young person. Secondly, I will have more opportunity to get a higher position in a company after learning the methodologies of programme and project management, comparing to my past.

(PEPA-1)

Therefore, an extrinsic dimension of Megan's motivation emerges here which is linked to her desire to become professionally competitive, typical motive of many international students in the Western academy (Kettle, 2017).

Last but not least, learning makes me happy. This means that studying at [name of university] and making friends here are fabulous things in my life, and this would be a great memory in my life. In conclusion, I want to study here to get promotion and enjoy my life. I dream a lot about the life in [name of university] and I do hope I can learn the practical knowledge here. Then, I want to know and analyze things in different ways and angles. Moreover, I hope I can find a good job after learning and acknowledging all the contents in this major.

(PEPA-1)

There seemed to be an interplay of external and internal forces shaping Megan's motivation. She appeared to be positively driven by both the instrumental need for a competitive profile to obtain a better job (extrinsic motivation) and her desire to learn new skills (intrinsic motivation). This interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic motives echoes van Lier's (1996) argument that these two dimensions need to work together to generate sustainable motivation. However, the configuration of motivation is far more complex when additional factors may exert other influences.

#### **8.1.4 Health problem**

While Megan had clear plans and ambitions about her studies in the UK, before her departure, in June, her motivation declined because she experienced a health problem.

I had tooth problem and I couldn't manage to make an appointment with a good dentist so I was not in a good mood and I couldn't think much about studying in the UK (...) I had something wrong with my body and I had no attention for anything else so no motivation.

(Interview-1)

This health struggle affected Megan to the extent that she had no motivation nor interest in thinking about the UK. This is a clear example of *motivation-in-context* (Ushioda, 2009) whereby despite having clearly defined motives (as illustrated earlier), Megan lost sight of these while another stronger influence in her life took over. Nonetheless, Megan had already formed some additional images of her future life in the UK, and these are critical to understanding her motivation.

#### **8.1.5 Imagined life on PS6 and MSc**

Prior to her arrival, Megan had not pondered much upon the pre-sessional, as she believed the MSc would be more difficult and this consumed more of her thoughts.

Before coming the UK my motivation was neutral erm I mean neither excited like an 18-year-old or too worried. I didn't put a lot of thought on the pre-session course but I thought the MSc was going to be tough [hmm were you worried about the MSc?] no but I thought the MSc was challenging demanding [oh okay and did you think about the pre-session at all before coming to the UK?] hmm I know I will pass and will be fine [hahah] haha I knew I would meet many new Chinese people and that's nothing new for me [hmm good but what made you say that you would be fine during the pre-session?] well, it's all about language so will be fine.

(Interview-1)

Thus, Megan's motivation was mediated by her understanding that PS6 would be an easy transition because, in her view, the sole focus was language. On the other hand, she envisaged the MSc as a more challenging undertaking. Therefore, Megan's imagined experiences did not seem to affect her motivation despite the probable difficulties.

### **8.1.6 Choosing the specific university**

Megan selected this university because her chosen MSc promised the development of practical skills.

This MSc provides practical experiences like internship and this university is more practical and a taught degree is not research so it is nearer to the companies, but other universities were more play [ah what do you mean by 'more play' at other universities?] people in other institutions work less hard than at this university [ what makes you say that?] a lot of people like say this on WeChat group.

(Interview-1)

There is a clear emphasis on the instrumental orientation of this choice to study abroad which is evidenced by her engagement and time investment to make an informed decision; after all, she had clear ambitions for the future. Megan also believed that this university could help her develop 'soft skills' thereby making her a well-rounded person.

Also soft skills are harder to get than subjects like mathematics, physics and [this university] seems more practical and can give me these skills plus has a relatively high ranking in the world so this means that after finishing here and gaining these skills I can do whatever I want.

(Interview-2)

Echoing Copland et al, (2017), Megan's motivation was largely driven by the importance ascribed to the university's international reputation as well as the appeal of the prospective course content. However, this enthusiasm for her future studies came with her apprehension about her own skills.

### **8.1.7 Perceptions of her writing skills**

Megan's previous belief that PS6 would be an easy course about language did not last and this affected her motivation dramatically.

1st August was not a very good time for me as I tried to write an essay and looked up some info on how to write an essay but actually took me a lot of time.

(Interview-1)

Megan was assisted by a friend who had previously completed academic studies in Canada. However, this experience compromised Megan's confidence about her future studies.

I have a friend in China who completed an undergraduate course in Canada and I wanted to practise with her (...) I didn't like my essay writing because my essay writing seemed babyish and my friend said this. Also my essay was out of logic and other people may not understand it. So my motivation to study in UK went down and I even thought that I could do a postgraduate in China and not struggle in an English country but it doesn't matter that the UK is hard because here [in the UK] you spend less time than an MSc in China.

(Interview-1)

Megan's motivation suffered because she realised that her writing skills may not be sufficiently good to study in the UK. It could be that this perception was primarily generated by the pressure and judgment of her friend who had completed a degree in an English-speaking university. This episode thus points to the derogatory effects of 'role model'. However, Megan's motivation to study in the UK was still sustained by the fact that UK degrees take less time to complete than in China (Bamber, 2014). Given her academic writing concerns, Megan's motivation to complete PS6 shifted.

### **8.1.8 Why the pre-sessional**

Megan trusted that PS6 would help her hone her academic writing skills.

I am thirst for writing guidance. When I prepared the IELTS exam last year (...) The final score of my IELTS writing part was six, which is not enough for academic writing I suppose. Therefore, I really want to improve writing ability and especially the correct expression of meaning. Under the suggestion of my friends, I need to write a lot to get familiar and collect the common expressions. However, revising essay is another important part of writing. Therefore, there is gratitude of you to help me with my text-based studies.

(PEPA-1)

Megan's main motivation for attending PS6 was to improve her writing and seemed to be fuelled by the image of her *feared self* who would not perform well academically (Dörnyei, 2005). However, an important element of her concerns about her writing stemmed from her experience with the IELTS test.

Also the IELTS exam is not always fair because the marks they give are unfair. [oh what makes you say that?] well depends on the different place where you take the exam. Some of my friends got better marks in Thailand than in China. Last time I took an exam I had 6.5 for speaking and the second time I got 5.5 how is this possible? Once I had a rude examiner who did not have a good attitude or listen to me. So I think that in order to pass an IELTS exam erm I need luck. I took three exams and I never got all the scores required at the same time, so the pre-sessional was a requirement for [MSc department] I didn't really want to do the IELTS again.

(Interview-1)

The desire to enhance her academic writing skills and the dissatisfaction with the IELTS system constituted a significant part of Megan's motivation for attending PS6. Thus, there were a number of extrinsic and intrinsic forces driving Megan's commitment to PS6.

In sum, prior to her arrival in the UK, Megan's motivation was shaped by several external and internal factors. Having acquired work experience in a busy environment, she imagined and hoped for a calm lifestyle in the UK where she could focus on learning something new. This intrinsic motivation for learning intertwined with her understanding of a competitive society where a Master's degree was necessary to succeed. However, whilst Megan had nurtured the desire to study in the UK for a long time, a couple of months prior to her arrival, she experienced a tooth problem which she struggled to resolve, and which brought down her motivation. Finally, whilst she was disheartened by her fear of not succeeding in the UK, she believed that her chosen university, with its international reputation, would equip her with the appropriate skills to succeed (e.g. soft skills, good academic writing), and these beliefs kept her motivation from going further down.

## **8.2 Megan's motivation at the start of PS6 (weeks 1&2)**

### **8.2.1 Noticing learning**

After week-1, Megan noticed the process of learning new skills and this enthused her immensely.

Even we have to work a lot and hard in classroom and in residence I am very happy because I am learning new skills. I came to study here to learn and this week we study how to write a paragraph in academic English which is good for me.

(PEPA-2)

Thus, early on PS6, Megan's motivation was fuelled by her understanding that her learning was conducive to her own goals, and she explained this vividly through a metaphor about success.

When I arrived my motivation went up because I started learning and I felt I could taste the sweetness of learning and feeling nearer to the success like the good English speakers and, I felt near use better English myself (...) learning during the pre-sessional felt like eating with seeds that are bitter and the seeds are like the essays, exams and reading articles but I was refreshed after eating all the grapes (...) the grapes represent learning at the pre-sessional.

(Interview-2)

Megan's images capture her motivational journey, almost like self-guides which shape one's behaviour.

When I realised I was learning, my motivation went up. It's like when you want to achieve a big thing like a PhD you know this is big stuff and there is distance between you and this thing erm you could think of it as a big apple. When you finally reach it, you realise that you start eating and you realise it was not too difficult to reach and even if it is very big you get some sweetness, the sweetness that's learning.

(Interview-2)

This metaphor confirms that Megan's intrinsic motivation to learn was still in good health during week-1 of PS6 and her noticing progress enhanced such motivational force. The process of visualising the trajectory towards her academic goals through her metaphorical vision supports Dörnyei and Kubanyiova's (2014) suggestion that a tangible and sensory imagery energises action.

### **8.2.2 Satisfaction with teaching style**

Megan liked my teaching persona which in turn had an impact on her motivation to study.

you are very encouraging and I was impressed that on the first class you learnt everyone's names and I think this is very good because we communicate easy this way. I liked that you encouraged everyone to talk, although you are the writing teacher you encouraged me to talk more even more the speaking teacher.

(Interview-1)

Although demanding and intensive, Megan found my module on academic reading and writing enjoyable.



Text-based course had a tight schedule but accompanied a lot of fun in week1. At beginning, all of us were asked to tell two stories to guess which was correct. This gave us a chance to introduce ourselves and get to know other peoples at the same time. At the end of the day, we wrote a paragraph as a pre-course exercise. The next day, we experienced a hard day and we had thought the text-based studies would not be a big issue because we had a humorous teacher, Sal. To be serious, we learned to summarize a paragraph and began to notice that reading is fairly important for writing.

(PEPA-2)

This indicates that Megan was motivated by the positive classroom atmosphere promoted through communicative activities. As such, she seemed to embody Pinner's (2019) notion of synergy between a motivational classroom environment and her own motivation.

Furthermore, despite the challenging pressure of her feared self conjuring the image that she may fail, Megan remained motivated and able to see her weekly progress.

I was a little anxious to do this writing course because the texts we read are tough and we should write in academic English but is not easy. We read the article of Talent Management using the methodologies given by Sal. The last day was touching for me because after a weekly learning, we could write the paragraph finally. All above, this week gives gave me an unforgettable start of Warwick and my new life here. it makes me smell out the challenges and hard-working future.

(PEPA-2)

I was worried I couldn't write proper academic English and erm I worry in class sometimes you know but your humour and fun methods made the lessons good and I could learn. [ ah that's kind of you, I am happy to hear that, could you give me an example of 'fun methods'?] yea yeah I mean if we don't know the answer you help us find the answer with jokes and we feel good so we don't feel scared of you even we make mistakes.

(Interview-1)

Therefore, during the first two weeks of PS6, Megan enjoyed her learning experience because, despite the challenges and workload, she was able to see progress. This daily progress was instrumental in offsetting her vision of a *feared self*. Megan's appreciation of difficulty and 'the smell' of challenge may confirm Dörnyei and Kubanyiova's (2014) argument that motivation may be generated by the vision of the *feared self*, who may fail academically. Importantly, the friendly teaching approach provided a safe environment where she could learn without fretting about mistakes.

## 8.3 Megan's motivation during PS6 (weeks 3/4/5)

### 8.3.1 Settling in the UK

After three weeks on the course, Megan still faced the need to juggle many tasks at once and many of these went beyond her academic remit.

You taught a lot about the subject for the MSc for example like the difference between project and plan management and this helped me understand what I study on the MSc but at that time I did not take this as seriously because I can study later in the MSc and I was emotionally bothered with other tasks like setting bank account, finding a house, police registration.

(Interview-1)

Despite the encouragement and support emanating from the classroom environment, Megan's motivation suffered because of all the demands of settling as an international student in the UK. However, PS6 teaching and learning methods continued, to some degree, to sustain her academic motivation in the face of all these other external influences.

### 8.3.2 Teaching and feedback

Megan was positively influenced by my teaching methods, and particularly my feedback practice.

You are well prepared teacher (...) [thank you for saying that but could you tell me what made you think I was so well-prepared?] you always had real things to teach. You always had objectives at the start of lessons and also gave feedback for all the writing homework erm and also you asked us to write all the time which I think was useful for us. I was happy to write every week and your comments were serious [oh how do you mean 'serious'?] erm I think you read my writing very carefully and my friend told me that one way to make progress with writing is to write often and show it to others who are better than you so you did that for me and I was happy to do that.

(Interview-1)

Writing regularly and receiving continuous feedback, which she clearly valued, seemed to support Megan's motivation for learning. Crucially, we can still see the influence of her peers who put her on the path to improving her academic writing. Also, Megan's appreciation of the lesson structure with clear aims at the beginning confirm Mulligan and Kirkpatrick's (2000) argument that international students need scaffolding through lecture outlines and signposting to aid their comprehension.

Furthermore, Megan gained motivation from my habit of encouraging everyone to talk in class.

In Text-based course we get many chances to talk because Sal encourages us to speak all the time (...) I think this is a good method because we learn more grammar and vocabulary and my English improves. I like to be corrected by teacher in class even if we work in groups, I think teacher feedback is better.

(PEPA-3)

Megan's recognition of my communicative teaching approach supported her desire, at the beginning of PS6, to interact with others, whilst enhancing her speaking skills. She very much appreciated feedback from the teacher rather than her peers which may indicate that Megan preferred a 'role model' who was more proficient than her or her classmates.

Megan's motivation for learning was further developed by the experience of doing EP.

### **8.3.3 Exploratory Practice as learning about the UK**

EP fulfilled Megan's thirst for learning about UK culture.

Because we discuss together so we know other people's fancy points [fancy points?] like the points that attract them so like tap water, exams [ah so the different topics and you liked that you became familiar with erm what your classmates were interested in?] yes yes that's it (...) it means we get knowledge from others and about their topics and the answers they solved [ah so other knowledge about the UK?] yes yes I like learning from others about other things I don't think of.

(Interview-2)

Thus, although on this occasion EP did not bring together people with similar or same puzzles, this practice stimulated and satisfied Megan's sense of curiosity, one of EP's fundamental tenets (Hanks, 2017). This curiosity was not only fulfilled in relation to British culture but also academic culture.

### **8.3.4 Exploratory Practice as academic learning**

Whilst resolving her academic puzzle, *Why can English essays be written in different lengths even if they are on the same topic?*, Megan discussed this with her own classmates, and she realised that they shared similar puzzles. More importantly, she was pleased to learn from students in a different class group.

The discussion with group six was beneficial to learning. We discussed about our puzzles and we also talked about essay topics. My puzzle was about the lengths of the essay and I found that students in that class had more business topics, comparing with me and my classmates' theoretical topics. Therefore, I suppose that they may easily stretch their essay, because there are many cases they could use.

(EP-Reflection-4)

with group 6 I found that people there can use business cases to aid their essays to describe and do critical writing and this way they can make their essays longer because they can add business cases (...) the discussion was good because erm we have the chance to discuss with other people other groups and other groups had different experiences and more ideas than my group I mean talk with more people can give me more ideas so this is a good way.

(Interview-2)

This academic puzzling, however, did not help her resolve her dilemma; therefore, despite enjoying the experience, Megan was not fully satisfied.

And about the puzzle I don't think it resolved my problem because they had different topics and different ways to find an answer for their essays (...) it gave me more ideas maybe like adding more relevant references to make it longer and so I understand people can write in different lengths because they have different topics.

(Interview-2)

Nonetheless, through this experience, Megan came to the understanding that she could extend her essay by incorporating the discussion with more references. She also understood that people can write in different lengths because they use different approaches to writing, often depending on their academic discipline (Pilcher & Richards, 2016).

### **8.3.5 Exploratory Practice as a difficult experience**

Whilst EP was useful, Megan found the overall experience difficult and time-consuming.

Exploratory Practice is difficult (...) raising a puzzle is difficult and find an answer is also difficult. So I think for you it is a new way to teach and for us it is a way to learn, and it is a kind of initiative learn so [hmm what do you mean by 'initiative learn'?] it means that I have to do it by myself [ but I did help you ahah] yes I get a link and some comments on the puzzle (...) you gave me the background for the topic to do the interviews so that was useful, but I must say that this is not enough erm you cannot solve the puzzle directly and exploration is difficult and takes time.

(Interview-2)

Megan thus revealed a preference for a learning style where the teacher has a leading role as opposed to the student taking the initiative.

So I am not crazy about Exploratory Practice so it means I am not really interested in using Exploratory Practice because if I had exploratory practice every day I would go banana (...) I think I am not really interested in this way [of learning] although sometimes it's very useful, but first I have to find my own puzzle but it's hard to find a puzzle. If I have a puzzle then it's okay but for me it's hard to find a puzzle hahaha I need to have more chocolate or food to support me find a puzzle

hahah I think it's time-consuming. (...) I think [my motivation] decreased a little bit about studying in pre-sessional course [ so when you say that it decreased your motivation erm can you tell me more about that?] erm because we used lots of time raising puzzles and finding the answers but I have no idea if this is really useful to improve my writing and reading skills. [so you said before that using EP helped you understand more about essay lengths] yes [ but now you're saying EP is not useful for academic work] it decreased my motivation it's not equal to it's not useful [hmm] I think it's useful but it decreased my motivation [ah okay I'm wondering why] well it's demanding hahah it's hard work haha [hahah].

(Interview-2)

Megan here confessed that while EP helped her gain some understanding about her puzzles, she questioned if the approach helped her improve her skills, and as such, her motivation declined slightly.

In short, during PS6 Megan's motivation was shaped by a variety of factors. Whilst she had begun her UK experience with a strong thirst for learning, this intrinsic motivation was weakened by the numerous UK settlement tasks (e.g. police registration and opening a bank account). However, she was pleased with the teaching methods which fuelled her motivation to learn because, through regular feedback and the constant promotion of English in the classroom, she could feel closer to her learning objectives. EP added a new dimension to Megan's motivation in that she enjoyed the value of gaining a better understanding about the UK culture and academic writing conventions, but she found the experience of *doing* EP challenging and time-consuming. As such, Megan revealed a preference for a learning approach where the learner should not take the initiative, like with this EP experience, but rather the teacher would guide the student by telling her what to do.

## 8.4 Megan’s motivation at the end of PS6

### 8.4.1 Fear of exams

Towards the end of PS6 Megan’s motivation declined because she was concerned about her final exams.

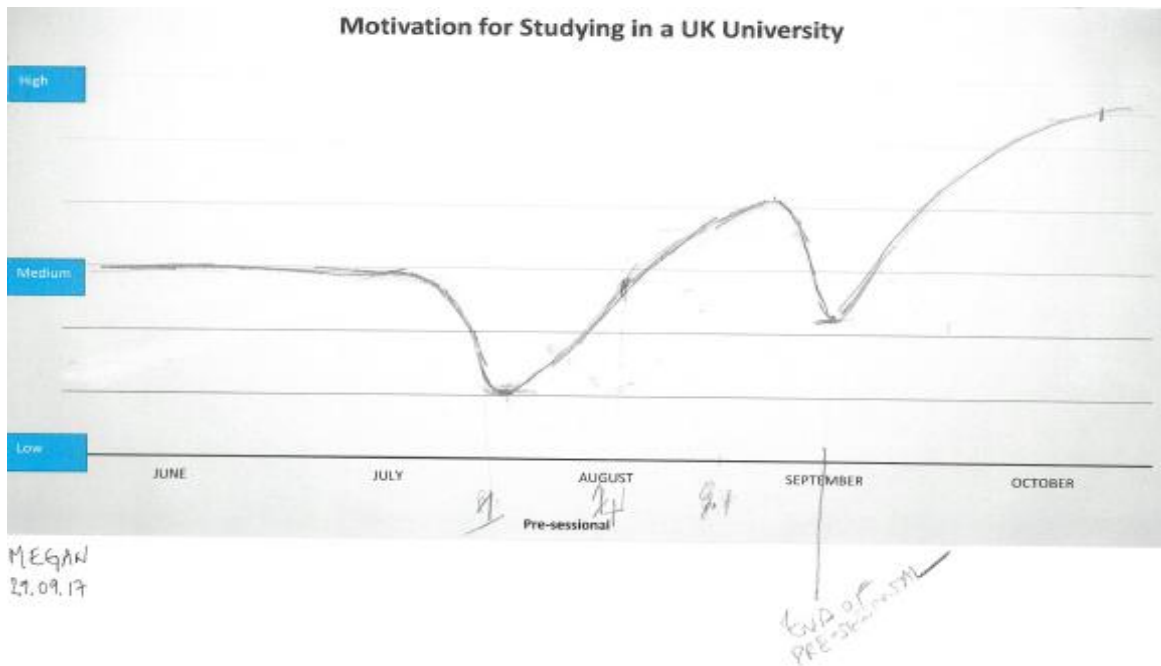
I am really afraid of exams which is due to my experience with IELTS and undergraduate studies. This fear to fail the final pre-sessional exams makes me feel anxious and if I don’t pass I cannot do my MSc.

(PEPA-4)

At the end of pre-sessional my motivation went down because I was afraid of exams. Even we worked hard and followed your suggestions I know there is a possibility I can fail and it’s like I remember the horrible experience with IELTS, so my motivation goes down.

(Interview-1)

This suggests that Megan’s initial understanding of PS6, as being an easy course, had changed, which resulted in the vision of her *feared self* taking over (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2013). This prospect of failing linked to her previous exam experiences and took a toll on her motivational wellbeing.



**Figure 8.1 Megan’s motigraph showing her declining motivation at the end of PS6.**

In the end she passed all components of PS6 and was able to progress to the MSc smoothly.

## **8.5 Megan's motivation at the start of the MSc (October - December)**

By October, Megan was fully settled in the UK and could focus on her studies without being distracted by other major tasks (e.g. police registration). This opportunity to concentrate on her academic work was motivating for her, but it did not last long.

### **8.5.1 MSc Schedule**

By November Megan had completed two modules, but more critically, she felt the pressure of the new MSc timetable.

I was busy at that time, I had modules from 9am to 6.30pm and we have presentations nearly everyday so it's quite busy I had to drink lots of coffee to work and stay awake (...) and sometimes I was really tired and when I go back home I sleep and then work on something for tomorrow [so that made your motivation to study] not quite high.

(Interview-3)

The pressure of class attendance and coursework had a negative effect on Megan's motivation. This intensive schedule seemed to curb her ability to self-regulate which in turn had a negative impact on her motivation. Significantly, this was not helped by her appreciation of the MSc teaching methods.

### **8.5.2 Teaching style: early MSc modules**

Megan noticed that one teacher was particularly boring, and she thought their module could have been more motivating if the teaching of theory had been combined with real cases from their experiences. Some teachers, however, facilitated practical activities, and these made her feel better.

The teacher is really boring [can you tell me what you mean by boring and how that affected you?] well he read PPT and that's quite boring [ah I see and what could have made this module more motivating for you?] like some teachers make connections to some real cases like from their experiences (...) so this kind of thing will make me feel better (...) but this boring teaching made my motivation go down.

(Interview-3)

Thus, Megan bemoaned the MSc teaching approach insofar as there was a missing link between the theory presented in lectures and the world of project and programme management outside the lecture theatre. This seemed to confirm that, like other mainland-Chinese students, Megan had chosen this UK degree on the assumption that she would gain innovative practical skills rather than more theory-oriented training like they may in China (Wu, 2014).

### 8.5.3 The culture of feedback on the MSc

In December Megan's motivation declined further because she received a fail for an assignment on which she had worked hard.

In December I got the result of the module in November (...) I used nearly one month to submit this work and the result was quite unsatisfying (...) because this is my second module and I paid even more time and made even more effort than the last PM, and the last PMA I submitted I got distinction. I think the second one shouldn't be worse than that but actually I got a fail so that's totally unfair and I was not happy with that because I wanted to graduate with merit or distinction, but if this module give me a fail I cannot graduate with merit or distinction so I was quite upset (...)

(Interview-3)

In order to address this problem, Megan emailed the teacher who taught the session related to her chosen assignment topic.

I email the other teacher because every module has many teachers and I chose the topic of him and he told me that it shouldn't be failed there's something wrong with module leader maybe because most of my class erm I cannot say the percentage but they told me over 50% of the class failed.

(Interview-3)

Megan and other students emailed the MSc course office, but these would not question the module leader's judgment (i.e. the marker).

I argued with University course office but there was no reply well yeah there was a reply later but they just said that they are on the side of the module leader (...) so that was a big thing for no motivation to study because I think my efforts didn't pay back.

(Interview-3)

Megan had read the feedback commentaries carefully and, given her disagreement with some of these, she forwarded this feedback to the teacher who had taught her during the module.

The first point is about like there was some comments were wrong in the feedback. For example, I used team working literature so I include some authors from the articles and course leader [marker] said it's irrelevant but my teacher said it's completely relevant because you talk about teamworking and these people are good authors so what I wrote should be in the paper. So this means that I did the right thing but the course leader said I did the wrong thing (...) the second thing is that he said my English is not good so the teacher wanted me to find people who speak English to show that they can understand my paper. So, my department should know that when they mark PMAs they should value more academic part and not penalise so much for the language. Actually, this teacher because I sent all my things to him, he kindly read it and he thought that what I wrote erm the English was not that bad and that it is understandable.

(Interview-3)



After noticing this teacher's support, Megan emailed back the course office with this teacher's comments, and they said they would take her complaint onto the next stage. The outcome, however, was unsatisfying because it clashed with Megan's academic goals.

I asked for second marking but they said there's not second marking but only one person marking these [so the team leader was the only marker?] yes very odd we have only one marker. [So what did they say after you showed that another teacher disagreed with that marker?] if I only want a pass for my degree I can have a mark like this because this mark is between 40 and 50 so I can have this kind of mark and still get a pass degree. However if I want high ambition and want to get a merit degree I have to pass all other modules over 50 and total mark must be 60 and means that if this one module is below 50 then they give you a new topic to re-write it so, I cannot get the degree the same time as my colleagues if I want a merit. (...) I was really upset.

(Interview-3)

This experience affected Megan's academic wellbeing considerably and noticing that another tutor supported her, but the department did not, resulted in a sharp decline of her motivation to study on this MSc. She lost sight of the rewards expected from her hard work and commitment to the degree. This episode shows how the dynamic nature of Megan's motivation shifted because of the negative influences emanating from the academic department and course leader (the marker). The resulting decline in motivation was unsurprising. This episode revealed a lack of supportive classroom environment (e.g. Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998); in fact, Megan was not even allowed to speak to the marker to gain dialogic feedback. Also, rather than increasing Megan's goal-orientedness (Dörnyei, 2001), i.e. graduating with a merit or distinction, this incident weakened her motivation thereby undermining her academic vision (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2013).

#### **8.5.4 Supervision experience**

According to her department's policy, students were required to take the initiative and responsibility to find a suitable dissertation supervisor by mid-December. This policy, however, did not seem to factor in students' lack of familiarity with the department staff and some course content.

In mid-December if you cannot find your supervisor then your dissertation will get 5% penalised [ah so it's your responsibility to find the supervisor not the department's?] yeah we have to send our CVs and our proposals to the supervisor (...) and the supervisor will see 'ah this student we can have an interview meeting' and maybe you will have one meeting or two meetings and the supervisor will say 'okay it's nice to talk to you'. It's also to see if you can't actually conduct the project and the supervisor will refuse the student and the student will have to find a new supervisor, so it's like job finding cycle and if you don't find the supervisor before mid-December you get 5% penalised. (...) there is a short amount of supervisors and many students. It was easy for me because I have job experience so all the supervisors I asked wanted me and I could pick but other students if they are just graduates of undergraduate school didn't know what to do (...) so my motivation went up because I didn't have to worry about my supervisor erm but my other colleagues are worried about it everyday (...) and my motivation goes up.

(Interview-4)

This departmental policy to securing a dissertation supervisor was not straightforward but Megan's ability to find one more easily than her classmates shaped her motivation positively.

[It's very interesting you saying that because your colleagues were struggling your motivation went up] yeah yeah [I'd love for you to tell me more about this if you can] okay yeah if you can see this like a competition then when you see other players are far behind and erm this is like this will make me feel better hahah [haha okay thank you hahaha]

(Interview-5)

Albeit challenging, Megan embraced this experience as a competition and her success in finding a supervisor enhanced her motivation to be on the MSc thereby supporting the argument that competition may generate motivation in adults (Reeve & Deci, 1996). However, one cannot ignore Megan's motivation being shaped by her intrinsic 'happiness' for finding a supervisor alongside the extrinsic force of the 5% penalty. After all, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) suggest these two orientations may work together in order to generate, support or sustain motivation.

## 8.6 Megan's motivation during the MSc (January - April)

### 8.6.1 New interesting modules

In February, Megan's motivation increased because she felt less pressure and was engaged with two new interesting modules.

In February we got two new modules and for these two modules we get to work together [with other classmates] so it's very interesting to work together although I don't want to write any more PMA [so in February you start classes again] yes [and your motivation goes up because of this?] yes but also work together with other people (...) with one module I was leader of the group so I organised all erm so each person has a role in the group and we have to run a company and I am the manager and others may be the human resources, financial contractor blah blah. And we need to negotiate with the teacher who is like another company and we want to cooperate to sell our products to other countries, so we need to work together and negotiate with the teacher and argue for better price. (...) I like this and makes my motivation go up because it's like real life project management.

(Interview-4)

Therefore, working in groups and using class activities which reflected the professional traits of programme management in the world outside the classroom fostered Megan's motivation. Not only does this point to the usefulness of establishing good group dynamics in the classroom (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019), it also reinforces Megan's wish, like many other Chinese students (Bamber, 2014), to develop practical skills during their overseas academic experience.

### 8.6.2 Difficult module but interesting teaching style

In April, her motivation was neither high nor low, because the new module was a little challenging, but further down the line Megan experienced new teaching methods which enthused her.

In April motivation is medium because (...) the teacher was very interesting but the module is a little bit difficult (...) the teacher designed many games in class and is really friendly (...) she asked us to work together and this was about management of change and during change anything could happen and it seems like we were many teams and we played the game together and see what could happen (...) for example, in the pass-the-ball game she asked all the students to stand up and pass the ball to the student next to each other, but then there are some rules erm and then she changes the rules so every time the rules are changed we need to create new things, this is the idea to deal with change. I feel very interested (...) and we can learn each role characteristics during the game erm like the leader, the negotiator and so from this game I learn some things.

(Interview-5)

Despite the difficulties of the module, seeing the benefits of these engaging group activities fuelled Megan's motivation. Like previously, here we see not only a synergy between good group

cohesiveness and Megan's motivation but also the connection between academia and the practical world of project management.

At the end of April, Megan submitted her last PMA, and she wished to take some time to herself and disconnect from her academic work; as such, her motivation to study declined and this continued until June.

At the end of April the motivation goes down because I successfully submit my PMA and in May I think I really need to have some time to enjoy life, so after I submit my PMA I relax myself from May to June [ah so in May and June your motivation to study goes down because you want to relax] yeah of course [hmm haha but weren't you supposed to be working on your dissertation?] because the deadline is still in August so I think erm yeah I'm fine.

(Interview-5)

Therefore, Megan utilised her self-regulatory agency (Bandura, 2001) to do what felt best for her own wellbeing. This was at the expense of her motivation to study, or in this case, complete the dissertation.

## **8.7 Megan's motivation towards the end of the MSc**

### **8.7.1 A Difficult dissertation Topic**

After taking a short break from her studies, in July, Megan's motivation fluctuated, driven upwards by her enthusiasm to submit the dissertation and downward by her frustration with the lack of resources in the library.

when I wrote my dissertation I needed to borrow books from other universities but the thing is that I applied online to get permission to borrow the books I want to read from other universities erm so from May to July I continue the literature review but I struggle because I cannot organise the material so that's a problem during that time.

(Interview-5)

As recommended by Copland et al, (2017), the university's resources play a big part in international students' experience, and as demonstrated by Megan, the lack of relevant resources may generate a loss of motivation to perform well academically.

But in July [motivation] becomes higher erm medium-high because at that time the deadline is coming (...) I struggled a lot but because the deadline is coming I feel anxious and the lit review is not on its way I cannot organise it (...) [so in July your motivation keeps going up and down because you struggled with the lit review] yeah [and what was the main problem that you experienced with the lit review?] I think the problem is that when I compare my topic with other students' topics I think my topic isn't good enough (...) because my topic is harder than other students it's difficult to find resources at the library so I have to borrow from outside [okay and did your supervisor help with the lit review?] he helps me but I cannot have enough books to read because I need to wait for books from other university libraries. So this means that when I want to read something erm I need to wait two weeks or three weeks [oh] so my topic is not a strength of [name of university], that must be the reason why the library doesn't have books on that and I think that's not very good.

(interview-5)

Thus, the struggle to find relevant resources at her own university library weakened her motivation to work on the dissertation, and this frustration was compromised further by the perception that other classmates' topics seemed easier than hers. Given Megan's previous competitive dimension, this was a critical blow for her academic ambition to graduate with a high degree classification.

### **8.7.2 Pressure generates motivation**

When she finally managed to obtain useful resources from other institutions, Megan decided to put in all the effort required.

the deadline is coming and sometimes I have insomnia because my motivation is so high that the deadline is coming and during the evening time I worked very very long and I finish in the end [but erm was that more a matter of pressure or motivation?] erm I think pressure and motivation they're friends in this part hahah [haha] (...) pressure and panic because actually I don't like my topic but I need to finish erm between May and July I lost interest because I couldn't find any books but when I finally find a point, an argument for my dissertation I go deeper to finish my dissertation and time is not much. I just use more time during August and sleep less so I can hand in this dissertation and I can successfully graduate (...) pressure makes my motivation go up.

(Interview-5)

The initial decline of Megan's motivation due to her disappointment with the library's resources may support the argument that one of many international students' determinants to choose overseas institution concerns the use of resources and reliance upon capable staff at the institution (Lamie & Issitt, 2005; Copland et al. 2017). However, the amount of pressure she was under generated more motivation, especially when she had the required resources. Thus, pressure worked in Megan's favour in that it energised her into action but, at this stage, her sole motive was to finish her degree and return home.

## **Chapter 9: The Story of David's Motivation**

### **9.1 Before coming to the UK**

#### **9.1.1 Doing an MSc to get an office job**

Before choosing to study in the UK, David had gained some professional experience in China, but he was not happy with his work conditions.

In June I got my offer from the university and I became very excited you know my motivation gone up to the top (...) I had some working experience before I came to the UK but I am not quite satisfied with my work because you know my bachelor degree is about civil engineering so I had to spend my time on the construction site which you know the conditions are not good (...) so it's a bit hard for me to work there (...) so I made a decision to spend some time on these studies and get a higher degree and that means erm I can get more chance to work in big enterprise(...)like in an office [ah so you want to work in an office] yeah I prefer an office [laughs] sitting in an office is much better than working on the construction site.

(Interview-1)

David's main motive to leave China and his job to obtain a UK Masters was shaped by his desire for better employment conditions. Like many other Chinese students, David had the clear goal of obtaining an overseas degree to gain a competitive profile and enhance his career path (Kettle, 2017).

#### **9.1.2 MSc as competitive edge**

According to David, Chinese companies value higher degree qualifications greatly.

In China many enterprises put the degree at very high priority that means if you don't have a master's degree you don't have a chance to even have an interview with the HR of the enterprise.

(Interview-1)

David's motivation to gain a Master's and a competitive edge were clearly defined by his understanding of the labour market in China. Therefore, David seemed fully aware of the importance and relevance of acquiring a higher degree qualification. These were the goal properties which were essential to sustain his engagement (Mercer, 2019) with this ambitious UK journey.

### **9.1.3 Competitive society**

David's desire to work for a bigger company was guided by his ambition for a higher salary which would allow him to live in Beijing, but this expensive city would also put him in harsher competition than elsewhere. Nonetheless, since his family and friends were based in Beijing, he seemed happy to take up the challenge.

my relatives my friends and also my home is in Beijing so I just don't want to leave my hometown haha [fair enough haha] I think it's okay to leave my hometown for a couple of years to fight for my career but if I have to spend 10 years outside Beijing I don't like that heheh.

(Interview-2)

Therefore, we learn that David's drive for a better salary was not just directed by his ambition to work in a better professional position, but this motivational impetus was enhanced by his affective desire to live close to family and friends. This motivational force seemed strong enough to energise David's action despite the harsh competition he expected in Beijing.

### **9.1.4 UK Universities are better than Chinese Universities**

David could have completed a similar Master's in China, but he preferred the UK.

The UK is a developed country and the management methods here is much better than China (...) in China the project managers don't like advanced management methods but the old-fashioned methods works well, but I don't like that because I think that innovation is much more important so, if you use the advanced management methods to manage a project maybe it works much better than the old-fashioned way...the project managers in China don't realise that but I believe it will make things better, that's why I came to the UK to learn management methods.

(Interview-1)

Therefore, David's curiosity and determination to understand whether 'advanced' project management strategies worked better than traditional methods represented a critical dimension of his motivation to study in the UK. In a sense, his motivation went beyond the instrumental need of a UK degree for the sole sake of prestige and competition (e.g. Kettle, 2017) because he was genuinely interested in learning.

### **9.1.5 Future MSc and professional plans**

David's academic goals were so clear that he had already formed certain ideas about his future MSc dissertation.

My dissertation topic it's not decided yet but maybe I could study a way to motivate the project managers to accept the new advanced methods (...) after I come back to China I can't say that I can change China or even I can't say that I can change my company but at least I think that even when I become a project manager I would like to lead my team using some advanced methods.

(Interview-1)

David's motivation to study in the UK was strengthened by his desire to introduce his knowledge about advanced management methods to the Chinese market. Despite his fear that Chinese companies may not welcome such methods, he was determined to use these strategies in his future professional contexts. Also, his dissertation plans reveal a robust motivational current (Dörnyei et al, 2016) directed by his clear project of capitalising on his UK studies to enrich his future career.

### **9.1.6 Choosing the specific university**

David chose a university which enjoys a good international reputation.

the university has not a long history but has already become a top university in the world so I chose this university because I knew it can give me all I need to be successful in my career.

(Interview-1)

He was determined to make the most of his UK experience, and the university's reputation instrumentally shaped his motivation as he believed this institution would equip him with the skills and experiences needed for a successful career. Also, he expected that this university would enable him to broaden his subject expertise.

My bachelor's degree is in civil engineering so being a postgraduate student in programme and project management gives me a good chance to broaden my sight and strengthen my understanding of how a programme actually works. (...) my bachelor is focused on construction projects and the methods of construction, but in every industry or company there is a need for programme and management project (...) studying at this university will help me achieve my goal.

(Interview-2)

Therefore, studying PPM at this university fuelled David's motivation to develop his expertise for career progression. This is one motive reported by large studies on international students in the UK (e.g. Lamie & Issitt, 2005; Copland et al., 2017).



### **9.1.7 University's location**

Part of David's motivation for choosing this specific institution can be attributed to its geographical location.

The university gives a quiet atmosphere away from loud noise and distraction, so the students are able to focus on their studies. (...) this town is small and the university is actually located in the suburb and so it's not many shops (...) so it's quiet.

(Interview-2)

Thus, the university's reputation was not the sole reason directing David's motivation, but the geographical setting seemed to acquire a degree of importance, just like for other international students (Bodycott, 2009). However, despite all the above motives shaping David's desire to study in the UK, there were other conflicting factors which had an influence over his motivational well-being.

### **9.1.8 Sadness about leaving China**

David was very excited in July because this was the first time for him to travel abroad, but, at the same time, he realised that he would miss family and friends.

In July I realised that I have to leave home for one year and can't go back to China because it's a long journey so motivation here goes a bit down, and I become a little bit upset because of leaving my friends and home in China.

(Interview-1)

Also, David was concerned that he may not be able to make many friends in the new place, and this thought led to a decline in his motivation.

I am little bit of a quiet person and I don't have so many friends and only have few close friends I can talk to, I think it's a little hard for me to make new friends in a new atmosphere like this so this is main reason that makes me sad before I leave China.

(Interview-1)

In sum, prior to his arrival in the UK, David's motivation was a product of several factors starting with his desire for an office job and the requirement of a Master's to gain a competitive edge within the Chinese market. However, not any Master's programme suited his intrinsic ambitions. He wished to study in the UK because he expected to learn about 'advanced' management methods which are not popular in China and was determined to utilise this knowledge in his future career back in China. His choice for the specific British institution was also guided by the university's

international reputation and the geographical location. Nonetheless, despite his enthusiasm, David was consternated by affective factors such as missing his family and friends, and this, too, had an influence over his motivation before his departure.

## **9.2 David's motivation at the start of PS6 (weeks 1&2)**

### **9.2.1 Lack of parental presence**

During the first week of PS6, David felt he was under substantial pressure.

It's mainly because of the study but it's about life because before I came to UK I used to live with my parents so didn't have to spend much time doing housework or cooking or shopping, so after I came to UK I have to spend much time on shopping or cooking and also have to study...so it's made me very busy (...) actually I feel exhausted that's why my motivation went down.

(Interview-2)

David was overwhelmed by the numerous tasks which went beyond studying as he was not used to juggling so much at the same time in China. This new lifestyle generated a sense of fatigue which diminished his motivation. Crucially, his motivation declined further when he realised that he had very little time for socialisation outside his studies.

Before I came to the UK I wanted a balance of study and life you know, I would like to spend some time on study and also some time on making friends or going to the gym, but after I came to UK I realised that I don't actually have time to hahah to enjoy myself (...) but actually I don't have a chance to do that so I felt bad.

(Interview-2)

As shown previously, David highly valued his social life and cared about friendships; but his first two weeks in the UK were marked by his struggle to adjust and lack of time to engage in any social activity except for studying and daily chores. Thus, his motivation suffered because he was hoping for a more balanced lifestyle.

### **9.2.2 Communication skills**

In China, David constantly used Mandarin and never felt the need to use English. As such, his early weeks in the UK presented a challenge for his communication with other people.

I found it difficult to talk with UK people because I don't talk in English in China so I didn't have much experience to talk to UK people so my motivation goes down.

(Interview-1)

For someone who highly valued social interactions, being unable to communicate adequately was a serious concern which affected his motivation to live in the UK. However, he did like the use and promotion of English on PS6.

Also, the pre-sessional lessons in the UK provide me an English atmosphere to listen and speak English everyday, which is much more helpful than just having an English class in my own country. I believe that taking a pre-sessional class is a right choice for me. (...) many students in China always ask questions or discuss with others using their own language. In pre-sessional class, an English-speaking atmosphere is provided by requesting every student to speak English all times. Therefore, students can get more opportunities to ask questions and express their opinions in English. Likewise, tutors answer questions and discuss main points using English.

(PEPA-1)

This PEPA indicates that David was pleased with PS6's expectation to use English constantly. After all, his environment promoted communication in English between students and teachers, and therefore boosted his motivation to engage with others. Although David was highly motivated to become involved in all activities which encouraged the use of English, his struggle to talk to people remained. However, the encouragement he received from his PS6 teachers sustained his motivation and confidence to speak with others.

The teaching method in pre-sessional class in UK shows different ways to help overseas students improve their English skills. Students are divided into groups, every student is free and encouraged to discuss their opinions with others.

The attitude of tutors in pre-sessional class makes a positive effect on students. Students are encouraged to be more confident to speak out their thoughts, and tutors are interested in hearing different opinions that each of us shares. Besides, tutors are so kind and patient to answer every question even it is a simple one. Therefore, students can feel confident and relaxed in pre-sessional class.

(PEPA-1)

In this PEPA, David revealed being motivated by a clearly defined 'classroom goal structure' (Dörnyei, 1994, p280) with teachers offering attention and support at group and individual level to ensure the success of the academic activities.

### **9.2.3 Disappointment with IELTS**

David was required to take the IELTS test in order to study in the UK, but he thought that such a test did not really assess a student's ability to perform well academically.

During pre-sessional class of week 2, a number of specific writing skills are taught to us. For instance, different types of situation are defined as plagiarism, which we did not notice before in China. Besides, we acquired knowledge about references and quotations and how they work in an academic essay. IELTS score may be defined as a good way to decide students' English skills, but the main weakness of this method is that some students with high IELTS score are not ready for being a postgraduate student with academic skills. Pre-sessional course, especially the course of week 2, gives us a solution to improve our English skills and acquire specific academic writing skills so that we are able to get well prepared for the coming year as a postgraduate student. I felt more and more confident in week 2 as a student.

(PEPA-2)

David's motivation to capitalise on his UK studies was strengthened by the realisation that PS6 offered him the relevant academic skills to succeed in his MSc studies. In particular, he noticed the discrepancy between the skills tested through the IELTS and the skills required by academic life, but this realisation enhanced his motivation to be on PS6.

### **9.2.4 Teaching as socialisation**

David viewed some teaching activities as opportunities to socialise with others.

Some changes have taken place during week 2. First of all, our tutor encouraged us to discuss our opinion with different people in our classroom this week instead of just talk to the people next to me. That is different from what we did in week 1. But I have to admit that this type of method offered us a better way to communicate with different people in our group. Sharing ideas with different people can always give us inspiration to find solutions to a problem.

(PEPA-3)

Interaction with others continued to be at the core of David's motivational trajectory, and as such, he highly appreciated the use of small-group activities on PS6. This methodology, new to him, fuelled his motivation to work hard because working with others 'inspired' him.

### **9.2.5 Teaching to support learning**

Furthermore, David valued my end-of-lesson summaries of the key learning aims and the reflective meta-discussions of the lesson content which, he thought, helped him focus.

Besides, our tutor had spent some time on summarize the class before class ended, which was a very useful way to help us know what we learned and offered us a good chance to ask questions. Overall, the pre-session course of week 2 had made a great contribution to build up my confidence in both writing skills and communication skills.

(PEPA-3)

In a post-PS6 interview, David further elaborated:

In your class you wrote down some main points on the board [yeah] that's actually about the main points it's about what you will do in this class [ ah the objectives of each lesson?] yes [ you found that helpful?] yes [ah it would be interesting to know how that helped you] erm...it's something like after the class you want to review what I learnt so I can take my notes out and see what's the main point of my class and this is helpful to review the lesson.

(Interview-1)

End-of-class meta-discussions about learning seemed to support David's motivation to study outside class hours thereby supporting Mulligan and Kirkpatrick's (2000) argument for signposting to support international students further.

In sum, at the beginning of PS6, David's motivation was shaped by negative influences such as the fatigue caused by the cultural need to do more than just studying, which was in contrast with his easier life in China. He was also dissatisfied with his ability to communicate with others because of the constraints of using English on a daily basis. This was exacerbated by the disappointment with his previous IELTS training which, in his view, did not prepare him for academic work. Nonetheless, these negative influences were diminished by the positive impact of PS6. The teachers' attitude enhanced his confidence to communicate in English and certain teaching methods (e.g. group work) allowed David to socialise in class and focus on his studies (e.g. reflective classroom discussions).

## 9.3 David's motivation during PS6 (weeks 3/4)

### 9.3.1 English teaching in China and the UK

David noticed marked differences between English language teaching in China and PS6.

I believe that taking pre-sessional classes was right choice for me (...) in China the English teachers actually don't speak English, they just maybe read a sentence in English and explain it in Chinese (...) in the UK the teacher speaks in English all the time and if you cannot understand what this means the teacher also explains it in English. So in China it's quite different...if you can't understand what this word or this sentence mean the teacher will explain in Chinese...and I prefer it in English.(...) the classes in the UK are quite different from China erm the tutors are actually willing to communicate with the students, in China teachers just write out some main points on the blackboard and the students just take notes and teachers are not always asking questions like in the UK.

(Interview-1)

The teaching approach David was familiar with in China and his first few weeks on PS6 led to his preference for the UK methods which fostered communication in English. This preference indicates that PS6 teaching continued to sustain his motivation. It is also worth noting that David's classmates were all Chinese and therefore it was understandable for them to use Mandarin at times. However, David enjoyed my methods to encourage them to switch to English. To illustrate this, David remembered the times when I would monitor activities and, if they were using Mandarin, I would comment: *'are you speaking in Welsh? - not sure I understand'*.

You always encouraged us to speak English and after few weeks I realised that it's not hard to talk in English so that's good for my motivation, you made me realise it's not difficult to talk English. (...)if the students are all Chinese in the pre-sessional class it is understandable that they talk in Chinese so it is easier for us to communicate in Chinese, but sometimes I think you may have to force us to speak English erm you had to go and see if the teams are speaking English or not and joke to force to speak English, I think that is good strategy...you have to force us to speak sometimes because otherwise we may speak Chinese (...) I think it's a good way to encourage us to speak English.

(Interview-1)

The role of humour in my teaching approach played a critical role in sustaining David's motivation and enhancing his ability to develop appropriate communication skills and see such progress. This safe classroom environment allowed David to cultivate his skills thereby promoting 'goal-orientedness' (Dörnyei, 2001).

### 9.3.2 Small achievements as source of motivation

David appreciated the guidance I provided throughout the essay-writing process.

The timeline of the essay writing was helpful for me. First of all we had to finish the 500 words of the essay and after two weeks submit 1000 words and draft and this actually improve my motivation (...) even I can't finish the whole essay immediately, the 500 words is a big progress and improves my motivation because I actually achieve something

(Interview-1)

Offering David an approach to reduce the complex task of his first academic essay into smaller activities helped him see the whole project as divided into *sub-goals* which were accompanied by *regular feedback* (Dörnyei et al, 2016). This structure supported David in noticing small achievements and, ultimately, sustaining the direction of his motivation to write the whole essay.

Another PS6 experience which contributed to the complex configuration of David's motivation was Exploratory Practice.

### 9.3.3 Exploratory Practice as motivational practice

Exploratory Practice was a new methodology which allowed David to practise his spoken English in new ways.

What impressed me most was the experiences of interviewing strangers in the café. Students would never do this in China because of different teacher methods. Furthermore, students from China are too shy to talk with strangers. But I have to admit that people in UK were so kind and patient to answer my questions. First I interviewed a kind lady who graduated from [name of University]. She told me that during her student time, the only way to assess their knowledge was to take exams, which she thought was a disaster. I also interviewed her daughter who is now an undergraduate student at [name of University]. The assessment type of her degree was a mixture that combined essay and exams. Both the lady and her daughter believed that the mixture type is the most suitable one for students since everyone can choose a suitable way to show themselves.

(PEPA-4)

David engaged fully with the exploration of his puzzle '*why do we need to write essays at UK universities?*'. Not only did this activity shed some light on his topic but also enhanced his confidence to speak in English, especially with strangers. EP showed David that he could use English with strangers without resorting to Mandarin if communication broke down. This EP

experience therefore bolstered his motivation to communicate with others in English and, for someone who valued social interactions, this was an important boost.

### **9.3.4 Exploratory Practice as confidence-building**

David's exploration of his puzzle about assessment led him to develop a sense of confidence about his future assignments.

After I read some articles and interviewed some native UK students, I understand much about why we should always write essays instead of taking exams. People in UK focus more on practical skills than theory. Writing essays are not only an assessment for academic skills but also a chance to improve our practical skills. I really enjoyed the experience of exploratory practice because it helped me to understand my puzzle and be more confident. Since I was worried about the type of assessment before, I felt more confident about my academic life after this experience.

(EP-reflection-2)

In line with EP's promise for understanding, David gained a degree of clarity about the assessment culture in the UK which seemed to appease his uncertainty about future MSc studies. Although his new understanding could not change the assessment procedures, he felt reassured by the process of understanding such academic system.

Furthermore, whilst working on his academic puzzle, David valued meeting the students and teacher from another PS6 group.

I felt it's useful for the activity with the students from group 6. Firstly, I talked with some students about why our own opinions should be supported by references. They expressed their opinions that when we write academic essays, some rules should be followed. Thus, it is necessary for us to find some references to support our opinions. After that, I talked with the tutor, who gave me particular explanation about my puzzlement. As the tutor demonstrated, own opinions are allowed in essays. (...) This activity made me feel more confident about my future academic writing.

(EP-reflection-3)

By exploring this academic puzzle, David became clearer about his future academic demands, but more crucially, and in keeping with the EP principle of understanding, he became able to 'accept' the UK academic system leading to higher motivation and confidence about his future MSc studies. However, it is fair to note the one criticism which David expressed about doing EP.



### 9.3.7 Exploratory Practice as disappointment

Whilst EP was mostly beneficial, David discovered that other PS6 tutors, who did not do EP, took their students out on excursions to the local area as part of the British culture sessions.

I think EP was good for me but you know when I talk with my friends they said that our tutor just took to [name of location] to enjoy themselves but when I hear about this kind of things I feel a little bit disappointed erm because I had to sit in the classroom to talk about specific questions all afternoon and other students just go out to enjoy themselves all afternoon like in a cafe, so these differences make me a bit disappointed haha but I think overall EP really helped a lot.

(Interview-2)

Although David enjoyed EP, he could not help seeing the experience as a form of PS6 academic work which turned into disappointment when he found out about other activities outside the university environment. This impacted on David's motivation, as he would have preferred to self-regulate his time 'on PS6' and take a break from that environment.

In sum, unlike the first two weeks of PS6, when David's motivation suffered because of several negative influences, weeks 3 and 4 were more positive. This was evidenced by David's appreciation of teaching methods which promoted the use of English in class and my guidance over the complex task of essay-writing. EP also appeared to bolster David's motivation as it fostered his confidence to speak in English and socialise with others whilst addressing his uncertainties about assessment in the UK. EP also unexpectedly nurtured his curiosity about British culture. However, despite these benefits, the dissonance he noticed between the EP work we did and the leisurely activities some other groups engaged with led to a degree of disappointment because he would have preferred a break from the university environment.

## **9.4 David's motivation at the end of PS6 (weeks 5/6)**

### **9.4.1 Busy Times**

In the last week of PS6 David was very busy preparing for his final exams.

Week 5 was a busy week since we were busy writing essay and preparing for presentation. Luckily we got full support from our tutors who helped us acquire knowledge about how to write good essays and gain confidence for the future.

(PEPA-4)

Despite the pressure of this assessment, David valued the outcomes of his journey on PS6 as well as his skills development, which, overall, maintained his motivation healthy.

### **9.4.2 Freedom to manage time**

David's motivation increased further at this stage because after PS6 he expected to have more flexibility with his weekly schedule.

At the end of pre-sessional my motivation went up because after pre-sessional course I went to Scotland. Also I realised that my modules are just for one week and then no classes just write my PMA so I realised that I had some chance to manage my time even and spend some time on travel (...). You have freedom to manage your time and all you have to do is reach a balance between study and life and when I realised that my motivation went up.

(Interview-1)

David valued the ability to manage his time without many external constraints. Therefore, the opportunity to enjoy some free time after PS6 and the prospect of having a flexible MSc schedule to 'self-regulate' his own life enhanced his motivation. However, this motivational high was not to last, and indeed dissipated during the early days on the MSc programme.

## **9.5 David's motivation at the start of the MSc (October-December)**

### **9.5.1 Not so much time after all**

After the beginning of his first module, David's appreciation of time changed.

At the beginning of October I started the first module and this was tiring because classes were from 9am to 6.30pm and this exhausted me and motivation went down a little bit (...) one main reason why I came to the UK was trying to be more independent and make more friends but with classes I had no time to make friends, and after I come back home actually I don't want to have dinner, I just want to lay in my bed hehe I feel exhausted and that makes me feel very bad. Before I came here I wanted to balance life and study, I wanted to spend time studying but also making friends or going to the gym (...) I realise that I actually didn't have time to enjoy myself...apart from studying you know (...) and I feel really bad.

(Interview-2)

David was disappointed that the MSc timetable and coursework left him with little time to himself. After all, one of his main motives was to socialise with new people, but with the new pace of life, he preferred to use his free time to rest. In other words, he missed the desired balance of study and life and his inability to use his agency to change this situation led to a decline of his motivation.

### **9.5.2 Fast-paced Teaching**

David soon noted a marked contrast between PS6 and MSc teaching approaches.

In the pre-sessional classes you used to write the lessons objectives on the board and it's much more better because there are only 15 students in a class erm you speak everything clear and even if I have some question I can raise my hand and ask you but in my module [MSc] each class would take about two hours and the tutors speak so fast and there are so many students in our classroom, 35 so I don't have much time to ask questions because the time is so tight and the tutors don't have time to answer your questions, so sometimes I can't understand what they say but I can't ask questions because there's no time (...) [tutors] actually just give some slides but you know it's a lot of slides and I don't know what to focus on exactly.

(Interview-1)

This fast-paced and less student-centred approach on the MSc resulted in a decline of David's motivation as he was used to a more supportive learning environment which sustained his motivation directing his academic goals, but on the MSc, he lost focus. Nonetheless, he did find some relief in certain teaching activities which energised his academic sense of purpose.

### **9.5.3 Group work**

Despite the fast-paced teaching, David found some MSc activities engaging and these re-ignited his motivation.

I think it's interesting because I got involved in group activities and the tutor organised many simulations about how to manage a project which made me think this is very interesting activity, that means I can act like a project manager and deal with many issues that may happen in a project, so just like a role-play...I was quite interested in such activities.

(Interview-4)

Engaging with activities which reflected the reality of a project manager fuelled David's motivation to learn more from the course thus confirming that 'constructively aligned' curricula and teaching approaches (Biggs & Tang, 2011) may support learning motivation.

### **9.5.4 Improved Communication Skills**

In November, David noticed a stronger ability to communicate with other students.

In November I realised that it's easier for me to communicate with some people including other overseas students or the native speakers (...) I can understand what they're talking about so when I realised that, I realised that I improved myself a lot studying in UK (...) this is because I understand other people, I can make jokes I understand when they speak quickly (...)so my motivation goes up here because I noticed some improvement of myself.

(Interview-4)

This enhanced ability to communicate with others in different circumstances including joke interactions increased David's motivation as he could see progress, but more importantly, because he was able to fulfil his desire of engaging socially with other people. This is a struggle which, as reported by Copland and Garton (2010), triggers a major feeling of reward when, like David, a student can feel socially operational in the new UK society.

### **9.5.5 A friend's visit**

In December his motivation became even stronger because a friend from China visited him.

Here my motivation reached the highest point because one of my best friends from China came to see me which really make me very happy because he is my best friend from China.

(Interview-4)

Considering David's value of social interactions and his desire to make friends, it is unsurprising that he felt happy when his very good friend visited. This generated the 'balance of life and study' which he alluded to previously, and this happiness revamped his motivation to be in the UK. This points to Ushioda's (2009) *person-in-context view* of motivation whereby something as influential as an affective aspect of someone's life (e.g. a friend) has the power to shape one's motivation. This, of course, could have also diminished David's motivation, as a distraction, but rather David drew on this positive experience to energise his action towards his well-defined academic goals.

### **9.5.6 Positive feedback**

In December, David became even happier because he received feedback on his first module.

Also I got my module mark which was 65 [wow really good!] yes it's not a distinction but it's a very good score for me so [yeah] so I feel very happy in December and my motivation for study here just stayed at a very high level.

(Interview-4)

Whilst it was not a distinction, the positive feedback on this assignment enhanced David's motivation because he felt that his hard work was being acknowledged. In other words, such a good result served as a 'progress marker' towards his goals (Dörnyei et al, 2016). However, this motivational momentum was short-lived.

### **9.5.7 Plagiarism incident - Part 1**

Just before Christmas, David was informed of an issue of plagiarism concerning one assignment. The department had deemed some of his text as plagiarised. David explained that he had used some sentences from a source and only changed a few words because this was a definition. I remembered teaching David that if he uses a definition, he must be careful not to change the meaning. There was also an issue with using a secondary source within another source without acknowledging the latter.

[the department] say that they can send the PMA to the tutor and let the tutor mark this PMA but those parts which involved plagiarism won't be considered when the tutor marks my PMA. (...) the problem also was that I cited author A which was in author B but in the text I only referred to author A and not B, so that's their point (...) so when I heard this news my motivation goes down because my motivation here is linked to whether I can pass the MSc and if I fail another module that means I cannot graduate.

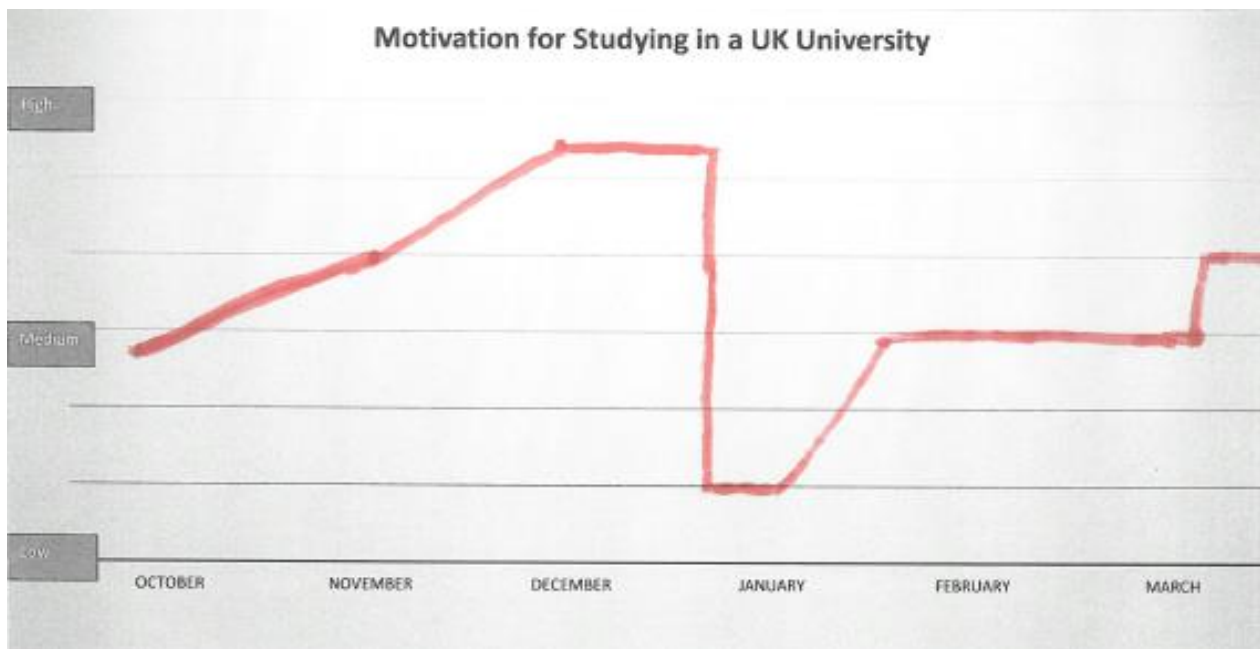
(Interview-4)

This incident conjured up David's *feared self* concerning the prospect of not graduating.

I went to my personal tutor to ask for some advice [ah good and did they support you?] erm not exactly haha so actually I wanted to meet him to get some advice but he's a tutor so he doesn't have time to meet me (...) but I had some friends to help me and to give me some advice but when that happened I have to admit that my motivation for study in UK is like erm facing a very huge drop so my motivation drops from the highest point to the lowest so I was kind of desperate and I don't know what will happen I don't know if I can graduate or not [and when did you find out the decision?] this was after Christmas so my motivation stayed at the lowest point for about a month so that kind of feeling was kind of destroying me and I felt like I didn't want to stay here anymore and I want to go home.

(Interview-4)

The lack of support from the personal tutor exacerbated David's anxiety and resulted in a sharp decline of his motivation to remain in the UK.



**Figure 9.1 David's motigraph showing his sharp decline in December**

This was a difficult time for David, and he spent his Christmas break in isolation.

During Christmas I did nothing, I really felt bad and stayed in my room just like watching movies erm to reduce my pressure, that was a tough time for me so I didn't want to do anything...I just feel really bad and couldn't talk about this to my parents because my parents spend a lot of money to support me, if I told them that there would be a chance that I cannot get my master's degree they would be very disappointed (...) so yeah but my motivation stayed at a very low level.

(Interview-4)

This episode obfuscated David's vision of his academic goals, and the *feared self* which emerged compromised his motivational wellbeing rather than triggering a pro-active counteraction (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2013). However, David had very little control or agency over this matter which may be why he seemed so demoralised.

In sum, during the first phase of the MSc, David's motivation suffered for not being able to strike a balance between work and social life. Also, the intensive teaching delivery left him with little time to ask questions. These negative influences, however, were counterbalanced by activities such role-plays which gave David a sense of engagement with his new subject. Other sources of motivation included the positive feedback on his first assignment and the visit from a friend. Nonetheless, his motivation was compromised by the formal notification of an issue of plagiarism with one essay. This incident drastically reduced his motivation to remain in the UK as he was unaware of the outcome and received little support from the department whilst the investigation was ongoing.

## **9.6 David's motivation during the MSc (January - April)**

### **9.6.1 Plagiarism incident - Part 2**

In January David met with the academic panel who decided that his work would still be assessed with the caveat of removing the section which was not referenced adequately.

In January I finally met the academic panel and they said that it's like they can just give my work to the tutor to mark but there is very little chance that I can pass [they said that?] yes because you know some of my work involves plagiarism so if they don't consider those parts that means the whole structure was destroyed, it's like my logic and structure all destroyed so...I didn't expect that I can pass but if I fail they say this is my first time so it's a warning and I have a chance to resubmit in August after I submit my dissertation(...).

(Interview-4)

Whilst David's morale improved, after realising that he could still graduate, his motivation to study was now weakened by his anxiety of making similar mistakes in the future.

When they said that even I resubmit that won't delay my graduation I started to feel better and my motivation went up a bit but those kind of problems were always in my heart and my motivation would not come to high level...so those kind situation lasted for 2 months (...)

(Interview-4)

At the beginning of March, David received feedback for this module.

In the beginning of March I received my feedback of this module and the mark is acceptable that is a pass so my motivation went up again but at this time I am busy with classes and other PMAs, also I am facing the pressure of the dissertation (...) so motivation goes up but cannot reach the highest point (...) [what motivation are you referring to, here?] so my motivation here is about whether I can get the Master's degree, so if something happens that makes me feel I can graduate then my motivation goes up, and things that gives me risk of not graduate then my motivation goes down. So my motivation is highly linked to my Master's degree.

(Interview-4)

Whilst the outcome of this incident had no major consequences on David's overall performance, the departmental procedures had detrimental effects on his wellbeing. His motivation was re-ignited by the positive feedback on this PMA, but he was busy with so much other work that when he received the good news, his motivation could not reach a very high level.

## **9.7 David's motivation towards the end of the MSc**

### **9.7.1 Neither happy nor sad**

In April David's motivation was neither high nor particularly low.

The line graph shows that my motivation is medium stage because everything was stable erm I mean I went to the module classes in the morning and went back to my apartment in the evening working on my PMA and when I was free I took some time just to stay with my friends and maybe sometimes we had dinner outside hmm it's like everything was stable nothing really happened at that time, nothing made me happy nothing made me sad hahah [ahaha] it's like I got used to life in the UK and, you know, I was just doing my job at that time and took some time to stay with my friends, so my motivation was stable.

(Interview-5)



With no critical episode in his life, after recovering from his incident with plagiarism, David found himself in a state where his motivation was not pulled in any direction by any happy or sad influences. This points to the importance of ecological approaches to understanding motivation whereby this psychological construct is intimately connected to other phenomena which shape its manifestation (Ushioda, 2009).

### **9.7.2 Pressure goes down - motivation goes up**

In May David's motivation went to a higher level because he finished his last module and only needed to complete the dissertation in order to graduate.

In April the motivation goes to a very high level [hmm] that was because I finished my last module in May so at that time I was really happy, I thought I almost got my Master's degree because I finished all the modules. And I don't have to get up very early in the morning and go back to my apartment very late and after that take time working on my PMA so that sort of life ended in May so I was really happy at that time, I thought the only thing I had to do is write the dissertation and then I can get the Master's degree. (...) at that time I was happy because this kind of situation made me focus on one thing, my dissertation.

(Interview-5)

David was relieved that he no longer needed to go to lectures or seminars, and his motivation increased because he could exclusively focus on one job as opposed to going to lectures, working on PMAs and dissertation simultaneously. This improved motivation may therefore connect with David's freedom to self-regulate his timetable (Bandura, 2001) without much external imposition. Crucially, at this stage, his motivation meshed with his desire to graduate.

### **9.7.3 Dissertation is hard work**

In June David's motivation declined because the dissertation was an arduous task.

In June I realised that I made a very big mistake in thinking the dissertation was an easy job because I was totally wrong, I mean the dissertation is really complicated, it's not like PMA, you have to work really hard, you have to collect your data, you have to read so many papers and you can reference from them and it's really hard work (...) especially for a Chinese student, English is not my native language and it takes me longer time to read English papers so sometimes you can only pick one or two useful information or sentences from one journal but reading that would take like 1 hour or 2 hours. Sometimes you work really hard like 8 hours or 10 hours a day and when the day finished you go back to what you have done and see that you only finished 100 words or 200 words hahaha and

that really make me feel sad...it's like you're working all day and you actually didn't achieve anything.  
(Interview-5)

Realising that the dissertation required more work than anticipated weakened his motivation which was brought further down by his belief that long hours of work did not necessarily result in noticeable progress.

#### **9.7.4 Data Collection**

In July, David returned to China to collect data for his dissertation. As already planned before arriving in the UK, his project examined the reasons behind Chinese companies' rejection of advanced management methods typical of Western countries.

In July I was doing the data collection part and I have to say that I worked really hard on this section because in July I went back to China because my dissertation is about the project management and how to populise the project management methods in Chinese construction projects (...) and I wanted to find out why there are many advanced management methods in western countries but the Chinese construction projects refuse to use them. (...) [so why does your motivation keep going down in July because I thought you'd be excited and happy to work on this?] yes the reason was actually the same like June, because (...) working really hard you know finish my interviews with some project managers and also I sent some questionnaires to my friends and some employees in construction enterprises and it was a lot of work

[ah so your motivation was going down because you were not expecting so much work] yes erm it was the work pressure you know sometimes I took 10 days to work on one interview transcript and I worked like 10 or 12 hours a day and I kept typing all the time but there was so much work left, I spent like a month working on interview transcript.

(Interview-5)

Like in June, David's motivation decreased because, despite significant efforts to complete his project, he felt the pressure of more work left to do. Therefore, whilst his motivation was positively enhanced by the investigation of a topic which he valued, the hard work and the perception of achieving little progress pulled his motivation downward.

#### **9.7.5 Submission of the dissertation**

In August, David's motivation decreased drastically because he was concerned about failing.

August was the month of submission of the dissertation but my motivation hit the bottom of the linegraph erm it was not about the deadline because although I faced a lot of difficulties working on my dissertation still I finished it (...) I was working really hard on the dissertation

and I finished in time. So it was not about the submission but it was actually about that I heard many people were failed by the second marker [ahh] yeah they can't pass the dissertation and they had to resubmit the dissertation, and they had to delay the graduation [ah okay so you were worried that this could happen to you] yeah and sometimes marking your dissertation is not about how hard you were working but how lucky you are, I mean I heard one of my good friends that he was actually following the guidance of his supervisor all the time, but still the second marker failed him because the second marker had some kind of different opinion with the supervisor [hmmm] and the second marker had the right to fail the student. (...) so this kind of feeling make me feel really bad. I was really worried that kind of thing might happen to me so it made me really sad.

(Interview-5)

David had worked steadily on his dissertation and the prospect of failing, like other colleagues who had worked as hard, affected him deeply. This fear meshed with his desire to graduate, as failing would mean delaying the graduation, his strongest motive at that stage, but this difficult time came to an end in September.

#### **9.7.6 Dissertation outcome**

David's motivation reached the highest level when he passed his viva.

In September I finished my viva test (...) and I was really lucky that I got a very kind second marker hahah [haha] so at that time when I passed my viva test I realised I actually can get my Master's degree [so your motivation was very high in September because your viva went really well, but I wonder at this stage, what motivation are you thinking of? As obviously it can't be your motivation to study as you had already finished] in September my motivation is related to my emotions because I felt really happy at that time, I finished all my jobs and all I can think of was 'when can I get my graduation certificate' (...) I would also say that at that stage my motivation is about my future life in China [ha okay] and now I have Master's my motivation is to work hard in China and fight for the future career.

David was now certain that he could graduate, and his high motivation was driven by the happiness about doing so well despite the challenges faced. At the end of his UK experience, his motivation was primarily driven by his imagined future life in China and the desire to build a successful career. Therefore, the positive outcome of his dissertation project and viva led to an activation of David's notion of *ideal self* (Dörnyei, 2005) which was further energised by the vision of a successful professional life back home.

## **Chapter 10: The Story of May's Motivation**

### **10.1 Before coming to the UK**

Prior to her arrival in the UK, May had nurtured a strong motivation to study abroad, but this was fraught with concerns about her language skills and the new MSc academic subject.

#### **10.1.1 Concerns about English skills**

She sat the IELTS test 4 times, and although eventually she reached the required scores, she still wished to attend PS6 because she did not deem her skills good enough to study in the UK.

I made this decision of coming to [name of the University] almost 2 years ago but my English isn't good enough and tried to study English and pass the IELTS examinations, actually I tried 4 times and I reached the 6.5 in total but I still wanted to attend the pre-session course because I know that my skills is not good enough for me to study here [...]

(Interview-1)

This lack of confidence in her academic skills echoed the argument that despite students' 'good' language skills, they may still struggle or fear the prospect of working within a 'specific' academic discipline which requires 'specific' discursive skills (Pilcher & Richards, 2016).

#### **10.1.2 New academic subject**

May was unsatisfied with her professional experience and previous attempts to complete a PhD in the area of biology; therefore, she decided to start afresh with a Masters in a new subject in the UK. She felt highly motivated to learn something which could help her obtain a good job in China in the future.

(...) I want to learn something new because with previous major it's very hard to find a well-paid job in China, (...)so I gave up and that's why I'm highly motivation before I arrived here...but I felt a little bit scared about my abilities to study like poor English and I know nothing about the PPM.

(Interview-1)

However, despite her high motivation, she was aware she had little knowledge about project and programme management, but this fear seemed to be offset by her motivation for future studies.

### **10.1.3 Ideal self**

In line with Copland et al., (2017), May was attracted to the reputation of her future MSc programme, in particular the lecturers' expertise.

This department they have external teachers who run their own business and maybe I could learn from a real case and learn how to deal with a reality case (...) and I lacked this experience from before as I only studied and worked as part-time teacher (...) but if you can combine together teaching skills and management skills and maybe you can build your own education company (...) so I chose [name the University] because I could learn practical skills here.

(Interview-2)

May could have completed an equivalent Master's in China, but the UK remained her preferred option.

I can find the same programme in China but I still want to study abroad I think it's quite an important experience for me... and actually management in China is like comprehensive course that I mean people pay more attention to IT, engineering and mathematics but management not so much so I want to study abroad something new maybe even I could come back and I can bring my new skills to the Chinese market.

(Interview-1)

Despite being expensive the UK MSc seemed more promising to May because she expected to learn very competitive skills which may enhance not only her career but also her self-confidence.

I prefer this course in the UK because of the high reputation of the university and this means that you can obtain high competitive skills (...) and the companies prefer those who study overseas rather the students studying in mainland china [ahh] yes it means that even though my English isn't very good I can communicate with you [English speaker] better than the people who study in China and it means that when I go back I can enter international company and during my work I must be more confident than the students who study in China even though their English is good...but because I study here I feel more confident.

(Interview-1)

May's attitude thus seemed to support the discourses that position overseas English-speaking universities as better options than the mainland-China counterparts (Kettle, 2017).

In sum, prior to her arrival in the UK, May's motivation to study was shaped by the concern that her English may not be sufficiently good to study at university despite passing the IELTS test. Also, she had no background in the MSc subject area which, however exciting as a fresh start, posed the question whether she would cope. Nonetheless, her eagerness to learn, acquire new skills, which she may then bring back to China, seemed to be stronger than her fears. In fact, it appeared that the lack of confidence in her language and academic skills enhanced her motivation to study, which we can infer by the decision to complete PS6 even when this was not a condition from the university.

## **10.2 May's motivation at the start of PS6 (weeks 1&2)**

### **10.2.1 Satisfaction with teaching and learning**

May appeared pleased with both her PS6 teachers and their methods.

It was an amazing first week which was full of challenges. I may talk about my experiences in 3 parts, study, resident life, and entertainments. First, about study, I have two lovely teachers. Sal is a humorous man. Attending his class make me feel delightful. During this week, we have studied how to arrange a new paragraph and grasp topic ideas from a paper quickly which may help my further study. Sue is a grace lady. She provided us some special lectures from TED TALK with both business skills and listening promotion. However, to change the way of study immediately is a little bit difficult for me. For instance, I can't use mind map well. When I try to mark some key points from listening tasks, I just listed the structure unconsciously other than made the connection between them. Therefore, I still need to practice in the rest of course.

(PEPA-1)

May revealed that despite the new learning challenges she was content with the programme, and her initial impressions about the teaching methods were promising. It was encouraging for me to read this PEPA at the start of PS6, as it clearly showed that her motivation was in good health. At the same, this PEPA offered some insights into May's specific issues which might have negatively affected her motivation in the future (e.g. listening problems). However, given her motives for completing PS6 despite her unconditional offer from the university, one may infer that these learning challenges fuelled her effort to move from her 'actual self' toward her 'ideal self' (Dörnyei, 2005).

### **10.2.2 Tiredness**

May reported a sense of fatigue stemming from the several tasks which went beyond studying thereby pointing to an initial struggle to adjust to her new life in the UK.

I feel tired all the time. It is because I need to cook by myself, I need to go everywhere on foot (it is such a long distance), I need to deal with jet lag. It means that I have to spend too much time to arrange my life and adopt new life here.

(PEPA-1)

This information was useful to appreciate the difficulties which May faced outside the PS6 classroom due to the multiple challenges typical of a newly arrived international student (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Gu & Maley, 2008). As a result, this tiredness May experienced seemed to bring down her motivation to study.

Crucially, whilst May is a sociable person, she seemed to have to sacrifice her social time in order to fulfil her academic responsibilities and respond to her new life demands.

I didn't have extra time for entertainments on weekdays this week because I had to spend too much time doing homeworks and to adapt to my new life. But at weekend, [name of classmate] and me travelled to Birmingham. We walked around the whole city central.

(PEPA-1)

This PEPA was reassuring because it revealed that despite the need to adapt to the new daily demands in the UK and maintaining an exclusive focus on these during the week, May was still able to incorporate some social activities in her new routine. However, her attention was captured by bigger issues concerning her accommodation arrangements for the academic year.

### **10.2.3 Finding accommodation**

From the beginning of PS6, May experienced some anxiety over her search for accommodation.

I fear the most is my accommodation problems. Until this weekend, almost all my friends' accommodation results have come out. It means that I have to hunt mine alone. I truly understand that it is a part of studying abroad. I still feel very anxiety. Therefore, except for day in Cambridge, I spent the rest of the time to search both city centre and area near campus. After these two days I feel very depressed.

(PEPA-2)

This weekly PEPA revealed that May's overriding concern in the first two weeks of PS6 was her future accommodation. This distress seemed to be compounded by her understanding that her

classmates had resolved this issue, thus pointing to the lack of ‘joint hardship’ (Dörnyei, 1997) which seemed to compromise her motivational wellbeing further. Therefore, this PEPA was useful in allowing me to signpost May to student support services who could advise her about these difficult circumstances which affected her overall social and academic experience.

In sum, during the first two weeks of PS6, May’s motivation was driven by her satisfaction with her teachers’ methods despite the learning challenges emerging from the new academic context. However, her academic wellbeing was also shaped by the anxiety over finding suitable accommodation off-campus. This consternation affected May’s daily life and pulled her motivation to a lower level than it was before her arrival in the UK.

### **10.3 May’s motivation during PS6 (weeks 3/4/5)**

#### **10.3.1 Teaching as source of motivation**

May highly appreciated my teaching approach because it entailed the use of relevant materials and activities which supported her learning outside the classroom. Her motivation was strongly shaped by a caring teaching style which foregrounded the focus on the students’ perspectives.

I can feel that you have really high motivation to be a teacher and to know about the reflections from the students (...) I can feel that in the class...you paid more attention about the students and what they gained from these classes (...) you did some research and work to understand us [like the PEPA] and it’s quite different from other teachers and I feel great.

(Interview-1)

Therefore, May’s previous teaching experience was instrumental in shaping her appraisal of her PS6 teachers’ methods. Also, she observed evidence of my ecological approach to teaching which positioned them *as-persons-in-context* (Ushioda, 2009), thereby aiming to understand them both as learners and human beings. Significantly, the synergy between my own motivation to teach and May’s appreciation of my teaching methods seemed to be conducive to her motivation to study because she ‘felt great’ about her teacher and learning experience. However, a teacher-student synergy (Pinner, 2019) is not enough to work against certain learning challenges which affected other dimensions of her motivation.



### 10.3.2 Learning challenges

May was not familiar with the course content of her future MSc and, since PS6 work focussed on that subject area, her academic difficulties seemed worse than she had expected.

Essay writing is more difficult than I thought it would be. First of all, I'm not familiar with the area of core contents of essay. I have to spend a lot of time to understand some basic concepts. Second, I must have my own opinions. This requires that I must think deeply critically. Because my understanding for relevant problems is not deep enough, so a deep discussion of perspective is not easy to carry out.

(PEPA-5)

May's lack of expertise in the new subject area led to a further decline in her motivation and, half-way through PS6, these were compounded by her continued search for suitable accommodation.

### 10.3.3. Finding accommodation: the struggle continues

She tried several strategies to resolve this issue, but this was time-consuming, stressful and conflicted with her demands on PS6.

I still have big troubles with my study this week. I spent too much time to arrange my life, I didn't have enough spirit on my study. For instance, I felt tired that I can't concentrate in class. I can't finish my reading targets. Good news is that I gave up the trip in [name of English town] and had a good rest this weekend.

(PEPA-4)

After a few weeks on PS6, May continued to struggle to strike a balance between her studies and 'arranging her life' leading to a variety of academic problems. This PEPA was thus useful in revealing that her academic motivation was suffering because of her life outside PS6. Her decision to skip the cultural trip over the weekend indicates the severity of her difficulties and fatigue. However, this is not the full picture of Megan's motivation because other external influences were at play.

### 10.3.4 The influence of peers

May found that her classmates were hardworking, and they motivated her to study.

I found my classmates they are hardworking and that motivated me to do my homework (...) because I want to be like them and erm I know if I follow the example of my classmates I can do well and succeed.

(Interview-1)

Therefore, despite the above reasons for feeling less motivated to study (e.g. anxiety over accommodation), May still found some motivation in her network of classmates whose hard work positioned them as 'role models' to follow, thereby energising her to work hard (Bandura, 1977).

### 10.3.5 Exploratory Practice as motivational practice

May's puzzle for 'Living in the UK' was '*Why doesn't the University offer enough accommodation for all students?*' She enjoyed doing EP and particularly liked the 'interview' practice because this allowed her to talk with the locals, and she used this activity to investigate her big concern about accommodation. One of her interviewees was a member of the residential life team at the university who explained the university's position which, ultimately, led to May's acceptance of this situation. This sense of acceptance is one of EP's benefits associated with the clarity of understanding (Hanks, 2017).

I like the interview practice as I can talk with others and ...I interviewed accommodation staff and she told me she can understand my situation and also the university trying to build new accommodation so that lets me understand the situation that they trying to improve the situation but the truth is there are too many students to give them the accommodation...I understand the university trying to give accommodation but they have no room so I accept and would like to find a new solution.

(EP-reflection)

Crucially, puzzling over something so vital allowed May to develop the skill to evaluate things from different perspectives.

EP taught me how to solve a problem [puzzle] by myself (...) Before EP I thought it's not good enough the university don't provide accommodation for us but after the interviews with staff and students I realise this thing is common and you should accept this challenge so after EP I consider things from two sides and it motivates me that when I study I need to understand things from both sides even if I don't like it but at least I understand

(Interview-3)

Thus, doing EP was beneficial to May because a) she developed a sense of independence about dealing with issues (puzzles), b) gained relief from her acquired knowledge (understanding) about the university accommodation system, c) strengthened her critical thinking ability to evaluate an issue from several perspectives before reaching a conclusion. Overall, these positives improved her motivational wellbeing in the UK.

### **10.3.6 Accepting life**

After going through a period of adjustment and dealing with numerous demands and challenges, May began developing a sense of self-confidence.

I know I am old enough to handle all the tasks about my life, but sensitive is also a part of me. For example, I told about accommodation problems several times. It does not mean that I did not prepare well before I came to this new country. [...] The same as the lady I spoke to, when I asked about these problems and what I was concerned about (as a female who worried about safety), she can understand me. It is true that "caution is the parent of safety".

(PEPA-5)

One can infer a degree of satisfaction in May's realisation that she could 'handle' life. However, this positive perception was accompanied by her concern about safety for being a female international student abroad, a concern shared by other similar female students in the UK (Bamber, 2014). Therefore, at this point in time, May's motivation was not in a stable healthy state, but was pulled upwards by the recognition of her ability to succeed and downwards by her concerns in the new UK reality (e.g. safety).

### 10.3.7 'work hard, play hard'

May always tried to find a way to look on the bright side of life despite the above-mentioned challenges.

This Friday, my friends and I had BBQ at the back of residence. It is really nice to talk with new friends. Coz we have different background. Communication with others can learn more. It is also an important reason for me to come here.

When you ask about my feeling in UK. My answer is definitely great! Even though I had experienced some difficulties, I love all these encounters. I do believe that work hard and play hard, I would gain more from all my experiences. When I feel upset I would tell myself tomorrow is another day! :->

(PEPA-4)

Thus, May's strong motivation to be in the UK and capitalise on all opportunities was still visible and arguably supported by her growing self-confidence to handle challenges.

In sum, during PS6 May's motivation to study and live in the UK was shaped by several factors. First, the appreciation for my teaching method which appeared to resonate with her own previous teaching job in China. This synergy fuelled May's motivation as she felt 'great' about her learning experience. However, some issues exerted a negative influence over her motivation to be in the UK and perform well during PS6. For instance, she felt overwhelmed by the new academic challenges (e.g. structuring an academic essay), and this feeling was compounded by her loneliness when she realised how much she missed her boyfriend and friends who lived in other countries.

Her motivational wellbeing was further threatened by her prolonged search for off-campus accommodation. Nonetheless, by doing EP, she was able to acquire a new understanding about this situation which assuaged her frustration towards the university for not offering on-campus accommodation to all postgraduate students. EP was also an opportunity for May to notice a new degree of agency to 'handle life tasks'. This new ability to battle through challenges and capitalise on opportunities such as developing new academic or life skills allowed her to recognise a new sense of worth which fuelled her motivation to continue her UK journey.

## **10.4 May's motivation at the end of PS6**

### **10.4.1 PS6 Final assessment**

When May received her summative assessment marks, she was not pleased with herself.

At the end of pre-sessional I have experienced a lot, the essay writing and examination and the motivation goes down (...) the marks is not good enough but I can understand...a classmate cried in class because she failed speaking [test] you know? in China the mark is very important, but I don't care about the marks I care about the skills ...I got a few pass and merit some classmates got distinction

(Interview-1)

May's marks had a negative impact on her motivation, especially in light of all the work she had done. However, she emphasised that although caring about marks was a cultural trait she associated with China, she was more concerned about her actual skills. These results, in turn, led to some anxiety over her future academic performance.

## **10.5 Start of the MSc (October - December)**

### **10.5.1 Creating the best future**

May intended to capitalise on every resource and experience to prepare herself for a successful future.

I have a lot of assignments coming so I review the Moodle site and learn about future modules...I also tried and look around for volunteer fair, sport fairs, career fair [laughs] just to look around and find something interesting for my future like the career fair can help me make decision for my future [...]

(Interview-1)

Therefore, right after the end of PS6 and despite the disappointment with her final marks, May recovered her motivation to be in the UK through the vision of her ideal self in a successful career (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2013). This reignition of her motivation led to a stronger desire for better performance on the MSc.

### **10.5.2 Aiming for high marks**

Despite her confession to care less about marks but more about her skills at the end of PS6, in November, May was already working on her second MSc module with a view to achieving high grades.

In November it's the second module for me and I am interested in the sessions...I still want to be a good student which reach the high marks so I work hard (...) it's a little bit challenging I need to prepare the PMA and an examination together so I need to work hard so at the end of November and start of December is quite high [the motivation]

(Interview-4)

Therefore, assessment seemed to gain a degree of importance which shaped May's motivation during the initial phase of the MSc. She was aware of the hard work required of her and this appeared to keep her motivation at a high level. However, she was also under the influence of some strain in the new academic life.

### **10.5.3 Structure of the MSc programme**

The structure and pace of the MSc represented a new challenge for May.

I feel tired in this process and too many courses and I always repeat 1 week module and 3 weeks to do the PMA but I don't want to do it so most of time I'm sleepy (...) I guess it's the mental problem not the physical problem...yeah erm the task is hard because it's not just PMA as I should do the dissertation at the same time but the task is hard (...)

(Interview-4)

The MSc structure was rather intensive for May. Her circumstances became even more complicated when she began to work on her dissertation whilst also completing individual MSc module assessments. Differently from many postgraduate courses, May began her dissertation project in November, and her tiredness, due to the MSc pace and style of delivery, weakened her initially strong motivation.

### **10.5.4 Lack of engagement with the MSc content**

The lack of background in the MSc subject, already visible during the PS6 days, meant that May struggled to engage deeply with the course content.

(...) maybe people who are doing a PhD or people in business who know a lot about these topics they can go deep but for me just when you're a very beginner in this area...maybe I can go further but none tell me what to do. (...)| the master is too short and every module is just one week but I am wondering how we can go more deep.

(Interview-4)

May's motivation was therefore compromised by her very little expertise in the MSc subject area. This inability to engage meaningfully was also a problem May associated with the length and pace of the MSc. More critically, her frustration stemmed from the assessment formats used by this department.

### **10.5.5 Repetitive tasks**

In December, May's motivation was not strong because she disliked the repetitive nature of the MSc assessments.

I don't feel that good [why?] uhm the motivation is not that strong like before because I repeat always the same work I mean even though the PMAs are on different courses, or topics I feel that the writing method or the style is almost the same.

(Interview-4)

Sometimes I talk with my friends and they almost have the same feeling? [hmm what do they say?] my friends study in the same course and when we finish PMAs we have the same conclusion something like we've learnt PMA skills...we know that if we did these 4 or 5 tasks we can gain...a certain mark (...) I am happy that it is not like the beginning when I didn't know what to do but if the same essay is all I have to do it's tiring (...)| I need more experiences real experiences.

(Interview-4)

Therefore, the lack of diversity in the assessment procedures generated May's frustration because her motivation to develop new skills and enrich her professional profile was not being met.

### **10.5.6 Family as distraction**

In December May's boyfriend visited her and this resulted in further loss of motivation to study.

I visited my boyfriend and my boyfriend visited me, so you know this made me feel too relaxed and I don't wanna work [*laughs*]

(Interview-4)

Given the above backdrop of dissatisfaction with the course structure and the repetitive assessments, May found the re-connection with her boyfriend distracting.

In sum, the early phase of May's experience on the MSc was characterised by her strong motivation to capitalise on every resource and opportunity at the university. This behaviour was driven by her motivation to equip herself with the best skills for a successful future career. Also, she appeared highly motivated to work hard and achieve high marks. However, such motivational forces were brought down by the timetable and delivery of the MSc. Also, the dissatisfaction with the repetitive assessments made her realise that she was not able to engage deeply with the MSc topics as she wished. In light of this discontent, she lost even more motivation to study when she felt the need to disconnect from her studies and distract herself with family.

## **10.6 May's motivation during the MSc (January - March)**

### **10.6.1 Engaging teaching as source of motivation**

In January, May recovered her motivation thanks to a new module taught by a new teacher.

*[my motivation went so high]* because of the teacher (...) uhm I liked her teaching method ...she not just talking about the theory very academic like that... she gave us a lot of examples about her career and students. A lot of cases I think is good (...) and she pushes us and she does real eye-contact when she speaks to us and she keeps asking questions.

(Interview-4)

This new MSc teacher thus made a difference and resurrected May's motivation. She appreciated this lecturer's approach because they combined theory with practice, which aligned with May's initial motivation for choosing this specific programme. She was also finally able to engage with the new concepts of the MSc and understand how these related to real life cases. May also appreciated the human touch of this lecturer who maintained eye contact with the students and asked questions throughout the lessons. This suggests that May preferred a teaching style which engaged her actively in learning rather than a teacher imparting knowledge more passively. This was particularly stimulating for May because she was interested in the practical application of theory, a motive shared by similar international students who come to the west to acquire new practical skills (Ding, 2009; Wu, 2014). However, teaching was not always so motivating for May.



### 10.6.2 Boring teaching

At the end of February, she began new modules and her satisfaction with teaching declined.

new modules come in and it's quite different teaching style from before. The lady has very huge experiences and she cooperates with the government but hmm maybe I can't recognise what she says (...) and the other teachers are also very academic and their course design is boring as well. So many things (...) and the teacher the course make motivation go down.

(Interview-5)

When asked to explain what she meant by 'the teacher was boring', May wished to clarify that not every teacher was boring. However, she indicated that someone who may be academic but does not offer real life examples is boring, whereas a tutor who is very academic but also able to offer evidence from real cases to support their ideas is good. May described another teacher (below) who was engaging, but she thought this teacher was not sufficiently critical.

I think we should think critically (...) there's a good teacher who is funny but not very academic [what do you mean by not very academic?] she just gives examples that support her opinion but sometimes she ignored the opinion which challenge her opinion but I like this style. Even though we don't go deep I can understand what she wants us to learn from the course so that means I can follow the course and do reflection and I remember this course.

(Interview-5)

Therefore, May was disillusioned with this teacher's lack of counterarguments in her lessons. Significantly, May's desire for a 'critical' approach challenged the controversial discourse that Chinese students lack criticality or are merely passive learners (Ryan, 2011). The synergy between May's motivation and her teachers' methods became even clearer when she differentiated between those who support international students and those who seemed to care less.

it's very difficult to understand the other teachers no background I don't know I even cannot understand the words but he/she just lets words there and guess we know the meaning of the words and starts to talk about [various topics] so when some new words come in I check in Chinese but some words' meaning is different in academic or business so sometimes I don't know what he was talking about [...] the good teacher translates into ways I can understand [for example] when she talks about risk management the academic may talk some words I can't remember but this good teacher gave me visual material and simple language.

(Interview-5)

Considering that May's group comprised 20 Chinese students and 10 students from other nationalities, she expected her teachers to support her and her classmates to follow lectures and be actively involved. This lends support to Mulligan and Kirkpatrick (2010) who recommend a new attitude towards international students with emphasis on techniques that may scaffold these students' learning in light of new academic challenges (e.g. listening comprehension).

Therefore, between January and March, May's motivation went through highs and lows mainly dictated by her appreciation of the teaching staff on the MSc. Perhaps, in contrast with her initial expectation of the quality of the programme, May developed frustration towards those lecturers who did not support international students with their linguistic issues. However, her motivation improved when she was taught by teachers who made their lessons student-friendly and who added a practical edge to their academic presentations.

## **10.7 May's Motivation toward the end of the MSc**

### **10.7.1 A friend as positive influence**

In April, May's motivation to study gained momentum thanks to her interactions with a friend who did not do her same MSc but had lived and worked in the UK for some time. May and this person had studied at the same Chinese university and met at a reunion in London. This friend worked as a designer for a successful British car manufacturer and gave May advice on her studies.

I feel I can talk to him and he can give me some suggestions...so at that time when I feel like I have some problem with my study I can talk to him and he can give me some suggestions. (...) so I think this positive friend is a good element for my study...for example, when I studied some cases I needed real experience in a company and he could tell me how he worked as a designer or project manager and how they work together and what would happen when they work together like some communication misunderstandings (...) so when I study this [name of the module] and I deal with this case study and I need to understand how roles work he give me real activities or real examples like how he manages the relationship with his staff

(Interview-5)

The academic support and friendly influence emanating from this friend played an instrumental part in reinstating May's motivation to study. This friend represented a 'role model' (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019) who enhanced her vision to learn by combining theoretical understanding with

practical insights. After learning about the positive influence this friend had exerted over her academic work, I investigated whether she had considered asking her MSc tutors for this kind of support. After all, they were the experts in the field.

### **10.7.2 Communication with teachers**

May confessed that she did not try to talk to her tutors.

I haven't tried to talk to my teachers maybe my problem but I don't know how to talk with them. [But when you were my student you used to talk to me] yeah that's because you talked to me but in [MSc department] no specific teacher tried to contact with me. We just know each other in class but after class we have no reason to talk (...) I feel there is a barrier between me and the teachers I mean something stops me from talking with my teachers (...) sometimes I think I'm so quiet in class and the teachers may not know me...I think they don't know who I am. They don't remember a Chinese girl who says nothing but I have my own reasons because I don't understand so that made me lose eye contact with teacher for example...I always fall behind so I can't catch up or give the answer to teachers' questions so that may be why the teachers don't remember me. So that's why it's difficult for me to ask questions and sometimes it's impossible for me to ask questions because I don't really understand what they talk about so I need to go home to restudy by myself and then I have questions

(Interview-5)

May's struggle to communicate with her MSc tutors was surprising because she was a very friendly and communicative student on PS6, and she would email me questions whenever she had doubts about her work. Her reason for acting differently was as follows:

Because you kept asking me questions and you made me feel like you know me [ah okay] actually I feel like we are friends so I can talk to you and we have an understanding between you and me but the teachers in [MSc department] they are like strangers and don't know me so if I ask some question they just give me some general answers but not what I wanted.

(Interview-5)

May would have preferred a dialogic teaching practice where learners and teachers reached a degree of mutual understanding as humans as opposed to the distant relationship between her and her MSc tutors. This ultimately shaped her motivation negatively, and her case became even more complex when she highlighted that although she was not communicative in class, this did not mean she lacked cognitive skills.

Just because I look quiet in the classroom it doesn't mean like I don't want to engage. I want to but I can't catch up with their speed so it's difficult to immediately interact with the teachers and sometimes for them it's just easier to talk with the people who like to show off in the classroom but that doesn't mean that I don't think or don't want to think anything I think a lot.

(Interview-5)

This confirms May's desire to be an active member of the social practices of learning and teaching but her inhibitions, which might have been reduced by a more supportive and dialogic teaching approach, left her quiet. Therefore, while she had ideas, she simply did not know how to integrate herself. After all, enacting new academic discursive practices may take time for international students in a new academic environment (Duff, 2010).

### **10.7.3 Balance between studies and leisure activities**

Given the above disappointment with the MSc teaching and her marks, which were lower than desired, May decided to take a break from academic work.

I suddenly realised that I felt stressed and confused and I should maybe arrange some travel or trips with my friends and at that time I also planned to go to the US so I didn't put much effort to my studies. (...)I spent too much time on studies and I didn't even receive my ideal results, I mean the PMA I think I can get 60 or more than 60 but I got 58 so I got confused and I think 'what's wrong with me?' so when I study for two months and I see the results aren't good enough I want to arrange some trips to make me happy.

(Interview-6)

May's frustration over the lack of understanding of assessment results affected her motivation to continue her work. Therefore, her decision to prioritise her trip to the US in order to feel better came with a significant loss of interest in her studies. May's need to strike a balance within learning processes was an act of self-regulatory agency (Bandura, 2001) which she exercised to preserve her personal wellbeing beyond her initial academic motivation.

Another aspect of the MSc journey which tarnished May's motivation was her supervision experience.

#### 10.7.4 Supervision

May reported feeling low levels of motivation because she did not interact with her supervisor as much as she would have liked, and she was confused about how to proceed with her work.

I didn't contact with my supervisor that frequently just one time a month and I don't know how to write the dissertation but I don't receive that enough suggestions coz I even don't know how to finish the dissertation (...) actually I went to a workshop on how to do a questionnaire ... how to do the data analysis but nothing I no idea what to do.

(Interview-6)

For someone like May who wished to engage with her studies and interact with her teachers, but failed to do so, this supervision experience was particularly frustrating and demotivating. The supervisor offered some support, but this did not help her sufficiently because if she did not understand she would not know how to ask further questions.

He tried to help me but he just contacted with me once a month, but if I asked him question he can give me answer but quickly but I don't know how to ask...you know that feeling that you don't understand things so you don't know what to ask? (...) He could give me more guidance for the dissertation I really don't know how to finish the dissertation. (...) my supervisor hasn't told me how to write [did you not ask him?] no [how does he know if you don't ask?] [laughs] yeah but I don't know how to ask.

(Interview-6)

I cannot comment on the quality of help offered by the supervisor, but May's account reveals that she could have benefitted more from her supervisor if she had been armed with the confidence to communicate and ask questions. However, although she would do so on PS6, May lost this ability from the early days on the MSc, and this lack of communication led to a complete loss of faith in herself and her motivation to study.

May only met her supervisor twice, once at the first introductory meeting and at the viva examination.

I don't think he read my dissertation very carefully because not one by one I mean (...) before I submit he just looked at the questionnaire and I asked if that was okay and he said that would be fine (...) I haven't received feedback chapter by chapter but more like general comments.

(Interview-6)

These comments suggest that this supervision experience weakened, instead of supported, May's motivation to work on her dissertation. While it is impossible to ascertain the degree of involvement of the supervisor, May disclosed a level of dissatisfaction with the guidance she received. Her supervision experience or rather, the 'uncertain territory' (Grant, 2005, p338) she navigated, had a detrimental impact on her motivation which resulted in another decision to self-regulate her academic commitment and devote less attention to her dissertation.

### **10.7.5 The end of the UK journey**

In June and July, her motivation to study was eclipsed by her boyfriend's visit and her subsequent trip to the US.

I had no motivation in July because I was in the US with my boyfriend and his family and I was not interested in studying [ahh but you did work on your dissertation?] yes yes but not very interested in it.

(Interview 7)

In light of her disappointment with the MSc and her previous results which did not seem to reflect her efforts, May experienced a complete loss of motivation. This was not aided by the unsatisfactory supervision experience which lacked the dialogic guidance May desired. In August, nearer the time of dissertation submission, she came back to the UK to complete her dissertation. However, her initial strong motivation brought from China and nurtured throughout PS6 alongside the desire of learning new skills for a better future was reduced to the following thought:

In August I only have the pressure to finish and submit the dissertation, I just want to finish.

(Interview-6)

## **Preamble to Chapters 11 and 12**

In Chapter 11, I offer a cross-sectional analysis and discussion of the findings from the four stories with a view to addressing each RQ, thereby highlighting the core factors which shaped these students' motivations through each phase of their UK journey. While this discussion will position such findings critically within the literature, the core implications will be presented in Chapter 12 alongside a discussion of the study's contributions and concluding remarks.

# **Chapter 11: Understanding Chinese students' motivations to live and study in the UK**

## **11.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I review the findings of this study by positioning them within the relevant literature. I will refer to the Research Questions posed in Chapter 1 and explore these in turn with the aim of elucidating the critical factors which shaped the student-participants' motivation.

## **11.2 Chinese Postgraduate students' motivation before arriving in the UK**

In this section I will address RQ1:

*What was these Chinese postgraduate students' motivation like prior to their arrival in the UK?*

### **11.2.1 The UK as catalyst to become a better Self**

All the student-participants showed signs of an 'imagined' future self, a self which, thanks to this UK experience, would develop into an improved, new version. Alita had nurtured a longstanding desire to study in the UK and discover her 'authentic self', a dream stemming from her professional life in China where she worked for 6 years without being able to express her own opinions. This finding resonates with Bamber's (2014) female students, as well. However, Alita trusted that in the UK she would acquire new skills and develop her 'authentic' voice, and ultimately, stop hiding who she was in order to fit in society. What Alita describes here is the liberating sense of 'becoming an individual' which Ding (2009, p316) illustrates clearly with her participant, Huan, a Chinese postgraduate student who recognised the importance of expressing her own opinions and being able to do so to the extent of viewing her 'new' self in the UK as 'a person who likes to argue'.

Similarly, May was eager to learn new practical skills which, alongside her previous work experience in China, would turn her into a resourceful person able to create new opportunities for herself (e.g. starting her own educational business). In David's case, his sense of future self was so strong that despite the understanding that it may be difficult for him to deploy western management methods in China, he envisioned researching strategies to motivate Chinese project managers to accept such methods. These motivations for professional growth resonate with Gareth



(2005) who argues that international education offers strong advantages over domestically educated peers. There is also a strong reflection of previous research findings which have highlighted Chinese students' desire to study in the UK in order to enhance their career prospects. For example, Ding (2009) came to the UK to enhance her professional teaching career and Wu's (2014) students revealed strong instrumental motivations to better their professional status. Finally, Megan had imagined the UK as an environment where she would be able to become less busy with life and concentrate on herself and learn new knowledge. Her expectation was that the UK would give her the opportunity to become a better self by 'calming down' from a busy life in China, and 'learning things from a new angle'

These accounts of imagined selves in the future UK reality echo Norton's notions of identity and investment (e.g. Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2013). In other words, prior to their arrival in the UK, these students had made the choice of 'investing' themselves into this UK-experience under the understanding that this would result in shifts and enhancement of their identities. Within the broad field of Applied Linguistics, Darwin and Norton (2015) view investment as a complementary element of motivation, and advocate that identity needs to be conceptualised through its complexities rather than dichotomies of the learner such as *motivated/demotivated*, *bad/good*. They suggest that motivation frameworks normally depict the individual as 'having a unitary and coherent identity with specific character traits', but argue that investment, on the other hand, views the learner as a 'social being with a complex identity that changes across time and spaces and is reproduced in social interaction'(p37).

However, it is worth noting that the intimate relationship between identity and motivation was previously explored by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009). Whereas I fully support Darwin and Norton's perspective attesting to the complexity of identity and the role of context, I disagree with the statement that motivation frameworks generally regard learners as having 'unitary and coherent' identities. It is certainly valid to state that some early motivational theories may have promoted a somewhat monolithic notion of motivation and the learner, but the motivation research community has moved on. In 2005, Dörnyei highlighted the dynamic value of context and how this affected motivation, and in 2009, Ushioda stressed the need of seeing learners as real people living, co-habiting and traversing a multitude of contexts. In other words, Ushioda's *relational view of*

*motivation* had already highlighted the importance of identity and how such a complex human trait, alongside other individual traits, shapes the direction and nature of motivation.

Importantly, Ushioda's (2009) framework encourages us to regard learners as 'real persons' as opposed to 'theoretical abstractions' or bundles of variables. This stance echoes Kramsch's (2002) invitation to no longer view learners as 'computers' but 'apprentices' within a community of practice. As such, Ushioda (2009, p220) suggests a focus on "the agency of the individual person as a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, a person with goals, motives and intentions".

In order to operationalise Ushioda's theory within the realm of educational psychology, I wish to draw on Bourdieu's sociological notions of *habitus*, *capital* and *field*. Each person builds, throughout their life, a *habitus*, a kind of 'socialised subjectivity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p126) predicated upon their experiences. Day by day, people collect and build resources which allow them to live and interact within society and its social actors. These resources are what Bourdieu calls *economic capital* (e.g. money), *social capital* (e.g. friends and family), and *cultural capital* (e.g. educational background, hobbies). Another important form of capital is *symbolic* and represents the prestige or respect the individual enjoys depending on their social class.

In my view, *habitus* is close to the notion of identity, which is shaped and constantly reshaped by one's own *life story* as this constantly evolves from the moment a person is born and throughout their life affairs. Each person's story is unique and rich, but such richness is not solely measurable through the above notions of capital. Rather, one's life story is rich with idiosyncratic histories, emotions, dispositions, needs, and desires, to name but a few factors which constitute the complex essence of a human being. Bourdieu maintains that a person's ability to navigate, negotiate and live through experiences in society is directly influenced by their own *habitus*. This interaction is also contingent upon the specific context (or *field*) where they act because each field (or context) is characterised by societal, institutional, and political structures to which an individual is able to respond in light of what they already understand or have experienced during their own life story.

Therefore, if we move beyond Bourdieu's sociological perspective on social classes and look at human beings more holistically with their own idiosyncrasies, we could argue that people have more than just economic, social, cultural or symbolic capital. In my view, everyone is equipped with what I call *life capital*. Life capital could be described as a symbolic wealth which every person possesses, a wealth which can be understood through the richness of one's life experiences. Life capital thus entails memories, desires, emotions, attitudes, opinions and these can be relatively positive or negative and explicit or concealed depending on how the individual manages, shares and employs their life capital. I do not mean to use the concept of life capital in capitalist terms; after all, I am transferring Bourdieu's heuristics for an understanding of social classes into an ecological educational perspective. In other words, I wish to employ the concept of life capital to refer to the ensemble of people's life experiences with all their idiosyncratic dimensions to account for the complexity of every individual's life and recognise that this shapes people's behaviour.

Returning to motivation, I argue that an individual's motivation is to be understood in relation to their life story and, more importantly, the interdependence between what is encompassed in such life story and the individual's internal and external responses. For instance, a student yawning, looking down and not participating in class may not necessarily be bored or demotivated; it could well be that this student did not sleep well because of a health-related or family issue. In other words, this student is in the physical context of the classroom but has a life story which influences their current social experience, in this case, the lesson. For example, Ahmad in Hanks (2015) was a student who clearly had a desire to study but could not do so in certain situations because some circumstances interfered with his motivation to study. Therefore, the life capital humans carry, with all its idiosyncratic traits, has the ability to impact on and shape the individual's experiences, including motivation. In this study, for instance, we saw that Megan's and May's motivation to study towards PS6 exams was largely shaped by their previous negative experiences with the IELTS test. Similarly, David's motivation to work on his dissertation was clouded by his fear of failing after hearing about the experiences of other peers. Therefore, the notion of *life capital* is useful to ecologically capture the life story of the learner and see how this influences their motivation, among other individual traits and phenomena.

### 11.2.2 Better (ideal) selves

To understand my students' notion of an imagined, better self, it is imperative to draw on the concept of *ideal L2 Self* proposed by Dörnyei and Csizér highlighting learners' ability to 'narrow the gap between [their] present self-perceived status and what one should ideally be' (2002, p454). This operationalised understanding of an enhanced future self seems to resonate with the student-participants of this study, who, through their UK experience, envisaged to become new, better versions of themselves. Dörnyei (2005) further articulates that 'a desired end-state will have an impact on behaviour only if the individual can personalize it by building a bridge of self-representations between one's current self and the hoped for self.' (117). My student-participants show that there was a dissonance between their current status when they arrived in the UK and the desired one. For instance, Alita wished to move from a place where she was unable to express her opinions freely (in China) to a place where she developed her own 'authentic voice'. Thus, these student-participants did generate their own self-representations of an imagined, better self. This, in turn, points to Dörnyei and Kubanyiova's concept of vision which is a vivid representation of the imagined L2 self.

However, one caveat makes this notion of *L2 ideal self* less desirable for these Chinese students completing a pre-sessional and a Master's degree in the UK. Their motivation goes beyond the desire of learning an L2 and integrating with a specific L2 English-speaking community (as promoted by the Gardnerian model); rather, they wished to better themselves holistically as individuals. Therefore, the use of the L2 and integration within the L2 community represent only two features of a wider complex web of motives to leave China and spend a whole year in the UK. More importantly, these participants made no explicit reference to integrating into British society in a way to assimilate British cultural values (e.g. Berry, 1997). Rather, they indicated strong desires to become better people by developing new skills, acquiring new knowledge, creating new opportunities for themselves with a view to going back to China and living a better life.

Thus, in order to conceptualise the case of these Chinese students utilising the UK (or any other Anglo-academic context) to better themselves as individuals who eventually go back to China, I wish to propose the notion of *academic* and *professional ideal self*. With this concept, I aim to account for these Chinese students' motivation to enhance themselves linguistically, culturally,

and intellectually thereby achieving an enriched sense of Self which allows them to operate better within (inter)national context(s).

I now discuss specific factors which shaped my students' motivation prior to their arrival in the UK.

### **11.2.3 Advantages of doing a pre-sessional**

Whilst all participants expressed clear ideas about their future selves, some provided specific evidence that the future pre-sessional course had played a crucial imaginative role in shaping their motivation before arriving in the UK. May viewed PS6 as an opportunity to adapt to the campus life before starting the MSc and forge some social relationships which would give her a sense of safety, especially since she knew nobody in the UK. This finding resonates with de Chazal's (2014, p33) argument that pre-sessional programmes should aim to develop 'academic and language skills, which in practice relate to wider cultural aspects' that concern the institutional culture of the university and the city/country as well as 'softer' cultural skills such as interacting with other people. Also, forging interpersonal relations at pre-sessional stage is a goal which international students have shown to harbour in other similar studies and which constitutes a critical aspect of their motivation at the beginning of the UK journey (e.g. Dooey, 2010; Jarvis & Stakounis, 2010)

On the other hand, Megan's motivation to attend the pre-sessional was heavily shaped by her imagined life on PS6 which she expected to be an easy undertaking compared to the future MSc. It is difficult to determine where exactly she retrieved the image of PS6 as an easy course; this may have come from the positive experience of some other pre-sessional alumni she interacted with prior to travelling to the UK. There is, after all, evidence that pre-sessional students report various success stories about pre-sessionals, such as improving one's language skills whilst enjoying a positive social programme of activities (e.g. McKee, 2012).

### **11.2.4 Competitive society**

All participants revealed that their choice to complete a postgraduate degree in the UK was largely influenced by the demanding Chinese labour market. May believed that this UK degree in project management, unlike her previous degree in geology from a Chinese university, would allow her to obtain a well-paid job in China. David wished to complete this Master's because he desired an

office job but knew this would be challenging in Beijing given the fierce competition, and a UK degree could help him stand out from the crowd. Similarly, Megan wished to complete a UK degree because she had worked for three years as an architect but with a UK Master's she may be able to work in a higher position e.g. project manager.

These students' accounts confirm the growing perception that studying at a post-secondary institution abroad is a valuable experience for Chinese students (e.g. OECD, 2013; Kettle, 2017). However, this phenomenon becomes even more complex if we consider that nowadays young Chinese professionals may struggle to find a job in China because of the increasing number of 'homebred' degree holders (Xu, 2006 in Huang, 2012), and therefore, a Chinese graduate will be viewed in a better light if they possess a foreign degree rather than one from China (Gareth, 2005; Bamber, 2014). This points to the pressure under which these students are because of the growing population with higher degree qualifications. However, while this reveals a trend of studying abroad due to the competitive nature of the labour market in China, there are some exceptions.

For instance, in this study, Alita was a slightly different case because while she wished to broaden her horizons and open new opportunities for herself, she wanted this more for her own intrinsic benefit than the external demands of competition. In fact, she highlighted that some people viewed her choice to quit her permanent job in China as irresponsible. This would resonate with the argument that age is a crucial factor in China and plays a pivotal role in shaping young people's lives since the Chinese labour market imposes some age bands and, as a result, young people are encouraged to settle down with a job before they turn 30. This age factor is intimately linked to the notion of adulthood within a Confucian society (e.g. Huang 2012). However, despite being 29, Alita took the risk and left her job to study in the UK for her own personal joy. Her decision therefore seemed to challenge the notion of *shengnu*, or woman 'left on the shelf' to refer to unmarried female Chinese people who spend too long in HE (Bamber, 2014).

### **11.2.5 Parents**

Societal pressure is not the only external factor which shapes Chinese students' motivation to study in the UK. There are other influences which emanate from the home/family space and which may have a significant impact. One of the factors which research has highlighted in this respect is the concept of filial piety or *xiao qin* (e.g. Yang, 1997). This value has important implications for

the child-parent relationship throughout the lifetime of a Chinese person. This means that there is a reciprocal relationship whereby parents will sacrifice and do anything to support their children and give them their best chance, and in return, children will repay with long-term love and respect. In this light, a child must respect and honour their parents' choices and wishes (Ho, 1996) even if this means going against one's own desires (Li, 2001).

In this study, only two students revealed that their motivation to study in the UK was subject to emotional considerations emanating from the home sphere. Alita considered herself a 'brave' person not only because she had the courage to quit her job despite what society may think, but also because she went against her mother who appeared to see Alita 'as a baby' and did not approve of her trip to the UK. Alita chose to prove herself, which shows that her motivational force survived the emotional pressure from her mother and, importantly, the influential pressure of *xiao qin*. However, it is fair to say that her father did support her decision. This finding thus indicates that Chinese young people do not always follow Confucian values which may hamper their choices, but are, perhaps more so today than yesterday, able to uphold their own individuality and make decisions which reflect their own needs and wishes.

On the other hand, David's emotional pressure came from feeling sad about leaving home where he had his parents and close friends. This sentiment was exacerbated by his concern that he may not make any friends in the UK because he considered himself a quiet person. These thoughts led David to contemplate abandoning the plans of studying in the UK. He also revealed feeling under parental-induced pressure due to the substantial financial investment they had made for his career. As suggested by Myles and Cheng (2003), this finding supports the above-mentioned notion of *xiao qin* but also resonates with other international students who feel pressure because of the financial support received from their parents. This, in turn, may lead to a form of anxiety over the possibility of disappointing the family in case of failure in the overseas academic experience.

### **11.2.6 English Language**

While all students showed some concerns or desires about improving their English language skills during PS6, when asked during the first interview about their motivation prior to their arrival in the UK, only May and Megan expressed some thoughts concerning the English language. May had sat the IELTS test four times and, although she eventually reached the

required 6.5 overall score, she still wished to attend PS6 because she thought her English was not good enough to study in the UK. Whilst we do not know what influenced May to argue that her English was not to standard for academic success, her concern somehow confirms previous studies which have investigated the correlation between IELTS scores and academic performance, generally finding that such a correlation is, in fact, weak (e.g. Dooley, 1999; Floyd 2015). As a result, Pilcher and Richards (2016) have argued for a re-assessment of the power invested in the IELTS to promote a more subjectivist and contextual view of language assessment for academic purposes.

Similarly, days before her arrival in the UK, Megan felt very concerned about her writing skills because she had tried writing a sample essay but found it very challenging. She was also assisted by a friend who had previously completed academic studies in Canada and who had highlighted that Megan's writing seemed 'babyish'. Megan's perception of her writing was that there was no logic to it and because of the fear of not having the adequate level she even began contemplating if studying in China may have been a safer option for her. These signs of anxiety about language skills and potential impact on academic performance appear to resonate with Dewaele and Thirtle's (2009) argument that foreign language anxiety alongside other individual differences may be predictive of language learning abandonment. Clearly, Megan's experience here goes beyond language learning, but it is crucial, in my view, to note how such English language-related anxiety clouded her enthusiasm to study abroad to the extent of considering an alternative postgraduate pathway in China.

Although in this study only two participants revealed concerns or anxiety about the English language before their arrival in the UK, this problem would seem common to other international students. For instance, Lamie and Issitt (2005), who conducted a survey of 250 international students at UK Universities before they began a pre-sessional, show that a large proportion expressed concerns over their English language skills. However, the limitation of Lamie and Issitt's quantitative study lies in their inability to uncover the nuances of these students' concerns. For example, Pilcher and Richards (2016) would ask the question, were these students actually concerned about the English language or the subject-specific English skills, after all the English required for Chemistry is fundamentally different to that required for social sciences?



### **11.2.7 Choosing this specific UK University**

If we move beyond the macro-motivation for choosing to study at an English-speaking university and examine the individual reasons behind choosing a specific university, we obtain a deeper understanding of the motives guiding these students' decision. This understanding is particularly relevant for a globalised world where English-medium instruction at higher degree level is now increasingly provided by both English-speaking and non-Anglophone countries (e.g. Ryan, 2013). The main reasons which emerged from this study concern the content of the Master's programme, the university reputation and its geographical location.

All participants expressed an interest in the core subject of programme and project management. Megan valued the Master's focus on practice and soft skills which, in her opinion, are sought-after by employers. David thought that combining his background in engineering with this new subject would make him a successful project manager. Alita had an interest in management and leadership which tallied with her desire to develop her authentic self and applying this to her professional life. May thought this specific Master's would give her the skills to combine with her part-time teaching experience and maybe, one day, set up an educational business. These accounts, which illustrate the importance attached to the specific course content and the desirable professional impact, lend support to similar findings reflected in a large survey of UK-based international students by Lamie and Issitt (2005) and by the OECD (2013).

Crucially, Megan and David highlighted an interest in the university's international reputation. According to East (2001, p4), some international students place the university's reputation at the core of their mindset which leads to the 'halo effect'. This study's students revealed a variety of reasons for choosing this specific university, but the notion of prestige is worth discussing. Megan thought that by graduating from such a well-respected university, she would become a well-rounded person able to succeed in any aspect of her future career. David saw the university's reputation as a sign of quality which resonated with his desire of learning about western advanced methods of management. This finding supports Kettle's (2017, p5) argument that, given the growing provision on the international HE landscape, students now choose in accordance with the quality of the university, which is reflected on the university ranking system. Furthermore, this view resonates with Copland et al.'s (2017) large study which underlined the importance students

ascribe to the university's international reputation as well as the prestige of the prospective course content and relevant teaching staff.

Finally, David, Megan and Alita pointed out that the geographical location of the chosen institution was critical in shaping their decision. Megan was attracted by the quiet atmosphere at the university and the proximity to London. David liked that the university was situated in a small city that is quiet, and which would help him concentrate on his studies. Alita was fascinated by the idyllic images of the campus she had seen online. These reasons concerning the ambiance and study-life style at the host institution support Bodycott's (2009, p354) survey of the key 'pull-factors' which attract Chinese students to a university abroad, namely the environment considerations (e.g. lifestyle) and the specific knowledge about the host institution. Nonetheless, it is worth understanding this finding in relation to the often-reported trend that international students may choose London-based universities because of the cachet attached to living in London. As indicated by Lamie and Issitt (2005), the privilege of being in London is not necessarily a deal-breaker for many students who choose to study at university in other UK cities whose reputation is still important.

Having illustrated the key factors which influenced these Chinese students' motivation before coming to the UK, I now turn to those factors which interacted with their motivation to learn and live in the UK during PS6.

### **11.3 Chinese Postgraduate students' motivation at the beginning of a pre-sessional.**

In this section, I will address RQ2 *What happened to these Chinese postgraduate students' motivation during PS6?* In particular, I discuss those aspects of experience which had a reported impact on the students' motivation to study and live in the UK. I divide this section into three parts to account for the *early days on PS6, the middle phase and the end.*

### **11.3.1 Settling in the UK: new responsibilities**

Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) and Furnham and Bochner (1986 in Furnham 2004, p17) argue that ‘foreign students face several difficulties, some exclusive to them (as opposed to home students)’. Gu and Maley (2008, p232) maintain that whilst adapting to a new academic culture, these students face multiple challenges in their first contact with the new society. As a result, the new lifestyle and the confrontation of traditions, values and beliefs clashing with their own may take a toll on their psychological wellbeing. These considerations chime with my student-participants.

During the first week of PS6, David was under substantial pressure because of the sudden change in his lifestyle. He was used to his parents taking care of everything so that he may focus on his academic or professional work, but now he had to attend to many tasks which went beyond studying or working. His initial strong motivation was weakened by this overwhelming number of duties. The heavy schedule of academic work and out-of-class chores prevented David from striking the desired balance between study and social life (one of his core motives). Similarly, Megan saw all these new demands (e.g. setting up a bank account, police registration) as ‘distractions’ which impaired her focus on PS6 academic work.

Alita felt ‘lost’ and ‘lonely’ in the new society with different values that caused a dissonance between her life in China, where her parents supported her with everything, and the UK, where she had to do it all by herself. May, too, reported a sense of tiredness emanating from the number of tasks which went beyond studying. Because of all these new tasks, May decided not to become involved with PS6 social events. Crucially, from the beginning of PS6, both Alita and May experienced some stress due to the uncertainty and strain of searching for suitable accommodation for the year. Alita’s concerns were aggravated by her understanding that other classmates had already made arrangements; May, on the other hand, was also concerned about financial constraints. These findings confirm some of the challenges faced by Chinese students abroad which indeed go beyond academic matters (e.g. Furnham 2004; Gu & Maley, 2008), and mirror Copland and Garton’s (2011, p244) work highlighting the complex ‘service encounters’ these students engage with during a pre-session programme, at the beginning of their UK experience.

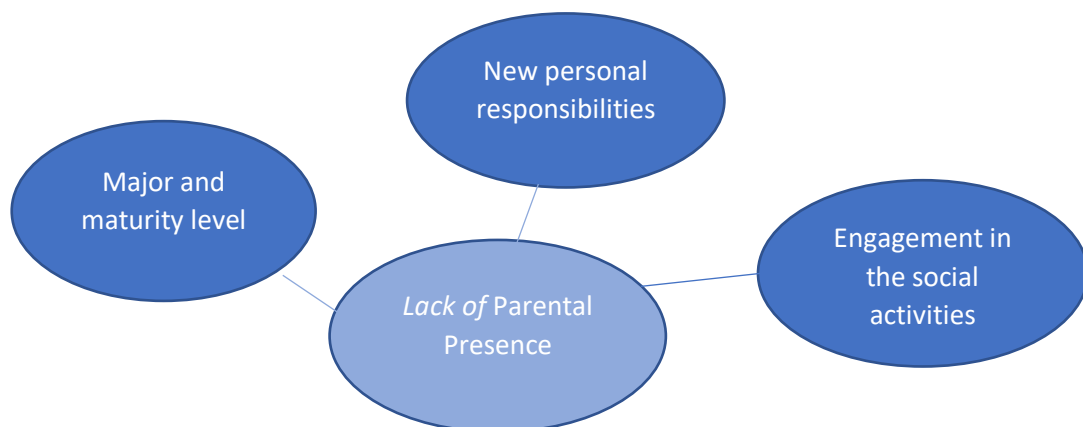
I now wish to draw on these students’ experiences to further develop the concept of ‘personal landscape’ proposed by Zhu (2017) in order to conceptualise the complex dimensions of Chinese

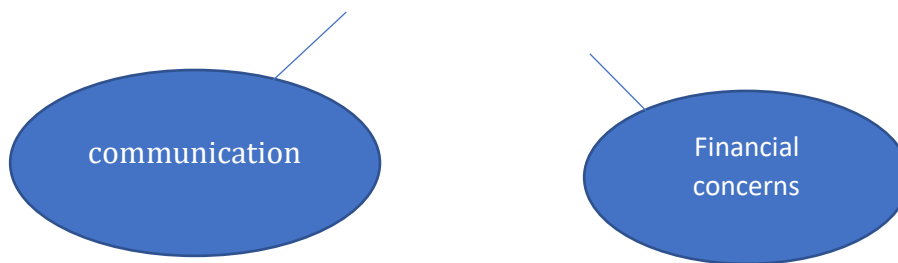
students' socialisation in the West. He highlighted issues of student maturity, interpersonal communication, engagement in social activity and financial support (figure 11.1 below). I wish to add to these the concept of 'new responsibilities' which, as indicated by this study, may include the urgency to register with the police, a doctor, the financial demands of securing a new place. These had significant impact on these newly arrived students which may result in lower levels of motivation, tiredness and loneliness. The notion of 'new responsibilities', and Zhu's components, are linked to what my students highlighted: the lack of parental presence and support which they were used to back in China. Reliance on parents and their support has been illustrated as a key ingredient for motivational wellbeing amongst Chinese learners (Fong & Yuen, 2016, p163) and thus requires a core place within this framework.

### *Personal landscape*

- 1- Major and maturity level;
- 2- Interpersonal communication;
- 3- Engagement in the social activities;
- 4- Financial supports

**Figure 11.1: Zhu's (2017) *Personal Landscape***





**Figure 11.2 My proposed version of *Personal Landscape* for newly arrived Chinese students**

My proposed landscape takes a new shape in order to represent the non-fixed nature of this construct which may indeed vary depending on the individual, and as such, one may keep adding to this complex web of factors. However, as well as the central addition of *parental presence* (or rather, *lack of*) within this framework, I wish to stress the notion of time, and how this landscape may look different at different stages of the Chinese learner's journey in the 'West', hence, my proposal for a dynamic and less linear representation of the construct. Importantly, though, whether the issue is registering with a GP or opening a bank account, this may be the first time for the students to complete such tasks without the longstanding presence of their parents taking the lead on such responsibilities. Therefore, I emphasise the centrality and lack of parental presence whilst dealing with *new responsibilities* which may indeed impact negatively on the students' motivational wellbeing (Yang & Clum, 1995) on a pre-sessional, the earliest stage of the UK journey.

### **11.3.2 Academic writing: disappointment with IELTS**

This study supports the literature which indicates a discrepancy between the skills international students develop through IELTS and the skills required by university departments (e.g. Moore & Morton, 2005; Pilcher & Rickards, 2011). By week-2 of PS6, David noticed a few writing skills, such as referencing and paraphrasing, which he had not acquired throughout his IELTS training. In fact, he felt that IELTS is not a guarantee of readiness for postgraduate studies but was pleased that, from early on, PS6 gave him the confidence that he would meet the academic requirements of his future MSc, and this shaped his motivation positively. Alita, too, reported a negative

experience with IELTS which she viewed as ‘torture’ because despite passing the test she was still anxious about her reading skills, particularly her speed to process texts. She was also concerned about improving her critical thinking skills and ability to express her thoughts logically in writing. Finally, May, who had passed the IELTS and did not have a conditional offer from the University, chose to complete PS6 because she still felt her skills were inadequate for academic studies.

These students’ accounts seem to support the literature which has scrutinised the IELTS test by highlighting some of the discrepancies between IELTS training and the academic demands of studying at an English-speaking university (e.g. Green, 2005). For example, empirical evidence has pointed to the major differences in the requirements of writing for university purposes and writing for test purposes where the former entails students to research, process and reorganise source material and the latter mainly expects students to rely upon personal experience (Horowitz, 1986). Moore and Morton (2005) have furthered this debate by highlighting the need to reconcile the differences between IELTS tests and the needs of the academy showing, with emphasis on writing skills, that the *academic* IELTS test should not be viewed as an indicator of students’ academic abilities (as David observed), but merely as an indication of their language proficiency in more generic terms. For instance, IELTS tests do not examine candidates’ ability to construct an argument based on research reading but solely rely on students’ own knowledge. This is an issue which meshes with the notion and dangers of plagiarism which, understandably, is difficult to monitor within the burgeoning landscape of the IELTS industry (Moore & Morton, 2005, p64). My point here is not to attack IELTS because, after all, the controversial trade-off between validity and reliability is inevitable (e.g. Wigglesworth & Eder, 1996). However, it is crucial to note the serious discrepancies between what IELTS tests for and what English-speaking universities require of students. In this sense, my student-participants’ experiences support the need of EAP practitioners to invest curriculum time and effort into ‘reconciling’ the dichotomy between IELTS skills and academic requirements at university, which otherwise, might take a toll on their motivation to perform well academically. Also, whilst this debate points to the negative washback effects of the IELTS, there is a possibility to generate positive washback if test designers produce training materials which may incorporate some core concepts of referencing and paraphrasing.

### **11.3.3 Teaching and Learning on PS6: *the early days***

Overall, all student-participants seemed to have positive first impressions about the teaching on PS6 and highlighted different attributes which would portray PS6 tutors as supportive and friendly. More specifically, Alita noticed PS6 tutors' patience and ability to offer encouragement which she identified as a difference between her notion of teachers in China and in the West. She characterised the former as teachers who are afraid of failure and keep students 'within their comfort zone', and the latter as more encouraging of students to try new things. According to Alita, Chinese teachers prefer to show the right models to follow and learn by memorising new knowledge. In contrast, PS6 teachers 'inspired' her to work more actively through discussion work whilst developing critical thinking. As a result, she felt empowered by PS6 teachers because she could develop her knowledge and skills by being 'involved' in class.

What Alita suggests here seems to echo the traditional dichotomies between 'surface' and 'deep' learning and Chinese teachers' tendency to impart knowledge through expository methods which would entail memorisation of knowledge to pass exams (surface learning) as opposed to developing meaningful understanding of new knowledge (deep learning) (Rao & Chan, 2010, p5). This, however, is not meant as a criticism nor as a generalisation about Chinese pedagogy because evidence suggests that in the Chinese classroom, too, it is possible to see a student-centred approach as well as a teacher-centred approach (e.g. Cortazzi & Jin, 2001; Biggs & Watkins, 2001) and that students engage with tasks aiming for meaningful understanding (Mok et al., 2008).

David, too, expressed appreciation of PS6 tutors' sense of encouragement and support, particularly in fostering an English-speaking classroom environment even though all students shared the same L1. This was in contrast with David's experience in Chinese classrooms, where students would be required to sit, listen to the teacher and take notes. In the UK, he enjoyed group work and active discussion tasks because these allowed him to practise his English communicatively, but also because these activities were conducive to socialisation with others. Not only did David report feeling confident because the tutors' friendliness bolstered his skills to communicate in English, but he also noticed that PS6 tutors seemed genuinely interested in his opinions and that they were happy to answer all questions, even simple ones. This, in his view, generated a relaxed and supportive atmosphere.

David's perception of the Chinese teacher as less 'interested' in their students may appear controversial, especially given the moral duties which Confucian-heritage cultures attach to the figure of the teacher (Zhao, 2013), and, more importantly, China's recent explicit move towards reforms which may welcome Deweyan student-centred pedagogies (Ryan, 2013; Beckett & Zhao, 2016). Nonetheless, this remains an insight into David's understanding of different teaching personas and their effects on students.

Having discussed the key factors affecting students' motivation before and at the beginning of PS6, I now examine the key experiences which shaped their motivation during PS6 (week2 to week4).

#### **11.4 Teaching and Learning on PS6: *half-way through***

Alita regarded my style as 'active' in that it differed from her understanding of teaching methodologies in China where the focus seems to be on examinations. The variety of teacher strategies which 'pushed her out of her comfort zone' by engaging in new tasks motivated her further to become a 'better self'. This notion of self-improvement through learning re-appears as a Confucian-influence over the need to achieve excellence through hard work (Lin, 2010).

David noticed differences between English language teaching in China and PS6. In PS6, teachers always used English, and he particularly liked the use of English for metalinguistic debates. He also felt motivated by PS6 teachers showing an interest in communicating with the students and contrasted this with his learning experience in China where teachers would normally focus on writing information on the board, expecting students to take notes rather than engaging in any form of dialogue with the teachers. May valued my guidance whilst adapting to the new academic environment (e.g. specific materials I designed) and preferred this guidance-driven style to other teachers who give students too much 'independent work time' during class time. She especially liked that I promoted spoken interactions despite being the teacher in charge of reading and writing. These students' considerations about PS6 show that they do not fully subscribe to what is normally referred to as Confucian 'examination hell' (Ishisad, 1974). Rather, they indicate a strong inclination towards a dialogic and engaging student-teacher and student-student relationships where everyone can be an active member of this new learning discursive community.



Another motivational factor which stemmed from PS6 concerned teacher feedback on formative coursework.

#### **11.4.1 The role of formative feedback**

Megan and May showed strong appreciation of formative feedback during PS6. Megan's initial motivation on PS6 was to improve her writing skills and, as such, she highly valued the feedback she received regularly on her formative writing (e.g. PEPAs), which corroborated her motivation for learning overall. This is in line with Haghi and Sharpling (2016) who, building upon Sadler (1989), reported EAP pre-sessional students feeling motivated by formative feedback because this supported their understanding about how to move forward with their learning. This study also echoes Rowe and Wood's (2008) work suggesting that students appreciate timely and regular feedback which may act as a motivator that reduces anxiety about their performance. Megan's appraisal of regular feedback and the positive impact this had on her is also supportive of Blair et al's (2013, p73) argument that students should not 'chase' feedback nor see it as an opportunity which only arises at specific points in time in the academic calendar.

May was also eager to receive feedback from her PS6 teachers, and, crucially, highlighted that although she liked and understood the use of peer-feedback activities, she preferred being corrected by the teachers rather than her classmates. While there is a growing literature that elucidates the benefits of peer-feedback (e.g. Rollinson, 2005), there remain some concerns about the efficacy of the approach and the extent to which it targets all types of issues in students' work (e.g. Keh, 1990, Haghi & Sharpling, 2016). Also, we need to raise the question about students' attitude towards the use and impact of peer feedback. Whilst, as expressed by Allwright and Hanks (2009, pp. 6-9), students may act as learning agents, not all students, arguably depending on their 'culture(s) of learning', may wish to do so. Therefore, some students may prefer a normative teacher-led figure who oversees feedback, in other words, a teacher who plays a 'facilitative role' (Zheng, 2012).

In this vein, May's attitude seems to support Unlu and Wharton's (2015, p31) argument that students expect more normative feedback than they actually receive. This view would thus position the teacher as the authority figure who can make judgments about acceptability. From a motivation perspective, the preference for normative feedback seems reminiscent of Ushioda's (1996) argument for 'absolute performance'-driven assessment approaches whereby teachers offer

evaluations that connect to objective achievements and, in doing so, offer learners the opportunity to develop self-perceptions of competence which may result in intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, these participants' cultural heritage may play an influence because, as Chinese learners, they may be used to viewing teachers as moral figures with deep knowledge and capacity to answer questions (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998), and thus favour teacher-feedback to peer-feedback. Nonetheless, as Allwright and Hanks (2009, p7) remind us, 'learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways', and these Chinese students have certainly valued working in pairs or in small groups; therefore, there are benefits in peer-feedback practice, too. Connected to the concept of feedback is the notion of 'noticing progress' which became a crucial motivational factor for some participants in this study.

#### **11.4.2 The motivational value of seeing progress**

Alita generally felt anxious about her academic performance, but noticing daily progress was a rewarding experience which sustained her motivation to work hard. For instance, whilst composing her first academic essay, achieving small goals (e.g. producing an essay outline, receiving feedback on her first 500 words) was motivating for her. Similarly, David appreciated the breakdown of the full essay draft into three submissions (500 words each time). By reducing the complex task of his first academic essay into smaller tasks, he could notice small achievements which, in his view, were 'big progress' and, in turn, enhanced his motivation to write the whole essay. Megan was relieved to see that despite facing several challenges, whilst reading academic texts and producing writing tasks, she could notice improvement in her ability to compose an academic paragraph. Her motivation was driven by her noticing such progress on a weekly basis.

This emphasis on recognising progress through the mediation of short-term goals lends support to Ushioda's (1996, p25) encouragement to help students experience 'immediate success' which, as evidenced by this study, may be achieved through short-term learning goals that 'induce feelings of mastery, skills development and a sense of progress'. Furthermore, recent motivation research suggests that this ability to help students 'see' their skills development may put them on a positive motivational current to keep the momentum (Dörnyei, Henry, Muir, 2016). In other words, showing learners their progress may energise action because they realise the proximity to their goal (or vision) which, in turn, may generate some steps (or a plan) to attain such a goal (Ibid, 2016, p23).

I now turn to discuss an experience on PS6 which generated a degree of impact on these students' motivation, Exploratory Practice.

### **11.4.3 Exploratory Practice as positive motivational practice**

EP initially raised Alita's motivation because she realised she was able to acquire new knowledge by using a variety of resources around her, including seeking help from others. For example, interviewing people whilst resolving her puzzles was an important experience for Alita because, by engaging in this activity, she noted that her speaking skills were better than she thought. This resulted in a confidence boost which was crucial for Alita because her parents never wanted her to feel over-confident in case she failed, but she felt different and rather happy about doing EP and discovering such confidence about her performance. Crucially, EP represented a means to socialise with other peers from other classes. As a result, Alita also enjoyed learning about other students' and teachers' opinions related to her academic puzzle (referencing) which enhanced her motivation to do well academically. As shown by other empirical studies (e.g. Val in Hanks, 2012), learning that others share our same puzzles (especially if a negative one) may bring a new sense of calmness produced by the understanding that we are not alone in this site of struggle.

May enjoyed doing EP and particularly liked the 'interview' practice because this allowed her to talk with the locals. She used this activity to investigate her big concern about finding accommodation, and this experience enabled her to consider arguments from different perspectives. Before engaging with EP, May just thought that it was bad of the university not to offer accommodation. She then understood that this was an issue shared by many, and this taught her to face challenges in her life thereby motivating her to work harder. EP was beneficial to May because she developed a new sense of independence and gained a degree of calmness by accepting the reality of university accommodation. This strengthened her critical thinking skills to evaluate an issue from several perspectives before reaching a conclusion. Like Lynne in Hanks (2017b), May evinced a sense of elation about conducting EP-related activities by herself and 'taking the initiative' and responsibility for her own understanding.

Exploratory Practice was a new methodology which allowed David to practise his spoken English in new ways (e.g. conducting interviews with the locals in a café). This was not solely a new

academic research practice for him, but also a whole new sociological enterprise because, in his view, people do not talk with strangers in China as they are shy. Thus, EP showed David that he could use English rather autonomously without the need of resorting to Mandarin if communication broke down; he also realised that he could communicate in English better than he expected. The benefits of EP to bolster one's sense of autonomy are already evident (e.g. Salvi in Hanks, 2017a). Like Alita, David saw this EP experience as an opportunity to practise his English skills which resonates with Ken's experience in Hanks (2017a, p43). EP therefore shaped David's motivation to communicate with others (one of his key motives) in English and, for someone who values social interactions, it was certainly a positive boost.

Furthermore, learning from other classmates' puzzles enhanced his motivation to live in the UK because by learning more about the UK culture he learnt to appreciate the country better. The desire of learning from others with similar puzzles and the benefits of recognising the value of other puzzles echoes Alita's experience and chimes with the postgraduate pre-sessional students in Hanks (2017a). Also, David's understanding of UK assessment modes (his academic puzzle) made him feel much more confident about his future assignments and, in tune with the EP principle of understanding, he became able to 'accept' the UK academic system thereby leading to higher motivation and confidence about his MSc studies. Both May and David with their acquired understandings about the educational and social cultures in the UK support Hanks' (2019, pp143-144) argument that 'the nexus of theory and practice has the potential to enrich our understandings of culture and wellbeing'. This is similar to Li's (2006, p453) call for 'increased awareness and understanding' which she formulated as a result of her fruitful EP experience in the midst of teaching and research struggles and successes.

These students revealed that, thanks to EP, they became more confident and motivated about their future studies either because they learnt to accept the new educational and cultural system or because they developed new skills whilst also carving out a new sense of learner autonomy and criticality. These positives support arguments that practitioner research, in this case, from the learner perspective as 'key developing practitioners' (e.g. Allwright & Hanks, 2009) lends itself well to the demands of a pre-sessional course where students may present a variety of needs (some of which very unique to the individual and difficult to anticipate for EAP teachers and managers).

Also, as Hanks (2019, p156) posits, EP seems well-suited to EAP because of the tenet of integrating research with pedagogic praxis. It is worth noting that EP within this EAP UK-context worked well because I adapted this research methodology reflexively and in response to this very context (e.g. Wedell & Malderez, 2013). I encouraged these students to develop their own puzzles by first exploring their own curiosity (Freire, 1973) about cultural and academic aspects of the new UK life. In these processes, the emphasis was put on developing understandings which were individual but often became collective (Allwright, 2005, p360).

Therefore, I used EP and gave the students the power to set the agenda for some sections of PS6 curriculum which allowed them to address questions that really mattered to them (Hanks, 2012, p121). However, I must critically and honestly admit that my students did not engage to the same degree of depth (data collection and analysis) as other EAP students doing EP (e.g. Hanks, 2012). For instance, they only had one lesson to discuss their interview questions and techniques with me as opposed to students who may have taken longer to refine their investigative instruments (e.g. Hanks, 2017). I felt that we had time constraints linked to the guidelines I had received from PS6 course director to ‘stick’ with the proposed scheme of work (though we had freedom to creatively adapt and design materials). In Hanks (2017a), the EAP postgraduate students seemed to have some leeway with the Language Development module which occurred daily for 1h30. On PS6, we only had 3.5h class time for the British culture-related EP practice and 3h for the academic purposes one. This is an observation which echoes Rose’s (2007, p499) experience of her EP study where she acknowledges that students can indeed ‘shape lessons (...) provided that the courses structure is sufficiently flexible’.

Research has already shown the compatibility between EP and EAP (e.g. Hanks, 2012; Dar, 2015); but considering my participants’ experiences, I now outline the key motivational dimensions of EP for pre-sessional learners who, in this study, happened to be Chinese students.

EP can potentially motivate EAP students because it is:

- **Relevant practice**, EP invites learners to explore and understand what matters to them. These Chinese learners exhibited an array of individual interests, and EP naturally allowed

them to set the agenda and fulfil their curiosity (e.g. British culture) or needs (e.g. academic puzzles).

- **Social practice**, EP invites learners to work with others, a skill which EAP international students may aspire to develop but with difficulty and shyness, hence EP may create the perfect educational arena for socialisation. For this to happen, however, trust is fundamental (Candlin & Crichton, 2013).
- **Skills development**, a safe EP environment may allow pre-sessional learners to practise and develop their language skills (e.g. speaking through interviewing), whilst developing other academic skills typical of a university discursive community (e.g. debate, interview skills).
- **Clarity**, thanks to the nature of understandings which are garnered through EP, learners may develop a sense of acceptance and calmness which is beneficial for those who may have experienced some form of culture shock or bump and/or may need a sense of security in the new learning and social environments.

Below is a graphic representation of the key dimensions which may characterise EP as a motivational practice for students:



### **Figure 11.3 Motivational dimensions of EP for a pre-sessional learner**

Having discussed the aspects of EP which impacted positively on the students on this pre-sessional, I now turn to a critical examination of those EP dimensions which were less positive.

#### **11.4.4 Exploratory Practice as a negative influence**

Despite my appreciation and enthusiasm for EP, I share here the less favourable narratives concerning this approach. Written representation inevitably requires choices about separating ideas into discrete items for discussion, but the ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ dimensions of EP and its motivational impact are interconnected. Thus, some of the negative influences, described below, formed part of what above was illustrated as largely positive, with the exception of Megan who did not see EP as beneficially as her classmates.

Alita reported dissatisfaction with one of the early stages of the EP experience when I had asked them to do an online search about their puzzles under my supervision in class as preparation for interviews. However, Alita would have preferred more discussion between classmates in class and less time on online search under my supervision which she thought could have been done at home. This may be in line with Alita’s appreciation for a learning style where the learner takes the initiative in complete independence. On the other hand, despite noticing the benefits of EP, David reported feeling discontented after discovering that other PS6 tutors, who did not do EP as part of the British culture module, would take their students out on excursions in the local area. As such he could not help regarding EP as a form of PS6 academic work, which resulted in his disappointment when he heard that students from other groups would leave the university to spend time in a café ‘enjoying themselves’. This impacted on David’s motivation to study, as he would have preferred a break from PS6 like his peers in other groups. Therefore, this calls into the

question the hopeful argument that time devoted to EP would be ‘seen as well spent’ (Hanks, 2012; p122); in other words, teachers may need to invest in showing their students the benefits of EP within the circumstances of a specific educational setting like the pre-sessional.

Of the 4 cases reported in this thesis, Megan was the only one who expressed major concerns about EP. In relation to her academic puzzle (*Why do people write essays in different lengths about the same topic?*), she thought that EP did not solve her problem because the students in the other group had different topics and therefore different ways to write. Also, Megan felt that EP was not easy because raising a puzzle was difficult and she disliked that she had to do it by herself when, in fact, she preferred a learning style where the teacher would take the lead. Megan’s attitude towards the challenging nature of raising puzzles is common to other similar students who struggle with this concept and easily mix it with the notion of problem (Hanks, 2015; Hanks, 2017b). As an illustration, Chen (2016), who conducted an insightful study on college students’ pragmatic skills, formulated her EP puzzles without using the word *why* which characterises EP’s notion of puzzle.

Also, Megan thought that EP was a time-consuming undertaking in that while EP helped her gain some understanding about her puzzles, she questioned if it helped her improve her skills. Given her strong focus on improving her English during PS6, her motivation declined slightly whilst doing EP. This experience resonates with the earlier impressions of Cheer in Hanks (2017a, 2017b). However, whilst Cheer eventually found a sense of elation in the understanding that we may not be able to find a solution to everything but accept things as they are and simply do our best, Megan did not seem to reach the same conclusion. She recognised the value of EP but did not find it beneficial or motivating. Arguably, Megan did not have enough time to ponder upon her understandings from this EP experience, which may explain why, despite some positive results, she would still claim that EP actually brought down her motivation because it did not ‘resolve her problems’ with writing. However, EP had a better effect on Megan when she realised that she was able to learn more about the UK and her classmates’ viewpoints. Therefore, whilst EP represented a highly motivational experience overall, it is important to make certain considerations about its implementation in order to maximise its benefits.



I now move onto discuss the role of peers on a pre-sessional and the impact these may have on learners'' motivation.

#### **11.4.5 The motivational influence of peers**

Alita felt a strong sense of relatedness towards her classmate May because they shared a similar background in that they had both finished their undergraduate studies a few years before their arrival in the UK, and they both acquired some professional experience in China. This was in contrast with most of their other classmates who had just completed their undergraduate degrees. Every time Alita struggled, she contacted May and, since they understood each other, Alita felt better about her situation. The motivational relief Alita gained from her interactions with May echoes Dörnyei's (1997) reference to the condition of 'joint hardship' whereby sharing a difficult experience may lead to such a strong affiliation between learners. Furthermore, May's ability to listen to Alita in her capacity as a mature student with a similar background and aspirations seem to support Krznaric's (2014) notion of empathy which, in this case, intertwined with motivational wellbeing. In particular, the motivational effects Alita reported seemed to lie in hers and May's ability to 'comfort each other' whilst facing similar difficulties.

Alita claimed that by observing May pursue her dream in the UK, she felt more motivated to do the same and 'become her authentic self'. This tallies with Bandura's (1977) notion of 'motivational processes' whereby an individual observes a role model to emulate because this enactment will lead to positive consequences. May, too, was influenced by her classmates during PS6 because she observed and perceived them as hardworking people which made her feel motivated to study even when she was less inclined to do so. Within applied linguistics, this phenomenon has been framed as Near Peer Role Model (NPRM), a concept which points to those people who are of a similar age and gender as the learner, share similar cultural heritage as well as professional and/or educational background, and similar skills (Murphey, 1996, 1998; Murphey & Arao, 2001). In Muir et al, (2020) there is an exploratory suggestion that Chinese learners may have a tendency to seek role models who have a strong motivational capacity. Therefore, I argue that Alita and May here confirm the strong relationship between NPRM and motivation as already illustrated by Murphey and Murakami (1998). However, peers are not the sole pre-sessional agents able to generate motivation. As well as teaching, this study points to the pastoral role of EAP teachers and its motivational potential.

#### **11.4.6 Pastoral support from EAP tutors**

Although pre-sessional teachers' core duties entail preparing international students academically, my student-participants recognised and valued teachers' pastoral care. Alita highly appreciated my support when I noticed she was feeling homesick and I offered to speak with her after class. The issue of homesickness amongst international students is pervasive (e.g. Ye & Inose, 2003), and is not exclusively related to the lack of family and friends but also the lack of familiar cultural and linguistic environments which may lead to loneliness (e.g. McClure, 2007; Ip et al., 2009).

May, who had worked as a teacher in China, noticed my own attitude to teach ecologically, in other words, my intention to treat them as active members of a community of practice rather than 'recipient' computers (Kramsch, 2002), or *people-in-context* (Ushioda, 2009) with their own unique life stories and life capital. This understanding of my teaching approach seemed to enhance her motivation to study because she 'felt great about her teacher and learning experience'. May's stance seems to echo Mercer's (2016, p97) notion of empathy in education that 'we must learn and connect to our learners as people before we can hope to teach them anything'.

These accounts resonate with Karpenko-Secombe's (2016, p4) message that EAP teachers 'need to accept a stronger pastoral role (...) as students' first port of call'. This is not to say that university services do not offer such valuable support but, as Jenkins et al (1991) suggest, students may prefer their teachers because they are in constant contact with them. It has, after all, been reported that pre-sessional students interact with teachers for most of their communicative encounters during a pre-sessional phase (Copland & Garton, 2011). Karpenko-Secombe thus recommends that EAP teachers simply 'be available, not only for language sessions, but also for a chat'.

This debate, however, is not uncontroversial because the EAP teacher role has undergone critical scrutiny, and uncertainty remains about the identity and agency of EAP teachers. Should they fulfil a peripheral role, or should they be accorded full recognition within the academy? (Charles & Pecorari, 2015). These questions are fundamental to this discussion, and certainly many EAP tutors would argue against an increase of their heavy workload. After all, EAP tutors are already often asked to act as 'personal tutors' for a number of selected tutees, but the question is what this pastoral role actually entails. Ding and Bruce (Ibid, p119), who argue that the EAP practitioner

should acquire a more central role within the academy, view pastoral duties as an add-on of EAP tutors' core responsibilities. Given the controversies about academic status, salary and other benefits, it is understandable not to argue for more work for EAP practitioners; however, the point remains that students may benefit from stronger pastoral support from the same teachers with whom they spend critical amount of social time from their arrival in the UK.

Having examined the core factors and experiences which shaped students' motivation during PS6, I now turn to discuss the only aspect that had important effects on their motivation at the end of PS6, final assessment.

## **11.5 Motivation toward the End of a Pre-sessional**

### **11.5.1 PS6 final assessments**

Nearer the end of PS6, the students' experience and motivation revolved around the final assessment practices and related outcomes. Megan's motivation was mainly shaped by her previous experience with the IELTS which she had to sit several times. Alita shared similar concerns but felt somewhat calm thanks to the reassurances from her PS6 tutors. May was disappointed with her final assessment but, unlike her colleagues who seemed to worry 'because marks are very important in China', she was more concerned that her skills may not be good enough for the MSc. David was also concerned about exams and kept very busy preparing for the final assessment but at the same time he was reassured by his tutors who drew his attention to his progress which, in turn, made him feel confident about the future.

These perceptions of final exams on PS6 seemed critical at this stage of the programme. However, in order to maintain transparency, I should clarify that while throughout PS6 these students received training on their essay writing and presentation skills they had no support in terms of exam preparation. This was because teachers did not know what the format of the final assessments would be until the week before the exams took place. I raise this as a critical debate because given the major academic adjustments which international students undergo, they need support in understanding the expectations of their first summative assessment experience in the UK (Price et al., 2011). It would have been useful and motivating for these students to learn more about these

language tests at the end of PS6 (Tran, 2009) and possibly receive some feedback on specific exam-like tasks which could give them a sense of confidence or an opportunity to address their weaknesses (Yorke, 2001). However, once again, the support and reassurances received from teachers at these critical times made a difference and sustained their motivation.

I now turn to a discussion of the key factors which shaped these students' motivation to study and live in the UK throughout their MSc experience.

### **11.6 Chinese Postgraduate students' motivation throughout a Master's programme.**

I will now address RQ3 *What happened to these Chinese postgraduate students' motivation during their MSc in project and programme management?*

This section reveals a marked contrast between my participants' experiences on PS6 and the MSc. While it is not the intention of this study to criticise the MSc department and their practices, it will become clear from the discussion below that several factors emanating from the MSc journey shaped the students' motivation rather negatively. In particular, I will examine the following five core themes:

1. The **MSc timetable** which became an issue because the students could not find a sense of balance in their new life due to the intensive pace of the programme. Because of this they also struggled to engage deeply with the topics of the MSc.
2. **The cultures of teaching and learning on the MSc.** The students often contrasted the MSc pedagogy with PS6 characterising the former with a focus on a transmission of knowledge and the latter as a more dialogic approach. The students highlighted a wish for their MSc lecturers to show an interest in them as people as well as learners. This may seem an unrealistic demand on university lecturers; therefore, I will frame it as a nudge towards an 'inquiry as stance' approach (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009) whereby lecturers do not make assumptions about their students but, rather, aim for a conciliatory approach. This would require an inquisitive lecturer outlook that caters for a culturally diverse student group. In other words, lecturers may need to make the effort to deCentre themselves

(Holliday & Amadasi 2019) from their culture of teaching and welcome and understand their students' cultures of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

3. **Assessment practices** within this MSc context acquired an influential role in shaping the students' awareness of their performance as well as their ability to 'attribute' failure or success to their own skills which, in turn, affected their motivation. Crucially, the department procedures in dealing with assessment incidents such as plagiarism had significant implications for these students' motivation and overall wellbeing.
4. **The concept of adjustment**, half-way through the students' UK journey, emerged as a healthy motivational factor. After finding a more comfortable stance in the UK, these students developed new motivational orientations. Theoretical support from sociocultural theory and self-regulation processes become valuable frameworks to make sense of this notion of adjustment and its motivational impact.
5. **The dissertation** which constituted a large part of the MSc experience as these students began working on it as early as December.

### 11.6.1 MSc Timetable

All participants identified the MSc timetable as a factor which weakened their motivation to study and live in the UK. The MSc modules were delivered within 1 or 2 weeks with daily classes from 9am to 6.30pm, and students would complete the summative assignments along with some coursework at the end of each module within a timeframe of 3 to 4 weeks. David was disappointed because this pace left him with little time to himself, and, often, due to his tiredness, he would even skip meals and prefer to rest. This had critical repercussions on his motivation because one of his main desires was to strike a balance between his social and academic life, but this did not seem to happen. This feeling of fatigue was echoed by Megan and May who felt the pressure of this intensive mode of delivery.

This finding resonates with Wu and Hammond's (2011, p432) students who reported being able to focus on their academic work more comfortably towards the end of term 3 (winter term), after the academic 'bump' experienced at the beginning of the programme. In other words, students may need a period of 'adjustment' before they become fully aware and responsive to the academic demands of the new postgraduate programme. One could argue that these students had all

completed a pre-session course and therefore had already experienced adjustment within the new UK academic environment. However, as will become clearer below, PS6 and the MSc programme showed signs of two different academic cultures which may, in turn, require the students to cultivate two different ‘cultures of learning’ (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

May and Alita expressed further concerns in relation to this intensive MSc schedule. They struggled to engage deeply with the course content because each module was delivered quickly and left them with no time to ‘rest, think and reflect’. The lack of engagement with fast-paced Master’s modules is an issue which was reported by Busher et al.’s (2016) postgraduate students who would have preferred more time to process the new knowledge. This is an issue which tallies with Quan et al.’s (2016) students who claimed feeling overwhelmed by new information and being unable to retain everything because they would have needed more time to ‘digest’ it all. Crucially, May’s and Alita’s views on the lack of engagement with the course content at a ‘deeper’ level are valuable not only because they point to the students’ wish to enhance their learning outcomes, but this finding also challenges the pervasive assumption that Chinese learners lack criticality or work towards ‘surface learning’. This view, according to Ryan (2013, p43) is outmoded or, at least, as suggested by this study, not generalisable across the Chinese student population.

This debate on timetabling and course delivery thus confirms that the pace of teaching has important implications for students’ perception of their learning as well as their motivation for learning. However, I now move onto a more nuanced discussion of those aspects of teaching which had a direct impact on these students’ motivation and academic experience.

### **11.6.2 Teaching approaches**

From the beginning and throughout the MSc, the lecturers on the programme had some form of influence over these students’ motivation. All students noted a contrast between MSc teaching approaches and the counterparts on PS6. David felt that the MSc tutors spoke too fast and left no room for student questions. He also struggled with the large number of slides in each lecture and the lack of guidance on what to focus on throughout a lecture. David contrasted this with his PS6 lessons when tutors would begin by outlining the core aims and objectives for each session and

allow time for questions during and at the end of the lesson.

These issues about lecture materials, signposting and structure might seem obvious to an EAP teacher who has completed training such as the Certificate and Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA, DELTA). However, the literature concerning pedagogy at university has promoted similar strategies. For instance, Brown and Atkinson (1987) have indicated the need for lectures to have a ‘beginning’, a ‘middle’ and an ‘end’, and Ayres (2014) stresses the need to highlight the key points of lectures and materials thus giving students a sense of direction and ‘ending’ or learning outcome.

On the other hand, Alita’s motivation suffered because of the lack of dialogue with her MSc teachers. Whereas she was genuinely interested in learning and asking questions, like David, she refrained from doing so because she did not think her lecturers were interested in students’ questions or opinions. However, not every MSc lecturer was portrayed in this derogatory light. Later in the year, May felt motivated by a teacher who would make eye contact and interact with them during lectures. She also commented on another good MSc tutor who tried to support international students so that they could follow (e.g. ‘translating ideas into easier words’).

Therefore, these students viewed communication with their MSc lecturers as a crucial motivational factor. Alita, for example, interpreted the lack of dialogue as a lack of interest on the part of the lecturers, who seemed solely interested to impart knowledge. May felt that these lecturers treated all students in much the same way which contrasted with her experience on PS6 where tutors tried to understand them individually and used a variety of strategies to cater for all students. These findings thus challenge the argument that East Asian students find ‘low power distance’ inappropriate (Durkin, 2008, p17); in fact, these students would have hoped for their teachers to put more effort into understanding their learning styles thereby fostering a dialogic approach. This may call on UK lecturers to follow Holliday and Amdasi’s (2019) advice to deCentre their assumptions about Asian students and invest in a pedagogy which creates ‘threads’ between teachers’ culture of teaching and their students’ ‘cultures of learning’.

This study also confirms Kettle’s (2017) argument that the use of dialogic teaching, with a variety

of strategies to support a culturally and linguistically diverse group, is beneficial in assisting all learning personalities within a university classroom (e.g. intimidated international students who need scaffolding to express their views). From an HE perspective, Ayres (2014, p96) recommends a variety of lecture materials which are ‘inclusive and accessible’ for a diverse university student community. This connects to David’s issue with lengthy PPT slides and May’s appreciation for student-friendly handouts. This attention to the needs of a diverse learning community is also highlighted by value 1 (V1) of the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning (UKPSF) (2011) which calls for ‘respect [of] individual learners and diverse learning communities.’

### **11.6.3 Caring teaching**

The lack of a dialogic approach resulted in the lack of opportunities for these students to express their voices or opinions during MSc classes. However, given my previous experience as PS6 tutor, I found this puzzling because during PS6 they would interact with me frequently. May explained that she would talk to me because I used to ‘take the initiative’ to speak to her. Both May and Alita went as far as saying that I ‘knew’ them and, as suggested by David, I knew how to speak to them. My approach thus contributed to a sense of comfort which they often described by framing me, their PS6 teacher, as a friend. This, in turn, takes us to the controversial debate of what constitutes approachability in higher education. Denzine and Pulso (2000) define approachability referring to university teachers who use students’ names, smile, speak with students after class, exhibit a warm and caring behaviour.

The notions of caring and connectedness between teachers and students have been largely researched at primary and secondary education levels, but less within higher education contexts (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). The small debate about this adult-adult relationship at university has brought up the argument that caring for students is important (Fitzmaurice, 2008), and that a safe environment should be created for students and teachers to interact (Ayres, 2014); but others have stressed that students should not be coddled (Lahteenoja & Pirttila-Backman, 2005). Therefore, while the benefits of becoming involved in students’ learning are evident e.g. increase of motivation (Komarraju, Musulkin & Bhattacharya, 2010), there is also a need for this student-teacher relationship at university to be ‘balanced’. For instance, Holmes et al., (1999) have



highlighted that a friendship dimension is inappropriate whereas others (e.g. Sibii, 2010, p532) have argued for the university teacher to be ‘friendly but not a friend’.

Crucially, my student-participants’ struggle to express themselves in the MSc classroom becomes even more complex if we take the view that language is essential not only for engagement with the subject area(s) but also as a form of self-representation (Norton Peirce, 1995; Cazden, 2001; Norton, 2013). To varying degrees, they used to be talkative and inquisitive on PS6, but during the MSc, they had difficulties voicing their opinions or questions. In some cases, as reported by May and David, who were concerned about making language errors, this may suggest a form of language anxiety caused by the need to perform in a language they were still learning to master (Horwitz, 2001). Importantly, within a new discursive community, where the fear of losing face may be prominent, learners could see their intelligence and personality misconstrued or misinterpreted due to a limited linguistic repertoire (Kettle, 2017, p112). This links with Turner’s (2019) deficient ideology which conflates linguistic skills, intellectual talents and abilities. However, by deCentring such assumptions of language and culture, we may be able to support students in finding confidence, especially when facing such academic challenges.

#### **11.6.4 What teaching approach is suitable?**

The students’ lack of engagement with a PowerPoint presentation and the lack of dialogue whereby they were treated as passive recipients of knowledge challenges the commonly held view that Chinese learners prefer a ‘transmission’ mode (Biggs, 1996). It has been reported that Chinese university lecturers regard themselves as knowledge providers (Xie, 2010) and the core focus is on lecturing about theory (Luo, 2010). However, David’s attitude, for example, may point to the reforms happening across China’s education system which have introduced new pedagogical objectives such as developing students’ interactive and collaborative skills (Paine & Fang, 2007, p282). While the strategy of offering students the opportunity to lead interactions and participate in classroom discussions is often desired practice (Kettle & Luke, 2013), this may turn out to be problematic because it leads to unequal participation, like in May’s case who would let more confident students speak. This has also been reported by other international students at English-medium universities who avoid speaking in the presence of dominating students (Leki, 2001).

My participants' position seems to be that if the teachers go beyond 'imparting' subject knowledge and invest some effort into getting to know them, this could lead to a supportive and conciliatory dialogue which can assist with their learning challenges. In this study, my participants' perceptions appear to resonate with Jin and Cortazzi (2006, p6) who argue that lecturers may have little to no knowledge about international students' previous educational experiences and expectations, and, as reported by Alita, they may show no interest in finding out (Ryan, 2002).

However, if Chinese students (or any other international students) are to accept western approaches to enrich their knowledge base and skills, why cannot western lecturers embrace the cultural and educational contributions from these students thus leading to a 'conciliatory dialogue'? (Durkin, 2008). Ayres (2014, p97) goes as far as saying that lecturers need to develop a rapport with their students which would facilitate their understandings of students' needs just by looking at students' behaviours and reactions during the lecture; this was a practice which my students noticed and highly appreciated on PS6. An implication from this is that UK lecturers may need to enhance their understandings of the issues Chinese (and other) international students experience and 'deCentre' their assumptions and practices (Holliday & Amadasi, 2019) by establishing a dialogue with these students, finding a 'middle way', and aiming for 'cultural synergy' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, p201). After all, 'internationalisation of education does not simply mean the integration of different national cultures or the suppression of one national culture by another culture (Gu, 2001, p105).

Among the specific aspects of teaching which had a significant impact on the students' motivation are the use of groupwork and the relationship between theory and practice. I will now look at these in turn.

#### **11.6.5 Group work**

Whilst most of the teaching seemed to be delivered through large-group lectures, this MSc also incorporated seminars with much smaller groups, and within these contexts, students were often required to do groupwork. The use of this method had a variety of motivational effects. Megan's motivation increased as she was particularly happy with groupwork activities which reflected the

professional world of programme management outside the classroom. David viewed groupwork as an opportunity to enhance his communication skills and interactions with other students. However, Alita and May, like Tian and Lowe's (2009) students, saw this formative experience as a source of discomfort and struggle. May found it difficult to talk and voice her ideas even when she may have had plenty but was not confident to express them. Alita's problem lay in the lack of cohesion within her class group. She had a thirst for 'international posture' (Yashima, 2009, 2013), i.e. the disposition to forge intercultural friendships and partnerships with a view to working together, but this did not seem feasible at the start of the MSc. Nonetheless, after organising some parties, Alita and her group began working together so well to the extent that if she had a question, she would ask an international classmate who, in her view, would know how to speak to another international student. This finding resonates with Copland and Garton's (2011) argument, echoing Morita (2009), that international students can indeed develop social language skills with other international students and reap various benefits from doing so.

Thus, the above positive and negative experiences with groupwork appear to support the argument that cooperative learning has the potential to generate powerful 'motivational systems' (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011:28) whereby positive emotions can be transferred from one group member to another. In this light, the development of positive group dynamics may lead to enthusiasm and positive emotions to become 'contagious' (Barsade, 2002), and the notion of 'goal contagion' has also been proposed in describing automatic triggering of goal pursuit in social contexts where goals are inferred from the behaviour of others (Aarts & Custers, 2012). The impact of group work and social cohesion on Alita's motivational wellbeing may be ascribed to the Confucian notion of team harmony (Hofstede & Bond, 1984) and the wish for students from collectivist societies to reach a conciliatory and caring relationship (Tannen, 1998).

However, this could also be attributed to the new western approaches which have been adopted in China through various reforms (Ryan, 2011) leading to a need, in the west, to expect and, arguably, facilitate a blending of practices from both cultural traditions (Durkin, 2008). Furthermore, as expressed more explicitly by David and Megan, groupwork has the potential to generate students' motivation when they see the benefit of developing an array of skills such as effective team working and project management. This is in line with Ayres (2014, p98) who advises that when

‘group work is conducted well, students develop a range of valuable transferable/employability skills’, which in turn generates motivation because students have the opportunity to experience ‘active learning’, by taking responsibility for their learning outcomes (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Nonetheless, as demonstrated by Alita and May, for group work to be successful, there should be ground rules in place that ensure guidance and clarify what successful conduct looks like, especially when students may not know each other well (Ayres, 2014). This also supports Dörnyei and Muir’s (2019) concept of group cohesiveness and the principle of tolerance in the classroom which may generate motivational group dynamics.

### **11.6.6 The bridge between theory and practice**

All students reported a sense of elation each time they noticed that their learning aligned with the demands and expectations of the professional world outside the university. David and Alita appreciated the use of ‘simulation’ (role play activities) because these reflected the reality of a project manager and thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to play roles with their classmates. This appreciation for the practical world of project management was echoed by Megan through her disappointment with those tutors who exclusively seemed to focus on theory and PowerPoint style lectures which lacked references to the professional world. These findings resonate with the advice that the curriculum should be ‘constructively aligned’ (Biggs & Tang, 2011) in that the professional skills need to be highlighted throughout the teaching, learning and assessment processes on the course.

These students’ desire for a focus on professional practice challenges the belief that western postgraduate programmes usually involve learning activities which stimulate the understanding of the real business world through ‘authentic’ tasks as opposed to a focus on lecturing about theory (Currie & Tempest, 2008). This MSc certainly incorporated such activities which stimulated a vision and understanding of the ‘real world’; May, for example, reported that one teacher motivated her to learn because this teacher offered examples from her own professional career referring to real cases. Nonetheless, overall, these students would have preferred a stronger emphasis on real professional cases.

Having discussed the motivational effects that timetabling and teaching methods had on these students, I now move onto a discussion of assessment practices on the MSc highlighting those dimensions which emerged as critical motivational factors.

### **11.6.7 The purpose of assessment**

Assessment played a crucial role in shaping these students' motivation since, to some extent, they all expressed the idea of liking to work hard for good marks. However, it is difficult to establish whether this motivational orientation was driven by learning itself or towards high marks with an eye to obtaining a good MSc classification. Nonetheless, it could be argued that these two motivational orientations, intrinsic and extrinsic, are often interconnected (Dörnyei & Ushioda; 2011). May highlighted her desire to develop new skills whilst being acknowledged for her hard work, David and Megan stressed the importance of good marks alongside their wish to return home with a good degree. Alita's continuous positive feedback on her assignments led to her conclusion that 'studying is fair' in that if she continued to put effort into her studies then her marks could be even higher. This positive impetus from her results bolstered her initial motivation for quitting her job in China where she did not feel her performance was recognised.

The relationship between assessment and these students' motivation points to the 'attribution theory' of motivation (Weiner, 2010) concerning the perceptions people have of failure or success, and how these may connect to their motivation to engage with an activity further or not. For example, though to varying degrees, all these students recognised the notion of 'controllability' which refers to their ability to notice and control the cause of failure or success, which in their case coincided with the acknowledgment of their hard work. For example, David and Alita repeatedly framed positive feedback and grades as key motivational factors. This points to the notion of motivational 'stability', whereby an individual perceives the causes of success as stable or changeable over time. This is also relevant to May whose motivation, later in the year, plummeted because she no longer saw the point of working hard when she could not obtain the high marks desired.

Another critical assessment sub-theme, which emerged as a motivational factor, concerned summative assessments. May noted that they were asked to produce the same summative work for

all modules. In other words, even if modules and PMAs were on different topics the style of assessment was always the same, and she believed that instead of acquiring new knowledge and professional skills she was ‘learning PMA skills’. May’s experience of repetitive summative assessments seems to go against the notion of assessment for long-term learning whereby students are able to evaluate their learning and benefit from a variety of dialogic evaluative strategies (Boud and Falchichov 2006). Jessop et al, (2013) argue that university semester-long modules are unlikely to offer the capacity for reflection and deep engaged learning. This seemed to be the case for these students whose MSc modules were one-week long with a narrow gap between end of module and summative assignments deadlines. There clearly seemed to be an issue for May with the pace and style of essay-assessment which impaired her ability to ‘engender learning for meaning’ rather than for marks (Ibid, 2013). This finding thus challenges assessment practices at Master’s level and raises the questions are we assessing because we need to assign classifications to students’ work or are we promoting opportunities for student self-development?

### **11.6.8 Feedback procedures**

Both Megan and David reported critical events which had a negative impact on their motivation. In December, Megan received a fail for an assignment, and in order to seek clarity, she emailed the teacher who taught the session about her chosen topic. This tutor supported Megan claiming that her English was intelligible and that her chosen literature was indeed relevant to her essay (two criticisms in her feedback). The course office, however, would not question the module leader’s judgment. This experience affected Megan’s academic wellbeing considerably and noticing that another tutor supported her case, but the department did not, resulted in a sharp decline of her motivation to study.

Megan employed a ‘problem-focussed coping’ strategy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984 in Berry, 1997, p19); she invested herself in this search for clarity over this matter. Crucially, her tenacity in seeking advice from the expert tutor, while engaging with the course office, challenges the pervasive belief that Chinese students put ‘face-loss’ at the centre of their behaviour. This experience is similar to Tian and Lowe’s (2013, p588) Chinese student, except Megan did not receive the clarification and support requested and therefore her motivation suffered accordingly. Tian and Lowe argue that international students experience ‘learning stress’ whilst adapting to the new academic culture and this may be mitigated by the tutors engaging in a dialogue with the students. This dialogue may enrich the learners’ understanding of the new academic rules and help

them 'build trust of and develop a sense of inclusion in the new academic culture' (593).

The discrepancy between academics and their judgment of Megan's assignment is at the heart of this incident, and this issue is not new in higher education literature. For instance, Yorke (2011) goes beyond the notion of reliability and highlights that assessment by 'criteria' requires an element of interpretation on behalf of the marker, which means that marking is a matter of 'judgment'. However, the differences between markers are not to be viewed as 'errors' but rather, as inevitable effects of the 'multiplicity of perspectives that assessors bring with them' (Shay, 2005, p664). Following from this, Ashworth et al. (2010) argue that each marker builds their own Standards Frameworks which are complex and dynamic understandings gained from previous experiences.

Thus, Hartley et al., (2006) have argued that lecturers may (often unconsciously) focus on different aspects of student work thereby leading to different judgments. In order to address this issue, systems should be in place to ensure a fair marking procedure. For example, pre-moderation marking could be arranged, whereby tutors mark a small sample of students' work before marking the large batch (Price, 2005). This way markers can unpack their own standards frameworks and possible academic judgments whilst comparing their marking against other colleagues'. Returning to Megan's incident, one limitation of my discussion is the lack of access to these tutors and their feedback or judgments about it. However, what emerges from here is that Megan's inability to reach clarity, arguably due to a lack of dialogue between her and the course office and module leader (main marker), generated a sharp decline in her motivation to study.

I now discuss a major assessment incident which weakened David's motivation. The department detected plagiarism in one of David's assignments (see 9.6.1). David was seriously concerned he may fail his MSc which affected him even more deeply when he thought of the financial investment incurred by his parents. The levels of stress reported by Chinese students due to the large financial support from their parents is not new (Wu & Hammond; 2011, p340). Parents, however, are not to be seen just as financial providers, they are crucial 'significant others' and play a major role in shaping the 'preventative' dimension of these international students' motivation (Lamb, 2012, p102). David's unfortunate case chimes with what Ryan (2013, p44) defines

‘apparent plagiarism’ which is Chinese learners’ inability to paraphrase appropriately at such an early stage of their studies when their skills may require further work and practice. However, during PS6 David showed a sound understanding of basic referencing and paraphrasing skills, which was also reflected in his previous PMAs that had received good marks. Therefore, this case may lend support to Duff’s (2010) argument that enacting new discursive practices may take time, practice and feedback. Nonetheless, the department’s judgment on David’s alleged offence without a thorough examination of the possible subtleties of the incident threatened David’s motivational wellbeing. This issue was also exacerbated by the lack of support and communication to elucidate the complexity of the department’s procedures and potential outcomes. As a result, David’s motivation to study and be in the UK reached a very low level.

Another aspect of students’ motivational journey on the MSc was their perception of ‘adjustment’ to life in university and the UK more broadly.

### **11.7 The motivational impact of adjustment**

After approximately 7 months of full-time education in the UK, these students began to identify a stronger sense of adjustment (Searle & Warde, 1990) which is defined as a feeling of wellbeing and satisfaction with life in the host society where students ‘fit in’ more comfortably. Useful here is the concept of ‘International Student Culture’ (Xue, 2005 in Wu & Hammond, 2011) which aligns with Holliday’s ‘small culture’, a newly-formed space where these students bring their own experiences, practices, or ‘life capital’ (Consoli, 2020a) to the new environment and share these whilst embracing, to various degrees, the host cultural practices. They also showed a better understanding of themselves with new motivational orientations. In my view, the notion of culture shock (Pedersen, 1995) does not seem appropriate for this study, and like Wu and Hammond, I would refer to ‘culture bumps’ (Chen, 2007). However, these students’ motivation to learn and live in the UK somehow shifted into a stronger desire to graduate from the MSc. This orientation which was, to some degree, already palpable in previous months was accompanied by other influences which contribute both positively and negatively.

#### **11.7.1 Adjustment: positive motivation**

Alita's motivation was strong because by April she had a good understanding of her UK environment and developed a good relationship with her classmates resulting in frequent



interactions. Her PMAs' marks continued to be good, and when she noticed she only had 2 PMAs left, she realised the substantial progress she had made. These considerations about her skills and achievements enhanced her motivation to graduate with merit or distinction. Although Lysgaard's (1955) theory of the U-curve Hypothesis is not accepted nowadays, as it is deemed too static to acknowledge the complexity of study-abroad experiences (Brown & Holloway, 2008), it is worth noting that, at this point in time, Alita seemed to show signs of Lysgaard's 'mastery stage' whereby the student notices and benefits from a fuller integration within the host community. In her case, the good academic results and enhanced relationship with her classmates seemed to portray her as a fulfilled member of their 'small culture' in the UK.

Similarly, David recognised that he had fully settled, having reached a better balance in his life between study and social engagement (one of his core initial motives). Despite the plagiarism incident which had a major influence over his wellbeing with ensuing anxiety, later in May, his motivation improved. This was because he no longer needed to attend classes and complete summative assignments and could solely focus on the dissertation. His motivation, here, was strictly connected to his desire of graduating and returning home to apply his new knowledge to his new career. This desire for Chinese students to return home was illustrated by Fong (2011) whose participants wished to go back and help develop the country with their newly acquired skills, thereby pointing to these Chinese students' wish, like David's, to accumulate and employ their newly-acquired cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1992). This finding thus challenges Bamber's (2014) claim that Chinese students are mainly interested in a qualification and less motivated by a desire to aid their homeland.

### **11.7.2 Adjustment: negative motivations**

Around April time, May noticed that up to that point she had spent considerable time working on her assignments without seeing her desired results. Initially, she thought that something was wrong with her. However, in order to feel better about herself, she planned a visit to her boyfriend in the US. Her frustration over the dissonance between the desire to perform well, her hard work and actual results affected her motivation to study. In a similar vein, after submitting her last PMA, Megan decided to take some time to herself because she felt tired and her motivation to study declined. This finding somewhat seems to resonate with Bamber's (2014) Chinese female students who chose the UK because they would have better travel opportunities, thereby pointing to their

need to strike a balance between studies and time off. Travelling was also crucial because these Chinese people may not be able to travel as freely once back in China.

Having discussed the key motivational dimensions of adjustment in this study, I now turn to a theoretical discussion of the concept.

### **11.7.3 Situative perspectives on adjustment**

In order to understand the above experiences of motivation through the phenomenon of adjustment, I will refer to ‘situative perspectives’ of motivation which suggest that motivation and context(s) are intimately connected and interdependent as opposed to theoretical stances which position ‘context as variable’ (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011, p30). Sociocultural theory posits that the individual constructs their knowledge through social interactions with other more competent social agents and may draw on psychological, social, symbolic tools (Vygotsky, 1978, p162). However, this theory of learning has recently been adapted by motivation researchers to understand the complexity of motivation as a culturally situated and socially mediated phenomenon (Ushioda, 2007).

Therefore, like knowledge, motivation is not situated within the individual but is created through social and cultural activities which involve others. This elucidates Alita’s and David’s increase of motivation through their socialisation of learning with their classmates. Through interactions with other members of the relatively new academic community they developed a stronger sense of motivation driven by their desire to work and communicate with others. By the same token, Alita’s and David’s motivations were further enhanced by the progress made after completing most of the compulsory modules on the MSc. For Alita, this motivation was mediated through the positive feedback on her work and for David through his projected desire to return to China bringing his new cultural and economic capital to his country.

Therefore, motivation here interacts with several other factors and agents residing within the immediate physical context as well as alternative contexts of the learners’ past and future imagined experiences. For example, Alita’s strong enthusiasm about her good grades connects with her previous work experience in China where she was not valued in the same way. This also relates to

my proposed notion of life capital (Consoli, 2020a) whereby the individual draws on their life experiences to make sense of their current affairs. Similarly, David's motivation, at this stage of the MSc, was still tarnished by his traumatic experience of plagiarism back in December which stopped his motivation from reaching higher levels. This incident was part of David's life capital and his understanding and lived experience of that episode exerted an influence over him. Despite his good progress, he was still concerned about making a mistake with similar or worse consequences.

May's and Megan's motivations were largely mediated through the cultural context of assessment and workload on the MSc. May's disappointment with her marks was driven by her understanding of quality of academic work and the discordant judgment of her marker. The interaction between these elements of her assessment experience affected her motivation to study. Similarly, Megan was exhausted by the continuous engagement with formative and summative assessment and decided to take a step back from her studies. Both May and Megan utilised their self-regulatory agency (Bandura, 2001) to align with their self-reflections and understandings of their experiences on the MSc up to this specific point in time (April/May).

Therefore, there is a dynamic relationship between these students and the contexts wherein they are situated, and this relationship shaped their motivational trajectories. However, what becomes clear from this study is that one single theory may not be sufficient to account for the ecological dimensions of this dynamic and complex relationship. In this case, I have referred to 'sociocultural theory' to elucidate the value of framing motivation as a phenomenon which is culturally and socially mediated, but have also drawn on 'self-regulated action' to highlight the agency, or 'action control strategies' (Kuhl, 1987, 2005) which learners can employ to shape their motivational behaviour in relation to their intended learning. Finally, I have underscored, once again, the value of my proposed concept of 'life capital', which foregrounds the individual's ability to not only respond and adapt to contextual factors but to do so in relation to their lived experiences and resources embedded within their life story (past, present and imagined future).

I now discuss another theme which constituted a core part of the MSc journey and which had major

effects on these students' motivation, the dissertation experience.

## **11.8 The MSc dissertation**

### **11.8.1 Finding the dissertation supervisor**

This MSc department required the students to find a dissertation supervisor by mid-December. They would need to send their CV and proposal to prospective supervisors hoping to be invited to an initial meeting when the supervisor would establish if they were happy to supervise them. However, if the students failed to find a supervisor by mid-December, their future dissertation mark would be penalised by 5%. This departmental policy was dissimilar to the usual practice of a university department taking responsibility to allocate a supervisor after the students have completed all or most coursework for the Master's (Harwood & Petric, 2017). In addition to starting the dissertation process much earlier, these students were asked to take a strongly agentic role in defining their research aims and supervision. While it may be argued that this agency may seemingly offer students an opportunity to plan their learning and develop a form of intrinsic motivation in the dissertation project and processes (Hajar, 2019), in this case, the prospect of a penalty for not finding a suitable supervisor certainly diminished this motivational dimension.

All students reported some difficulty in finding a supervisor but none of them incurred the penalty; importantly no student except Megan highlighted this search for a supervisor as a positive motivational influence. Megan acknowledged that her ability to find the supervisor more easily than her classmates shaped her motivation positively because she had embraced this experience as a competition. It would be difficult to establish whether the nature of Megan's motivation was intrinsic or extrinsic – she admitted to feeling 'happy' for being able to find a supervisor easily, but one cannot ignore the external force of the 5% penalty. After all, as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) suggest, these two motivational orientations are not necessarily to be understood from a binary perspective but could be framed as intertwined. What is clear is that competition increased Megan's motivational force thus confirming the early findings that competition may indeed generate motivation in adults (Reeve & Deci, 1996).

### **11.8.2 The dissertation topic**

The students reported a variety of challenges concerning the experience of choosing and working

within their dissertation topic areas. After a while, Megan began thinking that her topic was not good because the university library did not have many resources in place, which disrupted her work. She had to wait between 2 and 3 weeks each time that she requested resources from other institutions. Similarly, Alita's struggle with her dissertation topic lowered her previously high motivation. Her topic was about *change management*, but this seemed to be such a new topic that she could not find relevant literature. Her supervisor advised to focus on *change management of project* rather than *organisation*, but she did not have the professional project experience and therefore did not wish to work on this suggested area. Finally, she resorted to changing her topic to motivation and how to keep project members motivated when they face change.

It is worth noting here that Alita's choice for this topic was driven by her interest in self-regulating her motivation throughout her time in the UK, but she was also influenced by our interactions throughout my PhD interviews. She found the topic of my study fascinating because it helped her understand her own motivation and how this changed depending on her circumstances. This is a clear example of the synergy illustrated by Lamb (2016) in his publication '*when motivation research motivates*', an article which elucidates the impact a motivation researcher may have on their participants, especially when these are learners engaged in the very subject investigated by the researcher.

Anderson et al, (2008, p39) suggest that a successful dissertation experience begins by choosing a topic that nurtures the student's 'personal intrinsic interest', which is probably what Alita did by opting for motivation as she noticed a strong interest in this concept throughout her time in the UK. However, the issues here illustrated point to the role of the supervisor and their ability to avert the setbacks concerning the appropriacy of the dissertation topic. The supervisor-masters student relationship seems 'uncertain territory' and questions remain about the levels of supervision and intervention required or even possible from the supervisor. In fact, the lack of understandings of these questions lead to a 'terrain of uncertainty (...) which is fertile ground for student-supervisor misunderstandings' (Grant, 2005, p338). Could it be that these students needed more guidance over the choice of the best topic or is autonomy what the supervisors aimed for? Some evidence suggests that international students need a more 'authoritarian' approach to supervision (Bryce, 2003), whilst others recommend a more dialogic approach with students taking a stronger agentive

role (e.g. Hajar, 2009). There is evidence that too much of either may create problems (Demb & Funk, 1999).

This study, however, lacks the supervisors' perspective unlike other studies (e.g. Bryce, 2003; Fan, 2013), and therefore, it is unrealistic to understand this issue fully. On a more positive motivational note, David was happy to work on his topic, the motivation of Chinese project managers to use 'western' methods; in this case, it is fair to say that his involvement with my research project had nothing to do with his choice since he had already thought about this topic prior to his arrival in the UK. In fact, with this dissertation experience, he wished to invest himself in this issue and do something about it – this is the kind of dissertation topic Anderson et al, (2008, p39) frame as 'practice intrinsic interest', and Islam et al. (2013, p5) have called this the 'national interest' phenomenon whereby international postgraduate students invest in their overseas studies and research project with the aim of furthering the socio-economic development of their own countries.

### **11.8.3 The supervisor-supervisee relationship**

The role and relationship my participants developed with their respective supervisors had a direct impact on their work and motivation. May reported feeling a low level of motivation because she did not interact with her supervisor as much as she would have liked. She was confused about how to write the dissertation despite her attendance of workshops on how to structure the dissertation. This issue mirrors Pilcher et al.'s (2006) finding that Chinese students may encounter issues structuring the dissertation given the 'open-ended nature' of this genre. May's supervisor offered some support, but this was not enough because if she did not understand, she would refrain from seeking clarification, a decision based on the fact that they interacted little, generally via email once a month. Crucially, May only met her supervisor twice - once at the first introductory meeting and then at her viva. She also expressed some concerns over the kind of guidance she received because she felt her supervisor's feedback was generic and not specific to her writing or individual parts of the drafts. This experience supports the literature stating that whilst international students might desire more contact hours with the supervisor, many struggle to approach their supervisor (Harris, 1995; Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). This was not everybody's experience, however. For instance, Alita and David reported having multiple interactions with their supervisors.

I cannot comment on the quality of supervision, but what emerges is that May could have benefitted more from her supervisor if she had the confidence to communicate and ask questions, but such inability had become a limitation for May earlier on the MSc. This finding resonates with Janet's experience in Wu & Hammond (2011, p434), a Chinese student who was concerned that asking for help from her tutors may be inappropriate. This, in turn, echoes Okorochoa (2007, p5), who maintains that international students may be unaware of how to seek support and clarification from their supervisors which could result in their despair or, as in May's case, decline of motivation. According to Pilcher (2011), many international students tend to prefer a more directive approach to supervision whereby they need to be told exactly what to do, and therefore work less independently. This argument supports Elsey (1990) whose Asian postgraduate participants wished for a supervisor who gave them guidance throughout the research process thereby setting up each step for the students. This may seem to support Megan's and May's cases, as they would have both wished for a more directive style of supervision and more detailed guidance. Nonetheless, the notion of supervisor guidance remains complex and unclear, especially without the supervisors' perspectives in this study. Hajar (2019) recommends that supervisors should ensure to establish, from the first tutorial, a set of expectations for both the student and the supervisor in order to manage the relationship and workload with more clarity. After all, while some students may contest the supervisor's feedback and view this as lacking detailed specificity, the number of supervisees and therefore the sheer size of drafts may affect the supervisor's effectiveness and speed of written feedback (Goldstein, 2005).

The supervisor-supervisee remains a challenging topic because in the UK sector, supervisors have busy schedules and, whilst following the assumption that students take the initiative, they may view international students as passive and lacking interest when in reality this may not be the case (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997). This links with the issue that Master's dissertation supervisors appear to reveal an 'immense variability' of approaches to supervision which depend on the supervisor, their understanding of the local institutional culture and their students' behaviour (Pilcher, 2006; Pilcher, 2011). In my view, this debate highlights, once again, the need for a dialogic approach between UK lecturers (supervisors) and their students (supervisees). If the supervisors interrogate their culture of supervision, deCentring their beliefs and assumptions, and instead aim for an understanding of their students' experiences and expectations, they could create 'threads' rather

than encounter ‘blocks’ in this supervisory relationship (Holliday & Amadasi, 2019).

#### **11.8.4 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed the findings in response to the 3 RQs which targeted the dynamic trajectories of my students’ motivations from prior to their arrival in the UK, throughout PS6 and the MSc. Thus, in the first part, I addressed RQ 1 illustrating the core motivations which drove these Chinese students to the UK. This debate underscored their desire to enhance their professional profile in light of the fierce competition in China which connected with their *ideal selves*, improved future selves as a result of the UK experience. The students also revealed an inclination toward the pre-session course which they viewed as a fundamental transition to the postgraduate realities in Britain. Furthermore, this discussion showed some of the dimensions of the impact which parents may have on Chinese students’ motivation to study in the UK alongside the appeal for high-quality education in English at a prestigious university.

The second section of this chapter addressed the findings related to RQ2 which focussed on the core factors and experiences that shaped the students’ motivations during the pre-session course. In particular, I highlighted the notion of ‘new responsibilities’ which marked a contrast with their realities back in China where parents usually take care of anything that goes beyond their children’s studies or work commitments. I also noted the students’ acknowledgement of the discrepancies between the skills developed through the IELTS test and the actual skills needed to succeed at university. This section revealed students’ appreciation for an ‘active’ teaching style whereby students are encouraged to take the initiative without depending on the teacher’s direction or control. Furthermore, Exploratory Practice emerged as a core aspect of this pre-session which mostly supported and enhanced students’ motivations. I also raised some questions about assessment and feedback practices on pre-sessionals which may have a range of motivational effects.

In the final part of this chapter, I examined the findings related to RQ3 which targets students’ motivational trajectory throughout the MSc programme. This discussion revolved around issues of timetabling and pace of teaching as well as students’ disappointment with teaching approaches and topics which were not relevant to the professional world of project and programme management. Finally, I looked at the complexities of the supervisor-supervisee relationship raising



questions about how this relationship may support or impair the dissertation processes and, ultimately, students' motivation.

In the next chapter, I illustrate the implications which derive from the above discussion of the findings and will also outline the core contributions of the study alongside perspectives for future research.

## Chapter 12: Conclusion

### 12.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I first illustrate the theoretical contributions this study makes to the field of motivation in applied linguistics and continue with a discussion of the contributions to the literature on Chinese students. This is followed by the implications for EAP practice and Master's programmes. Third, I discuss the methodological contributions stemming from the research design which combined Exploratory Practice (phase-1) with interviewing and narrative analysis (phase-2). Fourth, I reflect on the relationship I developed with my participants which then leads to an evaluation of the trustworthiness of the study and its key limitations. I will conclude with thoughts on dissemination, suggestions for future research, and a final personal epilogue.

### 12.2 Theoretical contributions: an ecological view of motivation

In response to Darwin and Norton's (2015) critique that motivation frameworks normally depict the individual as 'having a unitary and coherent identity with specific character traits', and that we should view the learner as a 'social being with a complex identity that changes across time and spaces' (13), I drew the attention to *ecological perspectives* of motivation. In particular, I referred to Ushioda's (2009) *person-in-context relational view* of motivation which stressed the need of seeing learners as people living, co-habiting and traversing a multitude of contexts. Influenced by Kramersch (2002), Ushioda calls for researchers to view learners (or teachers) as real persons rather than 'theoretical abstractions' or bundle of variables. This framework promotes a focus on "the agency of the individual person as a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, a person with goals, motives and intentions" (2009, p220). With this study, I implemented Ushioda's relational perspective and generated data which uncovered the bigger picture of my student-participants' motivations. I tapped into those internal and external influences which shaped their life experiences, and ultimately their motivation, too. Significantly, through the generation and analysis of my data, I noticed the emergence of a new socio-educational concept which may help us understand motivation ecologically, *life capital*.

By drawing on Bourdieu's sociological work, I revisited the notion of habitus as a 'socialised subjectivity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p126) and created a parallel with the notion of identity, claiming that this is shaped and reshaped by one's own *life story*. Each person's story is unique and rich, but such richness cannot be solely understood through Bourdieu's notions of economic,

social and cultural capital. Rather, we should look at the ‘idiosyncratic histories, emotions, dispositions, needs, and desires, to name but a few factors which constitute the complex essence of a human being’ (Consoli, 2020a, p71). Therefore, moving beyond Bourdieu’s perspective on social classes and looking at human beings more holistically, I argue that people have more than just economic, social, cultural or symbolic capital, but rather everyone carries what I call *life capital*, a wealth which can be understood through the richness of one’s life experiences. ‘Life capital thus entails memories, desires, emotions, attitudes, opinions and these can be relatively positive or negative and explicit or concealed depending on how the individual manages, shares and employs their life capital’ (2020a, p72).

This new concept may offer a novel ecological perspective to analyse ‘snapshots’ of findings which actually relate to a bigger picture of the human beings under investigation. Finally, this concept heeds Ushioda’s (2020) call, reminding the research and teaching communities that motivation is a human trait and, as such, should be treated with the same caution and ethics we would human beings. This, in turn, means having an ethical disposition towards analysing/understanding motivation which is flexible and adaptable to the particular circumstances of the research setting and individual participants. Therefore, this ethical disposition does not dissect motivation into discrete parts (or variables) for the sake of scientific clarity but aims for complexity, ecologically embracing as much as possible within the researcher’s resources and abilities.

### **12.3 From *L2 Ideal Selves* to *Academic and Professional Ideal Selves***

This study lends support to Dörnyei’s (2005) *L2 motivation self system* as my students showed that they had their own ‘desired end-state’ which shaped their behaviour ‘by building a bridge of self-representations between one’s current self and the hoped-for self.’ (p117). This notion connects to Dörnyei and Kubanyiova’s (2014) *vision system* driven by the concept of ‘vision’, a highly personalised goal guided by a vivid mental image of the experience of successfully attaining the desired goal. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova maintain that learners’ vision as ideal L2 users is one of the most reliable predictors of long-term motivation. Although my students showed several visions of themselves as successful in the UK or as enriched professionals with competitive skills to bring back to China, I argued that the notion of *L2 ideal Self* or *L2 vision* are not adequate for debates concerning Chinese students completing EAP and academic programmes. This is because these

students did not come to the UK to study English intending to become part of the English (or British) community, as promoted by the classical Gardnerian model of motivation. Although these motives emerged, to some extent, in some of my participants (e.g. Alita), their major motivational orientations related to their goals of becoming better people with strong professional profiles.

Therefore, I propose the notion of *academic* and *professional ideal selves*, which account for these Chinese students' motivations to enhance themselves linguistically, culturally, intellectually and professionally thereby achieving an enriched configuration of the ideal Selves which allows them to operate successfully within (inter)national context(s). Importantly, the configuration of these ideal selves is contingent upon the students' cultural heritage and personalities. Whilst I do not promote an essentialist view of culture, we cannot ignore the cultural influences which specifically shape mainland Chinese students' experiences in the West. After all, these experiences, as discussed throughout this thesis, may be different for international students from other cultural backgrounds. For instance, the 'issue' of silence or reticence in Chinese students, discussed in 7.3.2, is not one reported by Hajar's (2019) study of Arab students in a UK university.

Having presented the theoretical contributions to the field of motivation, I now illustrate my contributions to the research area concerning international students in the English-speaking western academy.

#### **12.4 Contributions to the literature on Chinese students in the UK**

As discussed in Chapter 2, some research about international students has already offered insights into the key motivations driving the choice to study in the UK. However, most studies (e.g. Wu & Hammond, 2011; Lamie & Issitt, 2005) have generally conflated various populations of international students into one category (Bamber, 2014), thereby failing to foreground nuances which may pertain to specific cultural groups. With this thesis, I focused on Chinese students because they constitute the largest cohort of international students at UK universities. Nonetheless, I reiterate the word of caution expressed in 2.4 about the term *Chinese* which must be understood through its complexity. After all, within the 'Chinese' world there are 'different ways of being Chinese' (Wong & Wen, 2001; Cross and Hitchcock, 2007; Ganassin, 2020).

Importantly, I do not promote an essentialist view of culture, and throughout this thesis I have demonstrated, with my reflexivity and adherence to the Holliday and Amadasi's concept of

*deCentring*, that I privileged my participants' meanings over mine. In other words, I kept my understanding of these students' cultural beliefs open to interpretations which went beyond the notion of *large culture* (Holliday, 1999). Rather, I, the researcher, stepped down from my analytical vantage point and welcomed the nuances of my participants' experiences and views even when these appeared to clash with my own beliefs. However, I do maintain that cultural heritage or influences, alongside individual traits, may play a part in shaping one's behaviour.

Finally, the extant studies about Chinese students in the western academy have tended to reveal limited discussions about motivation. This is because most studies have primarily focused on other issues such as English use for social and academic purposes (Copland & Garton, 2010; Mulligan & Kirkpatrick, 2000), adaptation/adjustment (Wu & Hammond, 2011), and cultural differences (Busher et al, 2016), therefore confining motivation to peripheral discussions. With this thesis, however, I addressed this gap and offered insights to enrich the existing contributions available about Chinese students' motivation to choose the UK (Ding, 2009; Bamber, 2014; Wu, 2014).

I identified a number of pull and push factors which may shape Chinese students' motivation to study in the UK. Amongst the positive influences were:

- The UK as a catalyst for personal improvement and enhancement of sense of identity accompanied by the desire to actualize one's *ideal self*.
- The pre-session course as an incentive which may facilitate a smooth transition to the Master's as well as affording the opportunity to forge a social network of supportive friendships. Thus, the pre-session was seen as a motivational determinant because of the potential to guarantee an easy adjustment to the new academic environment and UK society.
- The instrumental desire to acquire a competitive edge by obtaining a UK degree was another strong determinant for choosing the UK.
- The international reputation of the university and the specific course appeared as strong motives to choose the UK alongside the need for a comfortable location, as well.

Amongst the factors which exerted a less positive influence over these students' motivation to study in the UK were:

- Anxiety about the English language and particularly the new academic requirements which are not addressed by IELTS training.
- The pressure of meeting parents' expectations of success in light of the large investments they make for their children's future. This thought was often cause for anxiety and pressure for these students alongside the affective aspect of missing their parents and family whilst in the UK.

I now discuss this study's implications for the practices and policies of EAP in the UK.

## **12.5 Implications for EAP Practices and Policies**

### **12.5.1 The pre-sessional as a critical transition**

In 7.2.1, I drew on the concept of 'personal landscape' proposed by Zhu (2017) in order to conceptualise the complex dimensions of Chinese students' socialisation in the West. While Zhu highlighted numerous aspects of students' social adjustment such as individual maturity, interpersonal communication, engagement in social activity and financial concerns, I complemented these with the notion of 'new responsibilities' which seemed relevant to all my student-participants. This study, for example, foregrounded registration with the police, the NHS, as well as the financial demands of securing new accommodation as 'new responsibilities'. All these impacted on the students' ability to adjust and focus on their academic work, which we should not forget, is high-stakes for most pre-sessional students. This led to lower levels of motivation, tiredness and loneliness. Therefore, my notion of 'new responsibilities' alongside Zhu's components provide a more comprehensive picture of the landscape where the students are situated during a pre-sessional, highlighting the lack of parental presence and support which they normally have in China. Reliance on parents has been illustrated as a key ingredient for motivational wellbeing amongst Chinese learners (Yang & Clum, 1995; Fong & Yuen, 2016) and thus requires a core place in discussions of pre-sessional Chinese students.

Therefore, the lack of parental presence whilst dealing with *new responsibilities* may indeed impact negatively on the students' wellbeing. Pre-sessionals are therefore advised not to overload students with information on their first day on campus, usually a long induction day, but offer them a more extended induction throughout the space of at least a week. Also, supporting them with these new responsibilities such as facilitating police appointments on campus rather than police

stations or facilitating drop-in sessions to supervise the writing of NHS forms would go a long way to offering a supportive and caring network able to aid their transition to the new society.

### **12.5.1 IELTS versus academic performance**

A large body of literature has highlighted several discrepancies between the skills students need to pass an IELTS test and the skills required to perform successfully at university. As such, Bayliss and Ingram (2006) maintain that the IELTS may be able to predict students' language behaviour in the first six months but without any guarantee of subsequent academic performance. This study, however, shows that from the very beginning of PS6 (i.e. in week1), the students noticed marked differences between their understanding of academic English acquired through the IELTS training and the academic skills needed for their university studies. Major issues concerned the practices of plagiarism, paraphrasing and use of critical evidence to formulate arguments. These skills were addressed by the pre-sessional curriculum; however, it is worth reiterating the importance of facilitating a smooth transition for these students. After all, they may have taken the IELTS test several times investing financially, intellectually and emotionally but then find themselves disappointed after realising that, even with an IELTS, they are not ready for university studies.

Pre-sessional course managers and teachers thus need to offer explicit support through specifically designed classes which raise students' awareness of the IELTS skills and the gap they need to bridge to reach the academic level expected by the target department. This of course depends on the specificity of the subject because language and academic conventions will differ between departments (Pilcher & Richards, 2016). Nonetheless, even if the pre-sessional is not an English for *Specific Purposes* programme per se, offering a supportive mechanism such as workshops on how to transition from the IELTS to university will prevent students, who may already be grappling with adjustment issues, from experiencing 'learning shock' (Gu & Maley, 2008). This, in turn, has implications for EAP teacher training in that not every EAP teacher has a full grasp of the IELTS test. Therefore, it is the responsibility of EAP providers to offer some CPD or training to pre-sessional teachers to enable them to support students in an explicit and smooth transition from IELTS to university practices without much of a shock.

### **12.5.2 Active learning and teaching on pre-sessionals**

Importantly, despite some traditional research (e.g. Watkins & Biggs, 1996) which portrays Chinese learners as silent, passive, and exam-driven, this study indicated that Chinese students,

too, appreciate dialogic and engaging student-teacher and student-student interactions. My participants were in strong support of communicative tasks which involved the use of English even though they were all speakers of Mandarin. In fact, they enjoyed thoroughly being active members of the new learning community because, as they noted, the friendly and humorous approach provided a safe environment where they could express themselves without worrying about mistakes.

Therefore, mainland-Chinese students do not necessarily embody the ‘large culture’ assumptions of uncritical, passive learners. On the contrary, this study recommends that EAP teachers carry out a needs analysis which goes beyond language skills and, through an ecological approach, investigates their students’ personalities. By ecological approach I refer to my use of PEPAs, in this case, to learn about the students’ experiences on the EAP programme with a view to identifying their needs and responding to these as promptly and suitably as possible.

### **12.5.3 The role of formative feedback**

In 7.2.6, I discussed the affordances of formative feedback and its motivational impact on pre-sessional students. Haghi and Sharpling (2016) maintain that pre-sessional students are energised into action by formative feedback which supports their understanding about how to move forward with their learning. However, despite the various forms of feedback available, this study showed that students may prefer teacher-feedback to peer-feedback. Importantly, this study raises questions about students’ attitude towards the use and impact of peer feedback. Whilst, as expressed by Allwright and Hanks (2009, pp6-9), students may act as learning agents, not all students, arguably depending on their ‘culture(s) of learning’, may wish to do so. Therefore, some students prefer a normative teacher-led figure who plays a ‘facilitative role’ (Zheng, 2012). Also, from a role-model perspective (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019), peer feedback may be well-received if coming from a peer who demonstrates strong capabilities. In this respect, pre-sessional students may be wary of peers whom they do not consider to be at sufficiently high levels of linguistic and/or academic competence. Thus, pre-sessional teachers must be cognizant of the motivational impact peer-feedback may have and need to design feedback strategies accordingly. This could involve pairing up students in a variety of groupings and combining peer-feedback with some form of teacher supervision.



#### **12.5.4 Helping students *see* progress**

This study suggests that the ability to notice one's progress can be self-motivating. As discussed in 7.2.7, these students highly appreciated the opportunity to identify weekly progress in relation to their academic writing. As well as the daily homework concerning key aims and objectives on PS6 scheme of work, they completed regular weekly PEPAs which also offered opportunities to see progress as these tasks were all marked by me. Significantly, this study shows that students appreciate breaking down the big task of essay writing into smaller goals. This is because for most pre-sessional students it is the first time to write a long academic essay requiring substantial reading and critical engagement with, possibly, topics they are not too familiar with. Also, the students may be overwhelmed further by other academic requirements such as paraphrasing and referencing. Importantly, by seeing small progress through feedback on the first 500 words of the essay, they may sense a 'feeling of mastery [and] skills development' (Ushioda, 1996, p25) which leads to a motivational current (Dörnyei et al, 2016) to complete the whole task. Therefore, I recommend that EAP teachers design their coursework timelines in such a way to help students *see* a big and complex task as achievable by structuring it into smaller goals/activities that may foster a 'vision' for success.

#### **12.5.5 The motivational value of Exploratory Practice in a pre-sessional**

In this study, EP was able to develop and satisfy a thirst for curiosity which the students had in relation to British culture, academic conventions and other people. This lends further credibility to the argument that the 'nexus of theory and practice' can enhance individuals' wellbeing (Hanks, 2019, p143). Therefore, EP seems well-suited to EAP practices because it has the potential to cater for a variety of students' needs. The compatibility between EAP and EP has already been established (e.g. Hanks, 2012; Pinner, 2017), and in 11.4.3, I highlighted the four dimensions which could make EP a motivational practice for Chinese pre-sessional students. However, there are some caveats which emerged from this study and these are discussed below in 13.7. Nonetheless, EP remains a valuable approach which may support pre-sessional students in their first encounters with the host country's cultures of learning and teaching. This study also highlights that EP may be congruous with the time and workload constraints of a pre-sessional course, and therefore an approach which EAP course managers may want to consider in order to promote a *culture of understanding and good quality of life* within pre-sessionals.

### **12.5.6 Pastoral support on a pre-sessional**

This study makes a strong case for the pastoral role which EAP teachers may offer to their pre-sessional students. In 11.4.6, I drew some parallels between the issue of homesickness and loneliness and teachers' pastoral impact on these potentially vulnerable students. First, the notion of homesickness is not exclusively linked to missing the presence of parents or friends, but it is generated by the sudden and overwhelming lack of familiarity with the host context (Ye & Inose, 2003). However, if we follow Mercer's (2016) advice to connect with our students empathically before we begin teaching them, the outcomes of this teacher-student relationship can be multiple. For instance, May's and Alita's sense of loneliness in the new environment was mitigated by my enthusiasm and caring attention to their academic wellbeing as well as their personal wellbeing. This was easily done through my reading of certain PEPAs and informal interactions when I noticed that something was not right. I therefore support Karpenko-Secombe's (2016) call for EAP teachers to take on a stronger pastoral role. This is not to suggest that EAP teachers should act like parents, but they need to interact with their students more empathically. This may translate into making the effort to understand the wider life story of a learner and the life capital they carry. For example, this can be practically done through PEPAs that invite weekly reflections on the students' life and experiences during the pre-sessional. In other words, EAP teachers need to become alert to the possibility that their students may have no other social or student-friendly interactions during the pre-sessional (Copland & Garton, 2010). As such, teachers may wish to become 'available, not only for language sessions, but also for a chat' (Karpenko-Secombe, 2016, p5)

I now turn to an illustration of the core implications which this study suggests for Higher Education practices and policies.

## **12.6 Implications for HE practices and policies**

### **12.6.1 Timetabling and pace of learning**

One of the first major issues the students experienced after transitioning to the MSc was the shock caused by the pace of teaching. The students engaged with intensive classes for a week or two to complete a whole module, but this often resulted in fatigue as well as the perception that they were not able to process all the new information. This was due to both academic difficulty and lack of

time to ‘think and reflect’. It is worth noting that this MSc programme (with its short intensive modules) may not be representative of Master’s programmes in general (where modules run for a whole term or semester). This may seem like a paradox because one reason why international students often choose the UK is the brevity of the programmes compared to other English-speaking countries which may require two years to complete a Master’s. Nonetheless, this study points to these Chinese students’ willingness to engage more deeply with the new subject which was not possible due to the intensive pace. It is therefore imperative for university departments to consider deliveries of modules which allow reflection and time for elaboration. As shown by Hammond and Wu (2011), international students already have a large range of adjustment issues to address; therefore, supporting them with a more student-friendly delivery and teaching pace may ultimately facilitate their learning.

### **12.6.2 Teaching approach on UK masters**

An initial issue with the culture of teaching on the MSc concerned the lack of dialogue, unlike PS6, between teachers and students. This often led to the students feeling less comfortable and able to ask questions in class. Also, they struggled with long PowerPoint lectures with little signposting and a lack of focus on core learning aims. This lack of dialogue with their lecturers and lack of understanding of the lecture content often led to loss of motivation because the students felt these lecturers were not interested to understand students’ difficulties at a more individual level. I do not suggest that UK lecturers, who already have heavy workloads, should give up more of their time to see students on an individual basis. After all, this is certainly more manageable for a pre-sessional tutor who may be dealing with one or two groups of students as opposed to the potential hundreds on very popular Master’s programmes.

Nonetheless, lecturers of any department can take on board the needs that emerged in this study, including structuring lectures with a clear focus on core aims and objectives to support the learning of new concepts. An important implication from this debate is the need for UK lecturers not to assume that East Asian students are not used to dialogue and will sit passively waiting for knowledge to be ‘imparted’. In fact, this study shows that these students may have different attitudes towards learning. For example, as discussed in 7.3.1, students had a thirst for practical knowledge and skills as opposed to a theory-driven learning programme of activities. Thus, while lecturers may have their own culture of teaching and students may have their own culture of

learning, finding a ‘middle way to attain some form of ‘cultural synergy’ (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, p201) may go a long way to deCentring our assumptions about how learning and teaching *should* be enacted. According to Jin and Cortazzi (2017), systematic exchanges between staff and students about the expectations of learning and teaching through examples can be beneficial. These interactions may lead to an understanding of the institutional learning goals whilst raising awareness about cultural diversity at academic and socio-cultural levels. Ultimately, Jin and Cortazzi argue for lectures to show an ‘interest in and some valorisation of student experiences and the identities which international (and local) students bring with them as resources’ (2017, p248). In other words, this argument supports Healy et al.’s (2014) call for a partnership pedagogy which calls into question possible assumptions and promotes ‘reciprocal learning’ whereby staff and students work together to foster active engagement in new learning and teaching practices that serve and benefit all parties.

One may argue that UK lecturers cannot engage in dialogic teaching whilst delivering a class to over 100 students; however, they could, for example, design reflective tasks to use during the lecture and give students the opportunity to develop their cognitive skills whilst allowing more space for questions and answers. The core message behind these suggestions is to encourage all parties in the diverse UK lecture theatre or seminar room to understand that internationalisation does not require the ‘suppression of one culture by another’ (Gu, 2001, p105). Rather, I would envisage these intercultural encounters as ecological interactions between small cultures and unique human beings with their own needs, motivations and expectations for high quality university experience.

### **12.6.3 Assessment and feedback**

This study supports Dörnyei and Ushioda’s (2011) claim that intrinsic and extrinsic orientations sit interconnectedly on the same continuum and that the two may work together to generate and sustain motivation. The assessment experiences on the MSc reported here show that students may combine a desire for high marks to build a competitive profile and a thirst for new skills and knowledge. One key implication is that students prefer assessment for ‘long-term learning’ in the sense that assessment should fit with their professional skills development rather than solely take the form of academic assignments. This could therefore translate in the design of a variety of assessment strategies that go beyond the essay genre and include assignments which foster a more

strongly evaluative and reflective attitude towards the newly acquired knowledge. This would cater for those students, like in this study, who may wish for assessment to engender learning for meaning rather than for marks (Jessop et al, 2013).

In terms of feedback practices, this study invites academic departments to consider their procedures carefully. In 8.5.3, I discussed some critical incidents which challenge the notions of marking and what assessors privilege when reading an assignment. This is not to naively ignore the fact that assessment is a matter of academic ‘judgment’, but this interpretive procedure requires a form of standardisation and moderation to ensure that the multiple perspectives markers bring with them may be mitigated, especially when major disagreements emerge between markers. In this study, the sharp discrepancy between two markers who could not reach an agreement had a detrimental effect on Megan who could not understand her feedback and, more importantly, did not feel recognised for her hard work. This therefore points to a need for ethical sensitivity when assessing students’ work or administering feedback.

Another severe incident concerned David’s case of ‘apparent plagiarism’ (Ryan, 2013, p44). This event was useful not only to unpack the phenomenon of plagiarism amongst Chinese students, which is not necessarily an act of lack of integrity, but what emerged from this study was the debatable procedures the department used to inform the student. There is a need for more clarity and transparency in all university processes which involve students. The lack of understanding about assessment (or similar) procedures, especially in light of issues such as plagiarism, must be explained to the students clearly through a range of modalities including written letter or email and face-to-face meetings. David lacked the support from his personal tutor and no university staff met with him until a month later from the time when they detected the problem with his essay. This lack of support and clarity, as shown in 7.5, may lead to loss of motivation and damage a student’s wellbeing overall. For most Chinese students, this danger is compounded by the pressure they feel for the prospect of disappointing their families, who may have invested heavily on their overseas studies, as well as compromising future career opportunities.

#### **12.6.4 The Master’s dissertation**

The dissertation experiences revealed through this study raised several questions of good and not so good practice. One major problem concerned the unusual expectation that students should find their own dissertation supervisor – this is unusual because departments normally take the

responsibility to allocate students to suitable supervisors (Harwood & Petric, 2017). Although the process promoted by this study's MSc may seem to emphasise students' agency in developing their own learning experiences at the university, the 'competitive' dimension of hunting for a supervisor, who may receive numerous applications from several students at once, may tarnish students' motivation and confidence in the process. This was exacerbated by the penalty system which would affect those unable to find a suitable supervisor by the required deadline in early December. I strongly argue against this policy because a penalty system for something which is usually the department's responsibility seems unfair. The complexity of this issue is compounded by the fact that asking students, at such an early stage of their masters, to choose a supervisor on their own may lead to the wrong choice of topic due to lack of familiarity with the overall content of the programme. As a result, this policy has the potential to demoralise students who are already struggling with other adjustment issues.

Connected to this debate is the concept of dissertation topic which the students may pursue. As said above, it may be premature for students to decide on a topic at such an early stage of the postgraduate programme. Ideally, a successful dissertation topic will nurture the student's 'personal intrinsic interest' (Anderson et al, 2008, p39). This issue is intimately connected to the role of the supervisor and the mutual understanding of expectations between the supervisor and supervisee. This study recommends the need for supervisors to clarify, from early on, the core requirements and expectations concerning the supervisor's and students' roles and responsibilities (Hajar, 2019).

In 11.8.3, I explained that while it is fair to say that supervisors may be overworked (Goldstein, 2005), guidance is essential to ensure a successful postgraduate student experience. This also points to the 'immense variability' of supervision approaches which may be shaped by the institution's policies as well as the supervisor's personality and preference. However, my core message here is to return to the above notion of dialogue presented in 13.6.2. If the supervisors interrogate their culture of supervision, deCentring their beliefs and assumptions about their students, and rather aim for creating threads of understanding of their students' needs and interests, this may guarantee more opportunities for success. This deCentring process could be enacted through student-friendly tutorials which are guided by clear objectives and expectations for both students and supervisors to follow. Also, the student could be invited to write a reflective summary

about the tutorial interactions where they outline their progress and action plan for short-term goals. This could be reviewed and accompanied by a written note from the supervisor which can strengthen the students' sense of guidance and ensure clarity of objectives. These suggestions are non-prescriptive guidelines which may support students and staff in fostering a partnership pedagogy and partnership relationships (Healy et al, 2017) which, in turn, nurture student success and an overall sense of collegiality.

Having illustrated the main implications for the practices of teaching, learning and supervision on postgraduate programmes, I now discuss the key methodological contributions of this study.

### **12.7 Methodological contributions: from a *small-lens approach* to the *teaching-research nexus***

As discussed in 6.3, I situated this research under the epistemological influence of interpretivism with a view to seeking 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations' of the construct of motivation (Crotty, 1998, p67). This meant putting a strong focus on my participants' meanings and their own ways of manifesting motivation encompassing the complexities of their individual trajectories. In the field of applied linguistics this epistemological approach has been illustrated through ecological approaches (Kramsch, 2002; van Lier, 2010) or situated research (e.g. Kubanyiova, 2008). Within the L2 motivation literature, these ecological perspectives have been framed through a *person-in-context relational view of motivation* by Ushioda (2009), who, later in 2016, invited the community to research motivation through a 'small-lens' approach. I heeded this call by adopting EP as part of my research design. As suggested by Ushioda, EP was useful in capturing motivation through its pedagogical and social manifestations throughout PS6. More crucially, as indicated by Hanks (2017, 2019), EP helps teachers gain insights into their puzzles, in my case motivation, and PEPAs were indeed supportive in integrating pedagogy and research without compromising the former. Contrary to my initial concerns, I was able to implement EP in an educational setting with time and curriculum constraints. However, I must discuss some caveats about how I was able to adopt this methodology.

When I began using this approach, I did not have a puzzle about motivation framed in the traditional sense which EP promotes. In other words, without knowing the students or their

individual motivations, I was not able to begin my inquiry with a puzzle such as ‘why are my students motivated?’ However, arguably due to the influence of my PhD, I began with an overarching question which guided my entire inquiry ‘what are these students’ motivations to live and study in the UK?’. I used PEPAs in the same way as EP recommends and reformulated some of my class activities by framing the instructions in such a way to encourage the students to say something about their motivation. Therefore, EP and the PEPAs I used suited this objective. However, as soon as I realized the benefits of doing EP to satisfy my research aims, I felt the ethical need to share the experience with my students more explicitly so that *they* may do EP, as well. This meant that when I began supporting the students in the exploration of their own puzzles, I gave less attention to the potential development of new PEPAs to research motivation (my own research interest). As such, the principle of mutual development of puzzles was not possible concurrently. Furthermore, while I attempted to keep all EP-related work within the classroom setting without asking for ‘extra’ work as recommended by the approach, given my PhD needs, I sometimes asked for a little extra of my students. I invited them to write short reflective statements about the experience of doing EP each time they engaged with an activity concerning their puzzles. Nonetheless, these activities were voluntary, as they did not form part of the pedagogical scheme of work of PS6, and therefore students who did not submit them would not be chased or penalized. Furthermore, despite the insightful understandings I gained through EP about students’ motivation, these became richer when I progressed onto the second phase of the study to conduct interviews in a more traditional research capacity. For example, while a PEPA revealed aspects which influenced a student’s motivation (e.g. parents or competition in the labour market), with rich and in-depth interview conversations, it became possible to establish the intrinsic or extrinsic orientations of such motivation, which on a PEPA, looked less clear. *Narrative knowing* through story-writing to make sense of the data was also helpful in enriching these understandings because when students read my interpretive summaries or stories they engaged dialogically in the co-construction of my interpretations. These interactions were enriching and telling compared to the static PEPAs. For example, Alita expressed in a PEPA the idea of dissatisfaction with her previous job and lifestyle in China. However, when this came up again in January, six months later, she revealed stronger and detailed reasons for such dissatisfaction with China which she had not expressed in her PEPA as clearly or passionately. On a more ironic occasion, during an



interview with Xiaoxin, I referred to a thought she had written in a PEPA and she revealed she did not really believe in what she had written but she had added it to the written PEPA simply to make her text longer. Therefore, these interviews and *narrative knowledging* interactions served the purposes of enriching the complexities of students' motivation which PEPAs could not capture in the same way.

However, it would be naïve to argue that such rich understandings during the interviewing and narrative phase would have been possible without the foundations created throughout PS6. The PEPAs were helpful stimuli for certain interviews as well as additional data to contribute to the complex trajectories of these students' motivation. Finally, the good rapport, as argued below in 13.8, was conducive to such rich meaningful stories. Therefore, I believe that without the practitioner research phase of this study, my findings would have not been as nuanced and rich. As I argued elsewhere (Consoli, 2019), this study offers evidence to suggest that there are significant advantages in doing EP within an educational context as intensive as a pre-sessional and there are considerable advantages in doing reflexive interviewing which leads to *narrative knowledging* as I did it. However, I believe that these advantages are clearly enhanced by the combination of the two methodological approaches. My study thus foregrounds the value that emerged from the synergy between practitioner research and more traditional applied linguistics research. This supports McKinley's (2019) call for the promotion of the *teaching-research nexus* whereby teaching practice is informed by research and the research agenda is shaped by the needs of teaching practice. However, I would take this further and argue that academic researchers and teachers or practitioner researchers can do much better together. Teachers could invite researchers to their practice contexts and let them see how things happen in the classroom world from an 'insider' perspective rather than as external investigators. On the other hand, teachers may capitalise on some support and training into research practices from academic researchers. This could be one way to activate and promote the *teaching-research nexus*.

I now move to a reflexive discussion about the trajectory of my relationship with the student-participants of this study.

## **12.8 The teacher-researcher and student-participant relationship**

Doing classroom-based research of the kind exemplified in this study entails working closely with people and, as a result, this research can be ‘messy’. This is because the researcher deals with people’s lives which are complex. More precisely, as I have shown in this thesis, as social researchers, we deal with our participants’ life capital, which is rich, complex and unpredictable thereby conducive to research messiness (Rigg, 1991). In this regard, Kubanyiova (2008) foregrounds the need to revisit the researcher’s ‘role, relationship and ethical responsibilities’.

One first micro-ethical observation concerns my use of humour as part of my teaching. This was generally well-received, and students highlighted that their learning anxiety diminished as a result of such humour. However, it led to some students seeing me as a ‘friend’, when I was, in fact, their teacher. On one hand, this attributed role as a friend aligned with my aims and desires of creating a ‘friendly’ class environment. However, the notion of friendship in this adult-adult relationship between teacher and students has brought up contrasting arguments, including that caring for students is important (Fitzmaurice, 2008) but they should not be coddled (Lahteenoja & Pirttila-Backman, 2005). While many are the benefits students may reap from a friendly relationship with their university teachers (Komarraju et al, 2010), the need has been foregrounded for this relationship to be ‘balanced in that the university teacher may be ‘friendly but not a friend’ (Sibii, 2010, p532).

In my pre-sessional context, it became clear that I had to recognise the complexity of this teacher-student relationship. For example, a student once found my number on the university website and texted me on WhatsApp. While he was simply hoping to ‘communicate as friends’, I felt that my professional stance was being challenged. I finally told the student that it was not appropriate for me to be ‘friends on WhatsApp’ but that perhaps after the end of PS6 that could be a possibility. One may argue that if I had become ‘friends’ on WhatsApp I may have been able to obtain ‘superb data’ which Yates (2004 in Hanks, 2017) highly criticises. In fact, in line with this criticism, I argue that obtaining rich data at the expense of compromising professional relationships would have been ethically complex and challenged certain boundaries. I thus opted for not taking the risk of compromising the teacher-student relationship, and rather obtain less rich, yet ‘good enough data’ which supported my research aims but without compromising my professional code of practice (Consoli, 2020b, p34).

When the students progressed to the Master's programme, I wished to turn the student-teacher relationship we had into a researcher-participant one. I was therefore willing to foster my new identity as 'researcher' in the sense that I was 'external' to their Master's experiences. One could therefore argue that I was an 'outsider-insider' to the small culture the students formed throughout their Master's year. Insider because I had insights into the students' immediate educational background (PS6) as well as an understanding of their characters and personalities, but I was an outsider because I was 'external' to their unfolding experiences on the Master's. The insider dimensions were advantageous because thanks to the shared experiences on PS6, the students easily let me become part of their new Master's 'small culture' or talked about their views of PS6 freely. However, the disadvantage was that because of this 'closeness', they sometimes assumed or tended to retain information which, they thought, could be taken for granted just like Gawlewicz's (2016, p35) case where her participants would say 'we both know what I mean'.

Overall, I regarded my position as 'unique' because I was the teacher (or friend) who knew a lot about the UK and university system and they seemed to enjoy meeting me, asking questions and sharing their stories. However, this new relationship led to the development of my sympathetic self who often became entangled with dilemmas I had not anticipated. For example, David once disclosed that one of his core motivations was his wish to make new friends but that he may struggle because of his shy character. I cannot deny feeling a little emotional at times while facing certain sensitive questions. It was certainly enriching from a research perspective because I was obtaining much more nuanced data than I had through PEPAs on PS6, but my interviewer professional identity was challenged as I had developed a caring attitude towards these people. Despite the warnings about 'creating a warm bath effect that shifts towards the kind of understanding and empathy that is characteristic of therapy or counselling' (Mann, 2016, p164), I felt an ethical responsibility towards these participants. In other words, it was impossible for me to ignore controversial data or disclosures. It could be argued that I was unwittingly performing my PS6 pastoral role; therefore, at times, I sought assistance from my supervisor to respond to certain dilemmas (e.g. when a student-participant told me about breaking up with her boyfriend). On these occasions, I usually attended to the student's needs even if this meant limiting the potential for 'superb data'. This behaviour chimes with Ushioda's (2020, p140) call for an ethical

research agenda whereby teacher-researchers or researchers need to negotiate a balance between ‘investigating’ and ‘supporting’ their participants.

In sum, I began this project with the expectation to follow a dichotomous approach to my relationship with these people whereby during PS6 I would be a teacher researching his own students, and in phase-2 of the study, I would turn the relationship into a researcher-participants one. This was perhaps naïve of me because it was impossible to ignore our life capital as teacher and students and the good rapport forged previously. Therefore, in light of the complexities which emerged whilst managing a professional research relationship alongside my friendly teacher disposition, I argue that our multiple identities are not to be seen as ‘dichotomous; rather, they [draw] on each other to facilitate exchange, alter power differentials, and access data’ (Srivastava 2006, p211). This means being ethical and constantly acknowledging one’s Self in the research process, where ‘the self is not some kind of virus which contaminates the research. On the contrary, the self is the research tool, and thus intimately connected to the methods we deploy’ (Cousin, 2010, p10).

Importantly, one needs to accept that identities and behaviours ‘are frequently situational, depending on the prevailing social, political, and cultural values of a given social context’ (Kusow, 2003, p592). I, for example, cannot deny developing a genuine friendship with some of my participants after the end of our research interactions. However, whilst carrying out research, one must interrogate their sense of self with ethical reflection and reflexivity even if this means sacrificing opportunities for ‘superb data’ and being left with less, which may still be ‘good enough data’, but preserving our integrity and individual boundaries.

I now discuss the concept of trustworthiness in this study.

### **12.9 Trustworthiness**

The quality of qualitative inquiry is usually measured against the notion of trustworthiness. To operationalise this concept, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four dimensions of quality: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. I now discuss these in turn showing how my study met such criteria.

### **12.9.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the consistency of the findings and whether these rest upon sufficient evidence. Lincoln and Guba suggest that for this criterion to be met, the research processes must show that the findings are credible and that these have been endorsed by the very actors involved in the inquiry. One way in which I ensured credibility in this study was by drawing on a variety of datasets for each participant (i.e. both EP data and interview data). This is often referred to as triangulation (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1986), and as such, it means ‘cross-checking’ the meaning of the data through different sources. In my case, I would rather use the concept of crystallisation (Ellingson, 2009) which accounts for the complexity of social phenomena whereby ‘more data’ is not there to confirm but ‘enrich’ our understandings. This was indeed the case in this study because when my students looked at my interpretations of their meanings, they often elaborated rather than just agreeing or disagreeing with my words. Thus, the student-participants were involved in my *narrative knowing* and enriched my interpretations whilst looking at each specific thematic unit within their stories. These processes were especially aided by my extensive reflexivity evidenced, for instance, by my post-interview reflexive notes, the students’ feedback on my interview skills, and my memoing through MAXQDA.

### **12.9.2 Dependability**

Dependability is interconnected with credibility and refers to the consistency across the processes of data generation and analysis. Lincoln and Guba conceptualise this criterion through the notion of ‘fiscal audit’ whereby all research stages and processes are described with such clarity to ensure coherence between data, findings and interpretations. In order to ensure dependability, I kept a researcher journal from the very beginning of my PhD programme, which then turned into a teacher-researcher journal. This, alongside my post-PS6 reflexive and reflective notes, helped me illustrate a clear audit trail of my steps throughout each data collection phase (see chapter 7), and importantly, I was able to outline the specific narrative analytical procedures accomplished through MAXQDA (see chapter 9).

### **12.9.3 Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the influence of the researcher’s subjectivity over the research (Miles et al, 2014). The objective of this criterion is to ensure that the participants’ meanings are privileged over the researcher’s views and beliefs. Like triangulation I do not see this process as clear-cut

but, in the spirit of qualitative research about people and with people (e.g. Lamb, 2016), I acknowledged my presence and the effects of this. In other words, it was impossible to eliminate the impact of my presence throughout the research process. However, I made important reflexive efforts in bracketing my assumptions and beliefs before designing my research. For instance, I self-analysed my beliefs about EAP before starting my preliminary study (see 6.11.1) and showed how my previous experiences led to this study.

Also, throughout the research process I resisted imposing my ideas and interpretations even when I disagreed with what a participant may have said. For example, Megan kept describing PS6 as a language course, and while I strongly believe that pre-sessionals are more concerned with academic skills and practices, I did not change her meaning to accommodate my belief. Finally, I employed reflexivity both in my data collection and analysis to illustrate those instances where my presence had a clear impact on my participants and their stories. For example, I noted the influence of my project over Alita's decision to choose motivation as her second dissertation topic. I also acknowledged my presence in the behaviour of those participants who still saw me as their teacher (or friend) and struggled with the notion of compensation for their interview time. MAXQDA memoing was particularly supportive in ensuring confirmability because by putting all data for each participant, including reflections and reflexive notes in each MAXQDA folder, I had a rich and nuanced overview of meanings.

#### **12.9.4 Transferability**

Transferability is achieved when the findings of the study are still meaningful in other cognate contexts beyond the study setting(s). In other words, it refers to other readers' ability to relate to the research reported and make connections to their own experiences. In this study I made the effort of offering detailed descriptions. Significantly, my *narrative knowledging* approach to 'writing as analysis' was supportive of transferability because while writing each participant's story, I was able to capture their motivation ecologically. I was able to illustrate their motivation in relation to several specific factors unique to each participant. This detailed understanding thus allows any reader, including other EAP or subject teachers or learners, to relate to the story or not. For example, at Newcastle University, where I am currently employed as lecturer in TESOL, I have used some PhD data to inform my teaching, and during a seminar on narrative inquiry, one

of my MA students, who read Alita's story, began crying because she could 'see herself' in the story (findings).

### **12.10 Limitations**

While this thesis was a first attempt to uncover understandings about EAP pre-sessional students' motivation, this study remains anchored to a specific group of Chinese students and therefore limited in sample. The methodology of data analysis I designed does not allow for a focus on a large population as a single investigator, and therefore the findings of this study remain confined to this specific experience without much scope for generalisation. However, as mentioned in 12.9.4, the thick descriptions and nuanced understandings offered by this study allow for resonance and transferability across similar educational contexts and student populations.

Furthermore, although EP and related PEPAs offered good insights into the students' motivations, I would have liked to enrich my understandings of classroom life on PS6 with some video-data but, as soon as I walked into the classroom the first time, I noted that it would have been logistically cumbersome. The video-data may have offered an additional enriching layer of the classroom life, but this was not pragmatically possible in the small classroom of PS6.

While I obtained insightful data about the pre-sessional because I was part and parcel of that reality, it was not possible to gain as much rich data about the MSc experiences and cultures of teaching and learning in this specific department. This is because, despite my attempts to negotiate with the MSc course office and some tutors, it was difficult to gain access. Therefore, the findings related to phase-2 of the study are somewhat limited because, despite the useful contributions from the students, we lack, for example, their tutors' perspectives on the very same experiences reported.

Finally, one cannot ignore the possible caveat about the *social desirability bias* whereby my participants told me what they thought would please me. This is a bias any teacher researching their students will need to accept. However, in this study, I constantly elicited examples to support their opinions and claims which, therefore, would make their statements more credible despite this potential bias.

### **12.11 Further research**

This study has taken the first step towards gaining an understanding of the construct of motivation within EAP. Motivation research in applied linguistics has normally dealt with learning a language

for *general* purposes but this investigation has opened the avenue for further research to enrich the framework of motivation concerning English for *academic* purposes and *academic studies*. Therefore, it would be useful to pursue this line of inquiry by examining other cohorts of international students in similar pre-sessional contexts with a similar teacher-researcher approach which, like EP, combines pedagogy and research. This would guarantee fine-grained understandings of students' experiences and motivation whilst offering opportunities to enhance teaching practice as a result of such emerging understandings. Importantly, by doing practitioner research, I followed Ushioda's (2016) call for a 'small-lens' approach to understanding motivation, thereby tapping into the 'totality' of complex relationships between the individual and their environment(s) (Kramsch, 2002) or as I call it, life capital. However, I was certainly not able to gain access to such totality, but merely *part* of it. For example, my work did not entail a fine-grained understanding of student interactions from a discourse analytical perspective and therefore this could be an avenue to pursue in future research.

Furthermore, by adopting EP for my pre-sessional phase, I identified several incentives which frame EP as a motivational practice that fosters relevant learning and skills development whilst promoting relevant communication and social skills for newly arrived Chinese students. However, it would be useful to try this approach with other pre-sessional Chinese students to see what the outcomes would be. Could these new outcomes depend on the teacher who proposes the approach and their personality as well as teaching methodology? Or will this approach work for other pre-sessional students differently because of other reasons, such as the students' personalities?

Also, this study highlighted a number of positive aspects of the cultures of teaching and learning on this pre-sessional context which included a dialogic friendly teaching approach, use of group work, weekly reflective writing, and pastoral care as crucial support. It would be insightful to see what other EAP colleagues make of these practices and how my recommendations may align with different teacher approaches, personalities and student populations.

Furthermore, by engaging with the second phase of the study, I unpacked several practices about the cultures of teaching on the MSc which revealed relatively negative effects on my students' motivation. However, as I said in my limitations, this section of the study lacked the critical presence and perspectives of lecturers and administrators on the MSc. Therefore, future studies may produce more nuanced and multi-layered understandings of MSc teaching and learning



practices by crystallising (Ellington, 2008) students' meanings with lecturers' and any other relevant social actor.

Finally, the research field on international students is rich and many studies have examined the experiences of international students conflating various cultural groups into one. However, without imposing an essentialist view, I would recommend more work like mine which focuses on specific cohorts of students. This would lead to a richer understanding of cultures of learning and teaching of certain regions in the world whilst remaining aware that even within one socio-cultural context there may be many ways of *being* and forming *small culture* (Holliday, 1999; Ganassin, 2020). This is not, however, to discourage research which intentionally looks at the intercultural experiences of mixed groups and remains equally valid research. Rather, my suggestion is to enrich our understandings of the major influences which might shape the characters and behaviours of specific cultural cohorts of students whose nuances may be lost if conflated with other socio-cultural groups. In this light, I would encourage more research which focuses on Chinese students in a variety of UK universities. This is because the number of Chinese students is ever growing on UK university campuses and we need to ensure that we are giving them the excellent UK university experience they expect.

### **12.12 Final remarks**

In conclusion, this PhD project has brought to the fore the need to understand motivation from the perspective of international students engaged in learning English for *academic* purposes as opposed to traditional investigations of learning English for *general* purposes. Crucially, this study has offered an original perspective of these students' motivational trajectories thanks to its longitudinal dimension which was able to chart these students' experiences and related motivational impact from their arrival in the UK, throughout the pre-sessional and the MSc programme. Despite its limitations, combining practitioner research (phase-1 of the study) with more traditional interviewing practices (phase-2 of the study) was conducive to a nuanced student-centred narrative analysis of their motivation and its shifts. In other words, I was able to offer ecological pictures of these students' journeys by tapping into the complex ensemble of factors and experiences, embedded within their *life capital*, which shaped their motivation to live and study in the UK.

### 12.13 Epilogue

In October 2016, I came to the University of Warwick as an EAP tutor brimming with enthusiasm for research alongside my wish to narrow the gap between teaching practice and applied linguistics research. However, I still remember the time when Ema Ushioda, my supervisor, kindly welcomed me in her office for our first chat and showed me some books and articles written by her previous PhD students. I was certainly impressed with what I saw, and I am sure Ema had great motivational intentions at heart, such as showing me the right models to follow or inspire me to configure my *ideal self*. Nonetheless, I began asking myself questions such as, *what have I signed up for? Am I actually cut for this? Can I do this? Do I even want to do this?* I just could not see myself as an academic author and, more importantly, I began to struggle with the well-known *imposter syndrome*.

After appeasing these concerns (thanks, Ema!), I was able to concentrate on the core topic of my PhD, *international students in the UK*. With several years of teaching international students in England, I had developed a strong interest in the concept of motivation, *their motivation* to be in the UK and receive the first-rate education expected. This interest aligned with my longstanding teaching (and research) aim to ensure that all people in a classroom, students and teachers alike, are happy. I was delighted when I came across Exploratory Practice and realised that this approach had been promoting something similar through the notion of *quality of life*. This discovery enriched my *life capital* as a teacher, researcher and practitioner of applied linguistics. It was also enriching to see that through the PhD I began to develop a higher degree of critical engagement and understanding of classroom life. This realisation supported my work as a teacher-researcher on the pre-sessional. I somehow began to notice my ‘research’ expertise which, as an EAP tutor I did not have because I had not engaged with deep reading, debates and actual high-stake research like this before.

This is not to say that the journey was not tortuous or challenging. However, this path became feasible thanks to the interactions I had with my growing academic community including fellow PhD students, and other members of staff in the department or elsewhere. I began to appreciate the PhD challenges when I commenced my data collection and became involved with my student-

participants' *life stories*. The complex and insightful relationship which I developed with them carrying several hats, *teacher, researcher, friend*, was an anchor of support despite all the uncertainties the PhD created. My students showed me that the expertise I was developing as a PhD researcher brought numerous benefits to the classroom and their experiences in the UK. With this research, I was able to unpack and understand the value of empathy between a teacher and students.

I was not always sure of what I was doing and if I was doing it right, but my students enriched me with their views, insights, concerns and motivations. They made my story as a teacher and researcher worthwhile. Through their PEPAs, their pre-sessional contributions and their numerous interviews, they taught me what worked well to support international students in the UK and what worked less well. With their humour, kindness and friendship they have helped me build understandings which I would not be able to own and disseminate without their brave, vulnerable and inspiring stories. This connects with another discovery which I owe to the PhD. I have learnt to appreciate the power of *storytelling* not just for the sake of academic clarity. As my students showed me, stories give us the opportunity to express and enact who we are, how we wish to be seen and who we wish to become. Megan appreciated her story because 'nobody had given so much attention to her story before', May was pleased to see 'my engagement with teaching practice to improve things at university for other international students', Alita was 'happy to see herself in the story' and be reminded of the reasons why she left China in the first place, David was glad 'to understand himself better' through his engagement with my storytelling.

I am hugely indebted to *Alita, David, Megan* and *May* for enriching my life story as a teacher and researcher. I am equally grateful to Ema for enriching my story as a PhD student and a fledgling academic. Many thanks also go to all my other friends and colleagues around the world for enriching my story as an academic writer, presenter, collaborator...or just as Sal.

I come to the end of this inquiry with a myriad of understandings about motivation, EAP, and university teaching practices, but I realise that these understandings raise new questions and puzzles. However, I feel confident in saying that an ethical search for understandings, premised by a caring attitude for deCentring assumptions and fixed ideas, will allow the creation of new 'threads' between different cultures of teaching and learning. New stories can be written, and other lives enriched. Thank you for reading this story.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - Transcription conventions

<b>Alita</b>	Bold type indicates the name of the speaker
[ <i>laughs</i> ]	Square brackets and italics indicate notes on the non-verbal features or my own commentaries about what may be happening
[Ah okay]	Square brackets and non-italics indicate interjections from one speaker interrupting the flow of the other speaker
(...)	Three dots in square brackets indicate points where I have omitted utterances from the text
XXX	Indicates a word which I have omitted to preserve anonymity usually of places such as University and relevant departments.
...	Indicates a short, untimed pause of less than three seconds.
((.....6))	Indicates a longer, timed pause. The number of dots indicates one second of a pause, the duration is then given in seconds. The example shows a six second pause.
,	Indicates a continuation of tone
.	Indicates naturally falling intonation
?	Shows naturally rising intonation
‘	Single speech marks indicate that the speaker is quoting something or someone else.



## Appendix - 2 Participant Information Sheet

**Study Title:** An Exploration of EAP students' motivation and sense of identity:  
Narrative of an EAP classroom life in the UK

**Investigator:** Sal Consoli

### Introduction

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

(**Part 1** tells you the purpose of the study and what will happen to you if you take part. **Part 2** gives you more detailed information about the conduct of the study)

Please feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

### PART 1

#### **What is the study about?**

This study aims to understand pre-sessional students' sense of identity and motivation for learning at the start, during and at the end of a pre-sessional programme at the University of Warwick

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is entirely up to you to decide. I will describe the study and go through this information sheet, which you can keep. If you choose to participate, I will ask you to sign a consent form to confirm that you have agreed to take part. You will be free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and this will not affect you, your performance or progress to your degree programme at the University of Warwick.

#### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

I am not changing any aspect of my usual teaching and you will still receive a normal class with ordinary lessons from me. Therefore, you do not need to do anything but just behave normally as you would in the classroom. I am simply reflecting on my own teaching in order to understand myself as a teacher and to learn more about students' ideas about the pre-sessional course. I am mainly looking at students' motivation and sense of identity. The data I will collect in this study will come from my own teaching journals and observations of the class. I might make audio or video recordings of lessons to watch or listen to later. I will also collect pedagogic data – this means that I will look at work you produce in the class and analyse it for my research. There may be a camera or two in the classroom which will help me video-record some lessons. If you do not want to be part of the video-recording you can say so and I

will not use any information related to you. There may be other interactions we have outside class time – these may include formal or informal interviews. After you finish the pre-sessional, I may ask you to do two more interviews in December 2018 and July 2019 depending on your availability.

**What are the possible disadvantages, side effects, risks, and/or discomforts of taking part in this study?**

I am an experienced pre-sessional tutor and have worked with many international students in the UK. Therefore, I am aware of many cultural and educational differences between the UK and other countries. Rest assured that you will not be obliged to answer all the questions during class time or the interviews. If you find any of the questions or topics difficult you have the right not to answer or finish the interview without giving me any reason. Also, everything you say to me will be kept confidential and if any of your words are used in my research they will be anonymised so that nobody may be able to recognise you, unless you wish to keep your real name (you can specify this in the consent form).

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

During the pre-sessional course, I will be your teacher and my responsibility will always be to ensure that you can progress to your degree programme. During every interaction we have during or out of class hours you will be more than welcome to ask for academic support. However, if you choose to participate in my research, I will develop a deeper insight into your individual needs, motivations, etc. (e.g. through the interviews you will do with me), and therefore I will be in a better position to offer you tailored support and advice.

If you continue to be my participant after you transition to your degree programme, then I will be able to offer £10 for each interview we will have as well as some academic support (up to 30 mins each time) for any assignment or questions you may have.

**Expenses and payments**

This is a voluntary project, but if you continue to be my participant after you transition to your degree programme, then I will be able to offer £10 for each interview we will have.

**What will happen when the study ends?**

The information you share with me may be used in the writing of my PhD thesis, and also presented in other written reports (e.g., journal articles) or at conference and seminar talks. However, all information will be anonymised so that nobody may be able to recognise you, unless you want me to use your real name.

### **Will my taking part be kept confidential?**

Yes. I will follow strict ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence. Further details are included in Part 2.

### **What if there is a problem?**

Any complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm that you might suffer will be addressed. Detailed information is given in Part 2.

**This concludes Part 1.**

**If the information in Part 1 has interested you and you are considering participation, please read the additional information in Part 2 before making any decision.**

---

## **PART 2**

### **Who is organising and funding the study?**

I am the only researcher conducting this study is the basis of my PhD work. I am being fully funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

### **What will happen if I don't want to carry on being part of the study?**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate will not affect you in any way. If you decide to take part in the study, you will need to sign a consent form, which states that you have given your consent to participate.

If you agree to participate, you may nevertheless withdraw from the study at any time without affecting you in any way.

### **Who should I contact if I wish to make a complaint?**

Any complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm you might have suffered will be addressed. Please address your complaint to the person below:

#### **PhD Supervisor**

Dr. Ema Ushioda

Centre for Applied Linguistics

University of Warwick

Coventry

CV4 8UW

Email: [E.Ushioda@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:E.Ushioda@warwick.ac.uk)

Tel: +44(0)24 76574236

### **Will my taking part be kept confidential?**

All published data will be anonymised, including all names of organisations and individuals named in the interviews. In reporting on the research findings, I will not reveal the names of any participants or the organisation where you study. At all times there will be no possibility of you as individual being linked with the data, unless you wish for your real name to be used.

The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered during our interactions within the framework of this research project.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

I will produce a final dissertation summarising and discussing the main findings by September 2020 at the latest. An electronic copy of this will be sent to you, if you request it. The research findings may also be published earlier than September 2020 in publications and at conferences, both in the UK and abroad.

### **Who has reviewed the study?**

The study has been reviewed by the Centre for Applied Linguistics' representative on the University's Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC), and the Centre's Graduate Progress Committee.

### **What if I want more information about the study?**

If you have any questions about any aspect of the study, or your participation in it, not answered by this participant information sheet, please contact:

#### **The researcher: Sal Consoli**

ESRC-PhD  
Centre for Applied Linguistics  
University of Warwick  
Coventry  
CV4 8AL  
Email: [S.Consoli@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:S.Consoli@warwick.ac.uk)

#### **PhD Supervisor**

Dr. Ema Ushioda  
Centre for Applied Linguistics  
University of Warwick  
Coventry  
CV4 8AL  
Email: [E.Ushioda@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:E.Ushioda@warwick.ac.uk)  
Tel: +44(0)24 76574236

**Thank you for taking the time to read this Participant Information Sheet.**

## Appendix - 3 Consent Form

**Participant ID:**

**Title of Project:** An Exploration of EAP students' motivation and sense of identity:

**Narrative of an EAP classroom life in the UK**

**Name of researcher(s):** PhD researcher: Sal Consoli, PhD Supervisor: Dr. Ema Ushioda

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet (*version x, dd/mm/yy*) provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my student rights and academic performance being affected.
3. I consent to be audio recorded during interviews or class activities
4. I consent to be video-recorded during interviews or class activities
5. I understand that the information provided by myself will be used by the researcher in future publications (in the form of written transcripts), conference talks (these may include audio-recordings) and research thesis, but all data will be anonymized, unless I wish to keep my real name.
6. I wish for the researcher to use my real name
7. I am happy for you to use pedagogic data collected from my work in class
8. I understand that my data will be securely stored at least until after the examination process has finished.
9. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature